

Hedgerow studies

Fiona Peart encourages you to get out and about this month to pick subjects from autumn hedgerows

As the summer moves towards autumn, it's a wonderful time to find subjects to paint in our hedgerows. There is an abundance of ripe berries, hips, grasses and wonderful leaves, all bursting with colour. Even the smallest patches of urban wasteland can harbour sumptuous blackberries, shiny and dark.

This month, I am applying watercolour in wet little sections, dropping colours into controlled areas of paint, which result in fairly detailed studies. All this is dependent on accurate drawing, so I will begin by observing a subject closely, then drawing and painting it, all from the live plant.

It's not appropriate to use photographs for this as you need to examine the plant, turn it

around and see how it grows. Note its growing points and subtle colour changes then create some detailed studies.

Choosing a subject

- Detailed work requires time so begin with a very small sprig such as wild rosehip, which can be completed in a morning. Hips will stay fresh for a few days so the same subject can be used a number of times.

- Berries soften and lose their shine within a day or two, especially if not kept in water. Make sure you allocate enough time for the subject you choose to paint.

- Grasses last for a week or so and make wonderful additions to a mixed study.

- Individual leaves can be painted

within half an hour, but will begin to curl almost immediately.

Placing your subject

Although it's good practice to place the subject in water, this isn't always possible. You need to be able to look closely, turn and position it exactly as you would wish before you begin to draw. Standing it in a jar of water is sometimes not the best solution.

As I draw with my right hand I like to hold my subject in my left hand. This means that I either draw in a sketchbook or tape the paper to my board so the paper doesn't move.

An alternative is to tape the subject to the board so it remains in the same painting position. Occasionally just laying the subject on the board is the ideal option.

DRAWING STUDY

Maximum time – one hour

YOU WILL NEED

- Smooth drawing paper
- HB pencil
- Plastic eraser
- Masking tape

- 1 Select three different types of grass.
- 2 Look carefully at how the grass grows. Notice the direction the seed heads grow in, and the thickness of the stalks.
- 3 Place one stem on white paper next to where you work. Tape the stem to the paper using masking tape if the grass rolls out of position.
- 4 Begin with a simple outline to position the grass then add tonal shading.
- 5 Once you have completed your first grass, select a second and complete that drawing before adding the third.



► Grasses, pencil drawing, 11½×8in. (30×20cm)



DEMONSTRATION

Blackberries

YOU WILL NEED

- Surface
 - Saunders Waterford HP watercolour paper 140lb 8½×5½in. (22×14cm)
- Watercolour
 - Permanent rose
 - Cadmium lemon
 - French ultramarine
 - Indigo
 - Burnt sienna
- Brushes
 - Classic round natural-haired brush* or No. 12
 - Half rigger
- Miscellaneous
 - HB pencil
 - Putty eraser

DETAILED DRAWING

Maximum time – two hours

- 1 Choose a stem of blackberries. This could be much smaller than mine, perhaps just three berries and a leaf.
- 2 Look carefully at how the berries grow, notice how the individual clusters are packed tightly, and where the light leaves a shiny white spot on each berry. Note how serrated the leaves are and whether the veins are light or dark.
- 3 Begin with a simple outline then add tone, ensuring that your pencil lines go in the direction the plant grows.



▼ *Blackberry*, pencil study, 4x6in. (11x15cm)



► *Blackberry study*, watercolour, 4x6in. (12x17cm). The advantage of beginning with a pencil-study is that you have become so familiar with your subject that the painting becomes much easier. You also have a good quality drawing to refer to if the plant wilts or you don't have time to finish it.

TIP

Snip sections off the berry sprig with scissors to create a smaller subject.

TIP

Build up tone gradually. If you press too hard and need to remove tone, press a soft putty eraser against the paper (don't rub).

◀ Step 1

Begin with a light line drawing. This is purely to place where the paint is to go and not a tonal drawing. The less pencil you put on the paper, the better. You may decide just to concentrate on the berries or complete the entire drawing.



TIP

Look out for the subtle pinks in stems and stalks. Don't assume they will always be green.

Step 2 ▼

- 1 For blackberries, I use the Classic round brush and paint each individual round berry using indigo, leaving a tiny light source. Make sure the adjacent berries within the cluster remain dry.
- 2 Using the half rigger, drop French ultramarine on to each of the wet sections and, once these have dried, paint the remaining berries within the cluster. Each single cluster forms a blackberry.
- 3 For the lighter berries, use cadmium lemon and a touch of indigo, dropping in a little permanent rose.



LEAVES ▶

Tackle each leaf as a basic shape, merging the colours with the Classic round brush then dropping in stronger colour using the half rigger. Notice the hints of pink dropped into the greens on the edges of the leaves. Once this initial layer is dry, add the darker sections using the round brush. Finally add the darker leaf veins using the half rigger.

1 Let the colours merge into the shape of the leaf and stalk then drop in the darker colours around the edge. Subtle colour changes are suggested by dropping in wet dilute colour using the half rigger. Drop a strong mix of pink into the wet stalk, letting the colour rush up the wet stalk. The tiny dark dots are achieved by waiting until the sheen has gone off the paper (but it must not be fully dry) then, using the half rigger, gently touch the paper using dark, drier colour. The dark veins are added in the same way.

2 Using similar techniques as the previous leaf, paint the lovely pink sections by adding stronger colour onto a wet base of strong pigment. The stronger the colour, the less it travels; the wetter or more dilute the pigment the more the colour travels.

3 This technique requires a steady hand and good brush control. Begin with a wash over the entire leaf shape using the round brush. This will eventually be the lighter veins. Once dry, use a dilute pink to paint the entire leaf shape again, this time avoiding the tiny veins. It is important to keep the whole leaf wet, as stronger colours can then be added with the half rigger, including lovely darks along the leaf edge.

4 Wet the leaf shape all over with clean water then drop the strong pigments on to the wet surface using the half rigger. Apply



the lightest colours first and the darker ones later. Introduce strong dark colour on the edge; paint the vein once the base colour has dried.

5 Apply the base colour as before then leave to dry. Apply masking fluid over the veins and stalk and leave to dry. A dip pen is a good tool to do this, as it can be wiped clean after use. Once the masking fluid is dry, the darker colour is placed on top and allowed to dry. The masking fluid is then removed to

reveal the details. Masking fluid needs to be applied very carefully for the results to be delicate.

6 This leaf uses the same techniques as leaf 3 but, after the base colour has been applied and left to dry, drop in the sections of green and pink onto a base of plain water thus keeping the colours separate. The green must not be allowed to run into the pink, so both colours need to be of equal strengths.



▲ *Rosehips*,
watercolour,
4½×4¼in.
(12×11cm)

HIPS ▲

The same leaf techniques are used for painting hips.

1 Begin with a light base colour avoiding the shine then, once dry, paint a deeper, more varied layer on top.
2 Orange can be dropped onto red to

give a warm glow.

3 Add the dry tops of the hips next, allowing some of the red to seep upwards.

4 Finally, keep the leaves simple, painting them wet into wet.



▲ *Hips*, watercolour, 5½×7½in.
(13×19cm). Paint the wet-in-wet background after the drawing and before you begin to paint the hips. Use the same colours as you intend to use in the painting of the detail. Use the round brush and keep all of the colours fairly dilute.

THIS MONTH'S PROJECTS

PROJECT 1 ▼

Collect some small leaves and, keeping the scale the same as the originals, (you can even draw round them if you wish), paint a series of leaf studies. Add some colour-mixing notes onto your work sheet if you want to use them as reference material later. Limit yourself to half an hour for each leaf. Think about which techniques you will use before you begin.



▲ PROJECT 2

Search for a small sprig of berries including some leaves. Make a couple of preliminary watercolour studies then draw a slightly more complex composition. Limit yourself to two hours in total for both the drawing and the painting. Keep life size or smaller. Decide on the techniques you will use before you begin.

PROJECT 3 ▼

Develop a series of studies on one page (below). Placement is important so consider carefully where you place the drawing on the paper.

I will be painting a complex and mixed composition including grasses, berries and leaves this month. If you would like to see my project and read about how I achieved it, visit www.fionapear.com, click on Tuition and follow the link on the page.

