

Stretching Watercolour Paper

Stretching your paper makes it so much easy to paint on, particularly if you paint with a lot of water. The paper will be kept flat and you won't have to manoeuvre around buckles and lakes. Stretching the paper also helps you to photograph your work squarely and also, when you remove it from the board, the painting will sit in the frame better.

Materials:

watercolour paper 300gsm
kraft gum tape, cut in lengths 4cm longer than the width and length of the paper.
stretcher boards (I use 10mm gatorboard)
pencil, eraser, ruler and scissors
basin or bath (rinsed free of chemicals)
cereal bowl
natural sea sponge (remove any stones, coral and shell)

Try to touch the paper as little as possible, keep fingers to the very edge of the paper.

Cut your paper to size (keep scraps for practicing shapes etc) and on the right side of the paper rule a line 1cm in from each edge (check the watermark if unsure).

Soak paper for about 10 minutes, fully submerged in water. If you are stretching multiple sheets, lay them in the water individually one underneath the other, ensure each sheet is wet on both sides.

On your stretching board pencil mark straight lines about 1 inch from the edge so you can line your paper up easily, it's best to have the paper square on the board.

Take one sheet of paper from the water and let the drips run off it, lay it square on the board, **gently** run the sponge over it to remove excess water.

Run a length of tape thru the cereal bowl of water and line it up to your 1cm 'seamline', half on the paper half on the board, **lightly** run the sponge down the length of the tape to remove excess water. Repeat the other length then the 2 widths. Do not firm the tape down with your fingers, this will spread the gum from the tape and stick the paper to the board, your painting will be ruined. Keep the board flat for at least 12 hours to dry. BEWARE - Cats love to walk on freshly stretched paper!! Gggrrhhh!!

You might get air pockets, these will flatten out no worries.

12 hours later (possibly more if it's rainy season) - Ready to paint!!



Bikes n Brollies

When finished painting, run a craft knife down the edges of the paper, through the gum tape, you might hear a crack as the stretched paper is released from the board, this is all good. The paper should come away easily, in some places you may have to ease your knife a little more firmly. You will be left with the length of the gum tape around the edges of the painting, you can either cut them off or leave them as you wish.

Remove the gum tape from your board by wetting tape, leave for 10 minutes and lift up and remove with your craft knife - your board is now ready to use again.

I have about 10 boards on the go and frequently, when the first side is dry, I stretch more sheets onto the reverse side.