

Make your own egg tempera

Nowadays, painters use acrylic paint, oil paint or watercolour paint. However, these types of paint did not yet exist in the Middle Ages. They used something called egg tempera to create their paintings and illustrations.

This is one of the oldest paints in the world and was used as early as the Stone Age. Of course, prehistoric paint was not identical to what we're going to make, but it comes close. All you need is an egg, something that serves as pigment and water!



The first component is pigment, which gives the paint its colour. Pigment is still used in modern paint and even in pencils. You can buy pigment in a wide range of colours in a hobby shop, but you can also make it yourself! One of the ways to do so is to grind a substance containing pigment between two stones into a fine powder. The finer the better!

A mortar and pestle are ideal for grinding softer pigments into a fine powder.



Now that you have the pigment, you can start making tempera. To do so, you need an egg. Carefully crack open the egg and pour the egg white into a dish. Don't drop the yolk into the dish! Hold the yolk in your hand, pierce the yolk sac and allow the yolk to drain into the dish, but not the yolk membrane. It is best to discard the membrane, as you will get better paint without it. Mix the egg white and yolk well until you get an even mixture.

First add some water and then the pigment. It is best to use demineralised or distilled water. This is water that does not contain any minerals or ions. It is difficult to make this yourself, but you can buy it in a decent hobby shop that also sells pigment powder. Add the same amount of distilled water as the egg mixture. This is a ratio of 1:1. Mix everything well. The egg in the water serves as a binder for the paint, like glue in modern paint. Put the pigment powder in a tray, add some of the egg-water mixture and mix until you get a smooth consistency. Add some more water if it is too thick, or add some more pigment if it is too thin.



Your egg tempera is ready! Now you can start to paint.

As is the case with ordinary paint, you can apply several layers of paint to bring out the colour or mix it with other colours of paint! Enjoy your painting project!

Suggestions for pigment colours:

- Charcoal for black
- Brick / flowerpot for red and russet
- Mustard powder for yellow
- Dried parsley for green (looks like a seaweed green)
- Chalk for white
- You can use all kinds of materials as pigment! Experiment with lots of things to see what colours you get, but always be careful. For instance, it is best not to use anything that contains lead!
- Of course, you can also use coloured chalks or a pencil core (modern coloured pencils no longer contain lead)

Tips:

Egg tempera is not ideal for use on a flexible support medium such as canvas, as it is prone to cracking and flaking. It is best to use a rigid and smooth support medium such as canvas board or wood.

Adding more water creates a watercolour effect! This allows you to apply layers of different colours.