

MARBLING FOR BEGINNERS

We manufacture and supply products for Western Marbling Art. Western Marbling differs from Ebru Marbling which is also called Turkish Marbling Art. The main difference is that Western Marbling uses water-based products.

Marbling is done by floating paints on a thickened liquid solution (called a gel). Once you are happy with the floating design it is frozen in time by laying a piece of paper or fabric onto the surface of the gel and allowing it to float and absorb the pattern. The paper or fabric is lifted up off the gel to reveal a unique once off print. You can also marble odd shaped 3D objects by dipping them slowly into the marbling bath allowing the paint to wrap around them e.g. wooden items and ceramic in bisque state. Only marble porous surfaces that normal acrylic paints will adhere to. You can marble other surface types by either sanding off finishes or painting on a suitable paint primer first (primers for most surface types are available from hardware stores).

Marbling is done using small amounts of paint. To get best absorption and adhesion of paint onto the surface, the item to be marbled should be pre-treated first by dipping it into the fixative solution and allowing it to dry before putting it in the marbling bath.

Step 1: Make the Marbling Bath Gel

Add 65g (100ml) Gel Powder per 10 litres of water. If you don't have a good mixer then using hot kettle water will assist with dissolving the powder. The amount of Gel Powder recommended is for clean water and takes into account average tap water in SA. If you use deionized water you will need less powder and if your tap water is very hard you may need a little more. Add the powder slowly to the water while mixing with a high speed mixer. Hardware stores sell low cost mixing units that can be attached to any household drill and these are perfect for a 10 litre batch mixed in a 20 litre bucket. 5-10 minutes of mixing this way is required. The gel should reach the viscosity (flow) of an egg white upon standing. Allow the gel to stand for a few hours before using it (all air that makes it appear white should disappear with time and all lumps will dissolve).

Preserve your marbling gel for longer by storing it in a fridge and keeping a lid on it. It is important to give it a good mix and let it warm to room temperature before marbling again.

Add the gel to the marbling bath or tray that you plan to use (a cat litter tray or foil baking tray works well). For flat surface marbling make the bath at least 3cm deep. For dip marbling you will require a much deeper bath.

Step 2: Pre-treat the surface to be marbled

Add Fixative Powder to water. Simple shaking or fast stirring may provide adequate mixing. If water is very cold you can heat it up to help dissolve the powder. If you battle to dissolve the powder then boil the water. Make sure all powder is dissolved. Only use Fixative Solution once it has cooled.

For paper and non-fabric surfaces

Make fixative solution by adding about 60g (60ml) of Fixative Powder into 1 litre of water.

For paper sponge onto paper evenly. Allow to dry and press the paper flat before marbling.

For other surfaces dip the surface to be marbled into the fixative solution, hold it in the solution for a few seconds and then hang it up to dry.

For Fabric

Reduce the amount of fixative powder to half i.e. 30g (30ml) of Fixative Powder into 1 litre of water.

Soak fabrics for 10min, line dry and then marble. Iron with a cool iron if needed.

Note that higher concentration Fixative Solutions will make fabric brittle and it will tear.

Step 3: Prepare your paints

Acrylic paints must be made to flow very readily. Bastion Paint Marbling and Pouring Acrylic should be diluted as follows: Mix 1 part paint with 2 parts water e.g. 10ml paint with 20ml water. Your paint should be the same viscosity as full cream milk. If you add more water the paint will spread more so you can reduce the spread of some paints by using less water.

Step 4: Create your design

Watch YouTube videos and follow our very own South African Marbling Page for inspiration. Diluted paint is dripped carefully onto the surface of the marbling bath. Apply the colours of your choice in drops at the points that you require them. Each drop will spread out to a thin film. Different paints and colour drops close together will not mix but tend to push one another into smaller shapes or tighter veins. The colours will intensify as more paint is added. Don't squirt the paint onto the bath as it will sink. Not all paint colours spread the same and ones that spread less give more concentrated colours. You can make colours spread more by adding surfactant to them (see last paragraph).

Use a mini-rake, toothpick or items of your choice to create your design by gently drawing in the paint which is floating on the surface. (You can make your own quick beginners rake by sticking pins through a straw.) Watch: www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqclBOtOEx8

Step 5: Marble your paper, fabric or item

Before you start make sure the surface of the gel in the marbling bath is clean and has no skin. Skim the surface or absorb dirt specs by laying newspaper onto the surface. It is important to have your gel and paints at room temperature before you start.

For 2-D marbling lay paper or fabric onto the surface making sure to not trap bubbles. Tap on the surface to release bubbles if needed. Let paper lie for a minute and then lift the paper. For fabrics allow the fabric to lie on the surface until wet and then lift. Rinse as much of the gel off as possible without rubbing. Line dry out of direct sunlight. For 3-D marbling, slowly dip objects into the bath watching how the paint pulls towards the objects as they are lowered in. Remove your marbled item and rinse off immediately with gently flowing cold water. Hang it up to dry and you are done.

Step 6: Clean your marbling bath surface for your next design

If enough paint remains in the bath after marbling you can create a second print. Skim the surface of your gel with strips of newspaper or lay newspaper onto the marbling bath surface to absorb all remaining paint. Paint that sinks to the bottom will not affect your next creation. Use the same marbling bath to create your next work of art. You need only change your marbling bath gel when you can't get the surface clean, when it starts to smell or when it loses viscosity and becomes so thin that paint sinks. Make sure that the depth is always more than 3cm. If you really want to marble on a large scale we can provide a preservative to significantly prolong the life of your bath.

Use of surfactant – optional and not for beginners

Some colours spread out more than others. This difference can be useful but you can increase the spread tendency of any colour by adding our Concentrated Surfactant to it. For example Phthalo Green our Phthalo Blue are quite fast colours (meaning they spread more). Pyrrol Red and Dioxazine Violet are slow colours (meaning they spread less). You can increase the spread rate of slow colours by adding a few drops of Concentrated Surfactant and stirring. You will very quickly identify slow and fast colours.

2 or 3 drops of Concentrated Surfactant per 30ml dilute paint (10ml paint + 20ml water) should have a noticeable effect. If you want all paints to spread less then add surfactant into the marbling bath gel before starting and stir the entire bath (not usually required).

Guide prepared by Bastion Paint and Larissa Don.

The Gel Powder, Fixative Powder and Concentrated Surfactant referred to are those supplied by Bastion Paint.