

MY DREAM SHOPPING LIST FOR COLORED PENCILS

What I'd Buy If I Was Just Getting Started



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by Carrie L. Lewis

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About This List



Following is a list of the pencils I would buy if I was just getting started with colored pencils. The list includes the brands I'd try, and the colors I'd choose. Color selections are limited to six pencils from each brand, since most beginning artists are going to be limited by funds. I can tell you narrowing the selections down to six was difficult!

I've made color choices based on two factors.

First is permanence. None of the colors I've chosen are rated less than excellent for lightfastness. Any artwork created using these brands and colors will last decades. If you're creating—and selling—fine art, that should be one of the most important qualities of any pencil you use.

Second, I've selected colors that are suited to drawing animals and landscapes. Since those are the subjects I draw most often, any colors I test will be tested on drawings of either landscapes or animals.

If your favorite subjects are landscapes or animals, the color selections below will suit you beautifully.

If you draw still lifes, florals, or a variety of subjects, you should also still be able to discover which brands of pencils are going to work best for you by buying these colors. However, you may want to substitute some of the earth tones for other colors.

Finally, this list is meant to give you a place to start in your exploration of high quality colored pencils. I've quite deliberately limited the brands to the four brands I most want to try and that are available in open stock. There are many other brands I'd love to try, but that are not available in open stock.

I've also included Prismacolor Soft Core in this list, but with caveats, which I explain below.

If money is no object, there is absolutely nothing wrong with buying sets of pencils to try. There's also no reason not to buy smaller sets when available—the brands I've listed do have smaller sets available, and that's a great way to try out new colored pencils.

Whatever your stage of drawing, I encourage you to try high quality colored pencils at least once, just to see what they're like. If you don't like them, that's fine.

But maybe you will.

In either case, I hope this list is helpful to you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carrie L. Lewis". The signature is written in a dark ink and is positioned in the lower-left area of the page.

Artist & Teacher

Wax-Based Pencils

Wax-based pencils are manufactured with a wax binder that allows the pigment to be formed into the pigment core. The binder holds the pigment in that shape, and also allows the pigment to be spread onto the drawing surface.

As a rule, wax-based pencils are softer than oil-based pencils, and lay down color more easily. They do not hold a point quite as well as oil-based pencils, and although you can still draw a high level of detail with wax-based colored pencils, it can be somewhat more difficult, depending on the brand of pencil you use.

Wax-based colored pencils are prone to developing wax-bloom, which happens when the wax binder rises to the surface of the drawing. You can easily deal with wax-bloom by blending with solvent, or simply wiping the drawing with tissue paper (non-lotion only), then spraying with final finish after you've finished the drawing.

Caran d'Ache Luminance

Luminance pencils are opaque, so you can draw light over dark. They work over any other type of pencil, as well, so concentrate on lighter colors. The following colors are my ideal selections, but they are expensive, so you could get a good idea how they work by buying those marked with asterisks (*).

Although Luminance pencils are wax-based, they are not as prone to wax-bloom as other brands of wax-based pencils.

- *Buff Titanium
- Burnt Ochre 10%
- Naples Ochre
- Olive Brown 10%
- Raw Umber 10%
- * White

Caran d'Ache Pablo

- Brown
- Brown Ochre
- Brownish Beige
- Brownish Orange
- Burnt Sienna
- Cream
- Golden Ochre

Prismacolor Premier (Soft Core)

The best known and most popular wax-based colored pencil currently on the market is Prismacolor. They are also the most widely available and can be purchased from office supply outlets, craft and art supply stores, and many other locations.

I use Prismacolor Soft Core and Prismacolor Verithin and have had good success with them. Some of the pencils I've purchased have had broken leads, cracked casings, gritty pigment cores, off-center pigment cores, and warped casings, but for the most part, I've been satisfied with the product. Most of my pencils are older, though, and were manufactured prior to the wide-spread problems mentioned above.

I recommend them with caution.

I recommend them because they may be the only pencil available in many locations and because it is possible to create stunning colored pencil art with them.

I recommend them *with caution* because roughly half the collection of colors are less than satisfactory when it comes to fading issues and because of the problems mentioned above. Given the reviews I've seen and read, I probably wouldn't buy them now if I was just starting out.

If you want to try Prismacolor, buy open stock and, whenever possible, buy them in a location where you can examine the pencils individually. Look for:

Centered pigment cores by examining the ends of the pencils. If the core is off center, unnecessary stress will be put on the core during sharpening. Don't buy it.

Straight pencils by lying each pencil on a flat surface and by rolling them on the surface. Do not buy any that are not completely straight.

Cracked wood casings. Examine the pencil end to end. If there is any evidence of chips or cracks, leave that pencil in the store. Cracked wood casings may split during sharpening.

Having said all that, what colors would I begin with?

- Goldenrod
- Mineral Orange
- Light Umber
- Sienna Brown
- Dark Green
- Black

Unfortunately, most of the blues and greens are rated satisfactory or less for lightfastness and are not therefore recommended for fine art usage. Pinks and purples are also well-known to be fading colors and should be avoided.

It's advisable to begin your search for pencils by looking at the color chart for each brand you want to try. That's especially advisable with Prismacolor, so I'm providing a link to [a free Prismacolor Color Chart download](#). Print it and take with you when you shop for Prismacolor pencils.

Or you can use the following list, which only the top two ratings.

Prismacolor Soft Core Colors Rated I (51 colors)

| | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Artichoke | French Grey 10% | Parrot Green |
| Beige | French Grey 20% | Peach |
| Black Cherry | French Grey 30% | Peacock Green |
| Black Raspberry | French Grey 50% | Powder Blue |
| Bronze | French Grey 70% | Sandbar |
| Burnt Ochre | French Grey 90% | Sepia |
| Chocolate | Goldenrod | Sienna Brown |
| Cool Grey 10% | Green Ochre | Spanish Orange |
| Cool Grey 20% | Henna | Terra Cotta |
| Cool Grey 30% | Jade Green | Warm Grey 10% |
| Cool Grey 70% | Kelly Green | Warm Grey 20% |
| Cool Grey 90% | Lemon Yellow | Warm Grey 30% |
| Crimson Lake | Light Peach | Warm Grey 50% |
| Dark Brown | Light Umber | Warm Grey 70% |
| Dark Green | Metallic Silver | Warm Grey 90% |
| Dark Umber | Mineral Orange | Yellow Chartreuse |
| Espresso | Nectar | Yellow Ochre |

Prismacolor Soft Core Colors Rated II (23 colors)

Beige Sienna

Ginger Root

Olive Green

Black Grape

Grape

Peach

Carmine Red

Grass Green

Pumpkin Orange

Chartreuse

Indigo Blue

Sand

Chestnut

Jasmine

Scarlet Red

Cool Grey 50%

Kelp Green

Slate Grey

Cream

Mediterranean Blue

True Green

Crimson Red

Metallic Gold

Oil-Based Pencils

Oil-based pencils are manufactured with an oil binder instead of wax. The pigment cores are generally harder and often drier than wax-based pencils, but that makes them ideal for drawing exceptionally fine details.

Pencils manufactured with an oil-based binder are not subject to developing wax bloom. They are capable of being sharpened to a much sharper point, and they also hold that point longer than the softer wax-based pencils.

They can be used exclusively or combined with wax-based pencils in the same drawing.

Faber-Castell Polychromos

- Cadmium Yellow
- Pine Green
- Juniper Green
- Naples Yellow
- Burnt Umber
- Burnt Sienna

Lyra Rembrandt Polycolor Oil-Based Colored Pencils

- Brown Ochre
- Burnt Ochre
- Cedar
- Hooker's Green
- Sky Blue
- Van Dyke Brown

Places to Shop



As a rule, the more expensive colored pencils are not going to be available locally, unless you live in the vicinity of an exceptional store, such as a Dick Blick store.

You'll find the best prices online. My preference is [Dick Blick](#), but you can also find them at other art supply websites such as [Jerry's Artarama](#). [Amazon.com](#) is also a good place to shop, but be mindful of prices. Their prices are not always the lowest. Nor do they always have open stock available.