

Sketching and Drawing Trees in the Landscape

With Stephen Martyn

Here's another of my series of How to Sketch articles, which I hope will inspire you to get outdoors with a sketchpad and have a go yourself! As I write this it's Spring here in Norfolk, the perfect time of year for sketching. The days are getting long, the weather is improving (maybe), and the landscape still has that lovely fresh greenness about it which tends to dull as we go through the year.

If you're new to art, your materials can be very simple. A cartridge paper sketch book, perhaps A4 size with spiral binding, plus a couple of soft pencils and a soft eraser. When you're working outside, a stool or portable chair is good to perch on, but make sure it's lightweight, otherwise you'll soon wish you weren't carrying it. Last but not least, a good strong elastic band, to stop the pages of your sketchbook flapping in the breeze.

The above is a basic kit for pencil sketching. However, in this issue, I'm going to show you how an ink pen can be a really nice medium for drawing the landscape, so you might like to get one of those too. Any good art shop will be able to help you, but it's important to ask for a pen with *waterproof* black ink.



An ink pen study of a tree drawn on an A4 pad of cartridge paper

That gives you the chance to work over your sketch with watercolour later, without smudging it. The pens I use are the Edding 1800 series, but any equivalent is fine. They come in various sizes of nib, but I use the 0.7 which is good for both fine and wider lines. All the ink sketches in this article were made with one of these pens.

If you're ever stuck for a subject to sketch, one thing that there's never a shortage of in the British landscape is trees. Trees on their own, trees beside a building, in the distance, close up, the choice is endless. The illustrations accompanying this article show some of the different ways of sketching trees in both pencil and ink.

First find your tree, in other words the scene you want to sketch. A walk round the lanes on a sunny day will soon turn up plenty of likely candidates. Try and choose a scene that's not too complicated, so one tree on its own is a good idea to start with. Choose one that's interesting in shape, that you like the look of.

Drawing it is a skill that develops over time, although often less time than you might think. The one thing that you must constantly keep in your mind is to

look and observe first, and only then to make a mark on the paper. The tendency is to draw what your brain thinks the scene looks like, not what is actually there. Have a good study of the scene first, and only then get to work with pencil or pen.

With trees, I tend to start with the trunk and work upwards and outwards. However, care is needed, as a common problem is making the drawing too big to start with, so that you run out of space. A few light marks on the paper, showing where the main branches are and how high and wide the tree is, might help before you put in any detail.



Trees drawn quickly with a soft 6B pencil

Speaking of detail, even a small tree will have hundreds of branches and twigs, not to mention leaves. Somehow, we have to simplify those down, so that we capture the impression of the tree, and don't get bogged down in trying to draw absolutely everything.

If you look at my tree sketches in this article, you'll get some ideas for simplifying detail, using both pencil and an ink pen. With pencil, shading using the side of the pencil tip can give the impression of groups or clumps of leaves, without actually drawing any individual leaf at all.



Trees surrounding Ringstead Church. A study in ink pen on cartridge paper

Ink is an ideal medium for drawing finer branches, so I tend to use it most for trees that are not in leaf. It may feel daunting at first to be using a drawing implement that you can't erase, but if you start by making light marks and only firm them up as the drawing progresses, you'll find that it's not too difficult. I think you'll

enjoy using the pen once you've had a bit of practice with it, and it's amazing how much you can leave out of the drawing and still make the subject look convincing.

Another bonus of using a waterproof ink pen is that you can paint over it afterwards, using watercolour. Using a pen with a few simple watercolour washes is one of the most enjoyable ways to sketch and I'll cover the technique for that another time.

Do get out and have a go. If you have found this article useful, but you'd like to learn more, visit the Tuition and Events pages on my website **learnwatercolour.com** where you will find out how I can actually show you these techniques. Happy Sketching!

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