



Alaska
Botanical
Garden

BLUE POPPY, Color Matching

Let's try matching the colors of a blue poppy! Keep in mind nature is the most advanced at color mixing. There are some colors in nature that cannot be found in paint. It's okay to accept that nature is the winner and not to let that discourage you. Just try to get as close as you can. Blue poppies have many varieties some are a very light and bright blue, some are a slightly darker blue, some are even purple.

The Meconopsis 'lingholm' poppy is light and bright. The closest blue I had in my paint tubes was Manganese Blue, but you can use whatever colors you have available. You can also use whatever paints you have available.

Watercolor is nice because it is transparent, which can give you that luminous see-through quality of the light passing through the flower. Acrylic, and Oil paint also have transparent colors. The tubes of paint will often show you on the front which are transparent (see through) and which are opaque (solid).

1. Start with a thin, light layer of pure color to find your lightest value of your blue. To make my blue even lighter I watered it down. When working with watercolor it is best to try and preserve the whites or light spaces on your paper. Start light and work darker.
2. Now look for your middle values. You can think about layering a darker blue on top or next to your lightest blue. You can also think about mixing a darker blue with your lightest blue to make a darker value.
3. Next find the darkest values. You can apply the darkest blues you have straight on these sections, or mix your darkest blues with your light or middle blues.
4. At the end you can add highlights with white straight on top, or leaving your paper white in these areas. You could also mix white with your lightest blue and paint it on top of these spaces.
5. Now you can think about adding little details, line thin lines or veins on your flower. Maybe you even add a few dew drops using a circle of medium blue with a white highlight in the center. You could use little dark brown or black lines or ovals for small thrips or bugs. Mix light, middle and dark greens to add leaves, and a stem. Maybe you even want to attempt a painting of a bumble bee.

COLOR MATCHING TIPS

When trying to match the color of something it can be helpful to hold up the colors of paint tubes or the color you have on your brush next to the image or subject you are trying to paint and ask yourself if it is a match or not.

There are several helpful clarifying questions you can ask your-self to check your work.

Is it **lighter or darker** than this color?

Is it **warmer or cooler** than this color?

Is it **brighter or duller** than this color?

If your answer was lighter, you can add white to the color.

If your answer was darker, you can try adding black to the color.

If your answer was warmer you can try adding yellow, orange, or red to the color.

If your answer was cooler you can try adding blue, green, or violet to the color.

If your answer was brighter you can try adding yellow to the color.

If your answer was duller you can try adding grey or the complementary (opposite) to the color.

*Keep in mind to use small amounts when changing a color, you can always add more but you cannot subtract.

Once you have mixed your new color ask yourself the three clarifying questions again. And adjust as needed. Sometimes you're way off and have to start all over.

COLOR WHEEL, Color Theory

A color wheel can be one of the most helpful tools to help you visualize and understand color matching something you want to paint. The color wheel is an organizational chart illustrating the relationships between colors.

The **primary colors** red, yellow, and blue are colors that cannot be mixed, and are used to mix all of the other colors. For example, if you mix red and yellow you get orange, if you mix yellow and blue you get green, if you mix red and blue you get violet. Orange, Green and Violet are called **secondary colors**. Secondary colors can also be mixed with the primaries to get **tertiary colors** (Red orange, Yellow orange, Yellow green, Blue Green, Blue Violet, and Red Violet).

It is also helpful to think about colors that are **warm** (red, orange, yellow) and **cool** (blue, green, violet). This will help you immensely when you get to the matching colors activity.

Try mixing each color and filling it in on the color chart. Once you have made a color chart you can hang it in your studio and use it anytime you need a reminder of how the colors relate to each other.

TINTS, SHADES, and COMPLEMENTARY COLORS

True colors are called Hues. A **hue** or color can also have something called value. Value is how **light or dark** a color is. To mix a light value of a color you add white. A color or hue plus white is called a **tint**. To mix a dark color you can add black. A color or hue plus black is called a **shade**. You can also mix a color with grey and this is called a **tone**. Mixing tints, tones, and shades will give you a range of light, middle and dark values of your color or hue.

Complementary colors are colors that are opposite each other on the color wheel. Complements are also colors that create a pleasing and vibrant color reaction when placed side by side. Mixing a complementary color with its opposite will also work to grey out or create a **neutral**. It works like mixing white, black or grey into a color.

It is also important to note that you can also lighten or darken a color by mixing a lighter or darker color with it. For example, if you want to have a lighter green you could add yellow to it instead of adding white. White can grey out or neutralize a color making it appear less vibrant. But mixing two true colors like yellow and green without adding white will make the green lighter creating **dullness** to the color. We call this the **brightness** of a color.

100 COLOR CHALLENGE

It can be quite enjoyable and meditative to mix color without any project in mind. The best way to get better at mixing colors is to experiment. Try mixing as many color combinations as you can think of, practice mixing tints, tones, and shades. See if you can make 100 different color combos and fill in as many squares on the chart as you can. There are many artists who have made grid paintings and abstract color paintings just like this as their finished artwork.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Albers, Joseph. *The Interaction of Color*. Yale University, 2013.

Finlay, Victoria. *Color A Natural History of the Palette*. Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2004.

Itten, Johannes, and Faber Birren. *The Elements of Color: A Treatise on the color system of Johannes Itten, Based on His Book the Art of Color*. John Wiley & Sons, 2001.