

## Painting Space, Window into Nature

Paintings have long been described as a window, something you look at and then into. Looking out a window to observe nature is also something artists have been doing for hundreds of years. This idea to do this project was inspired by the giant greenhouse window at the Alaska Botanical Garden that looks out over the lower perennial garden. You may use any window that inspires you to complete your painting.

For this exercise choose a window in your own home, or use your imagination to invent your ideal window into nature. We will learn how to create space in a painting or drawing using a foreground, middle and background to make the illusion of space in an artwork.

Creating a painting of nature seen through a window, creates an interesting framing device to the composition of a painting.

1. Choose a window with a view of nature. Keep in mind the nature could be on the inside or outside of the window. Perhaps you have some indoor plants on your kitchen windowsill, or there is a vine that grows up the side of your neighbor's house. Maybe you have just a tree branch or two with a few fresh spring buds on it, or maybe you snapped a photo of a window looking onto your favorite garden or landscape.
2. Start by drawing the overall shape of the window. Take note of whether the window is square, rectangular, circular, or octagonal. Now look for interior lines of the window. Your window may have a window sill, mullions or parts that separate the panes of glass, or hardware latches to open the window.
3. Draw the outlines of any curtains or window hardware like curtain rods, latches, metal tie-backs for the curtains if you want. Look also at how the corners of the window are joined are they at an angle, or flush. No need to get overwhelmed you can always edit and simplify if needed and just stick to the main shapes.
4. Draw the outline of the plants, garden beds, stepping stones, fences or items you see outside your window. Think about the plants in the view that you enjoy looking at the most. No need to draw everything you see just pick a few key elements to create a foreground, middle ground and background.
5. For a foreground object think about something that is on the inside of the window that is closest to you or can be in the front of the painting. Maybe it's an indoor plant on the counter, pruning shears, or your favorite gardening magazine. Draw that foreground object.
6. Now draw a middle ground object. Find something in the middle about halfway from your foreground object to something far in the distance. This could be a shrub in the yard, a raised garden bed, clay pot, or tree branch. Draw that middle ground object.

7. Lastly find something in the distance to draw, this could be the vine growing up the side of your neighbor's house, or a tree at the edge of your property. Maybe it's a bird on a wheelbarrow or the outline of your gardening shed or lawn mower.
8. Once you have the outlines drawn of everything you want in your painting it's time to choose some colors and get to painting. You could use colors found in nature or your imagination. I like to start by painting things in the background of the painting first and work up to painting the items in the middle and foreground last.
9. A painting is made by layering paint, so if you start by painting the things that are in the back of the painting first this will help them appear to be farther away because those layers of paint edges will sit behind or under the layers you paint next or last.
10. I like to start with the sky first, this also allows me to create a wash of color around objects. This helps the sky to look uniform and it can also be a thin translucent layer of paint to make it look airy.
11. Next paint your plants in the distance or objects in front of the sky, then paint the middle ground items, and lastly the window pane and foreground objects.
12. You can also think about mixing other colors ever so slightly into your window pane color and painting a slightly different color on each edge of the window frame. This will create the illusion of light and space. For example, the areas that have sunlight falling on them could have white or yellow added to the window pane color. The areas in shadow could have tiny amounts of blues, purples, browns added to the window pane color.

If you want to share photos of your finished window into nature painting you can email them to [garden@alaskabg.org](mailto:garden@alaskabg.org).