

ARTBEYOU

The 10 High-End Watercolor Mixes

How to Avoid Mud and Master Value Using a Student Palette



About This Guide

This guide provides **ten core landscape color mixtures** using a standard twelve-color watercolor palette, alongside the practical strategy behind them. Beyond simple recipes, it covers value testing, temperature control, and visual proofs to demonstrate exactly how paint behaves on paper. Mastering these combinations will eliminate muddy mixes, build clean depth, and give you deliberate control over your palette.

The Core Objective: This reference breaks down essential color combinations, so you can stop second-guessing your palette and start mixing with absolute precision to achieve accurate, professional landscapes.

How to Use This Setup: You will execute these mixes using a standard **Cotman watercolor set**. Working with half-pans is the most effective way to start because it forces you to actively engage with the pigment and manage your water load. This assorted twelve-color palette is highly practical and perfectly suited for landscape painting or any other studio project.

The Palette

- Lemon Yellow Hue
 - Cadmium Yellow Hue
 - Cadmium Red Pale Hue
 - Alizarin Crimson Hue
 - Ultramarine
 - Cerulean Blue Hue
- Viridian Hue
 - Sap Green
 - Yellow Ochre
 - Burnt Sienna
 - Burnt Umber
 - Chinese White

Why a Limited Palette?

Restricting yourself to an assorted twelve-color palette forces you to master color value and prevents the muddy mixes caused by too many competing pigments. It builds the discipline necessary to understand how colors interact, ensuring harmony across every piece you create rather than relying on endless convenience colors.



Before moving into the two-color mixes, take a moment to familiarize yourself with the twelve Cotman pigments on the previous page.

You do not need fifty different tubes of paint to create landscape!

This compact palette provides every mix, tone, and atmospheric variation you will ever need.

Core Two-Color Mixes

1. Ultramarine + Burnt Umber = Sepia(Warm Black)

When you mix these two, you do not get mud. You get a deep, rich, warm black. During our landscape demo, we used this to anchor the darkest shadows under the trees. You have to watch your proportions. Too much blue, and it pulls cold. Too much umber, and it flattens out.

2. Ultramarine + Burnt Sienna = Payne’sGray (Cool Black)

This is your cool, atmospheric dark. It is perfect for deep shadows in the distance where the warm tones have faded away. It granulates beautifully on the paper, giving you immediate texture without extra effort.

3. Alizarin Crimson + Viridian = Perylene Maroon (DeepNeutral Black)

Viridian straight from the pan is often too artificial for a natural landscape. By cutting it with Alizarin Crimson, you completely neutralize it, creating a deep, dark, near-black maroon that is incredible for deep structural shadows.

4. Cerulean Blue + Yellow Ochre = Terre Verte (Green Earth)

This is a soft, muted, earthy green. We used this for the distant fields in the landscape demo. It recedes naturally into the background because it lacks the intense saturation of a Sap Green.

5. Yellow Ochre + Burnt Umber = Raw Umber

If you need a cooler, darker earth tone than Yellow Ochre, this is the mix. It is excellent for blocking in the foundational structures of rocks or dead grass in the foreground.

6. Cadmium Yellow + Ultramarine = Hooker’s Green

This yields a classic, deep mid-green. Because Ultramarine is a warm blue and Cadmium is a warm yellow, they mix to create a very natural, versatile foliage green.

7. Lemon Yellow + Cerulean Blue = Chartreuse

This is a high-key, punchy spring green. It is aggressive. Use it sparingly for the areas of grass or leaves that are catching the absolute peak of the direct sunlight.

8. Cadmium Red Pale + Ultramarine = Dioxazine Violet (substitute)

This creates a muted, brownish-purple. It is fantastic for the shadows inside clouds or the distant, hazy mountains where the air dulls the intense colors.

9. Alizarin Crimson + Burnt Umber = CaputMortuum (Indian Red)

This gives you a heavy, earthy, deep red. It is grounded and solid, perfect for brickwork, terracotta tiles, or deep, warm earth in the immediate foreground.

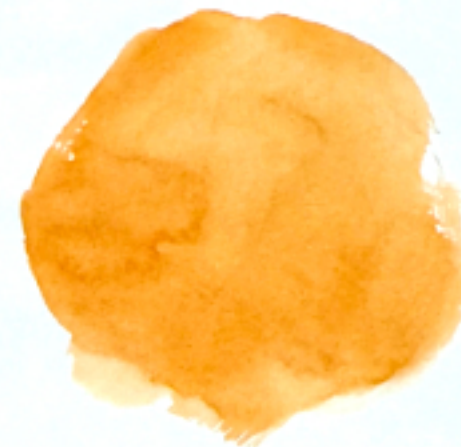
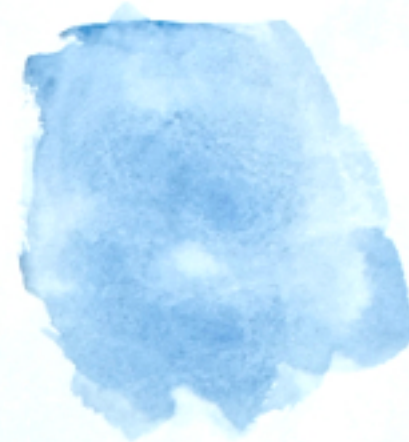
10. Cadmium Yellow + Cadmium Red Pale = Cadmium Orange

A bright, intense, fiery orange. It is completely clean and transparent.



Ultramarine + Burnt Umber = Sepia (Warm Black)

①



Ultramarine + Burnt Sienna = Payne's Gray (Cool Black)

②



**Alizarin Crimson + Viridian = Perylene Maroon
(Deep Neutral Black)**

(3)



**Cerulean Blue + Yellow Ochre = Terre Verte
(Green Earth)**

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Yellow Ochre + Burnt Umber = Raw Umber

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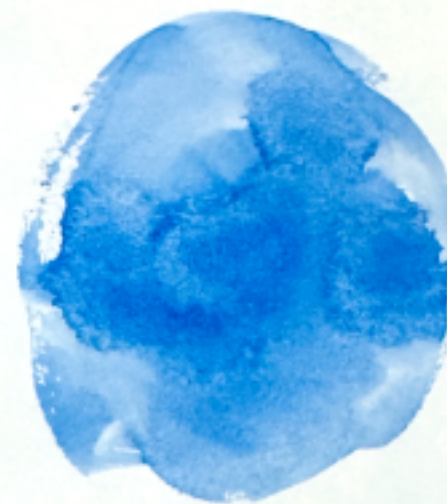
Cadmium Yellow + Ultramarine = Hooker's Green

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Lemon Yellow + Cerulean Blue = Chartreuse

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**Cadmium Red Pale + Ultramarine = Dioxazine Violet
(substitute)**

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**Alizarin Crimson + Burnt Umber = Caput Mortuum
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**Cadmium Yellow + Cadmium Red Pale = Cadmium
Orange**

⑩

The Strategy of the Setup

Mastering the Twelve-Color Palette

Mixing paint is the easy part; understanding why a mix works is where true skill develops. This brief guide breaks down the core principles that separate amateur guesswork from professional execution. Before you begin blending pigments, you must understand the strategy behind the palette.

1. The Muddy Mix Trap: Value Over Color

Color recipes fail when value is ignored. A perfect color mix will look exactly like mud if it is too dark or too light for its surrounding context.

- **The Trap:** It is easy to focus entirely on hue (red, blue, green) and ignore how light or dark the paint is. In watercolor, value is controlled entirely by water ratio, not by adding white paint.
- **The Fix:** Before applying any mix to your final piece, test it on a scrap piece of watercolor paper. Let it dry for a few seconds, watercolor always dries lighter than it looks on the palette.
- **The Test:** Squint your eyes. Squinting removes color information and forces you to see only light and dark. If the value does not match your subject, adjust your water ratio before you ever touch the canvas.

2. Twelve-Color Discipline: The Power of Limitation

Using a massive palette of pre-mixed colors stunts your growth as an artist. A strictly limited twelve-color setup is a deliberate, academic strategy to force mastery.

- **The Discipline:** When you only have twelve colors, you cannot reach for a pre-mixed crutch. You are forced to actively solve visual problems on the palette.
- **The Result:** Limiting your palette creates natural color harmony. Because every color on your paper is built from the exact same foundational pigments, the entire painting unifies effortlessly.
- **The Rigor:** This is not a beginner’s limitation. Mastering a constrained palette is the essential foundation that allows you to eventually control any pigment you touch.

3. Temperature Rules: The Logic of Light

A standard color recipe must change depending on the light source. You cannot blindly follow a formula; you must observe the temperature of the environment.

- **Warm Light, Cool Shadows:** If your subject is hit by warm, direct sunlight, the shadows will naturally shift cool (requiring blues, greens, and cool violets to be mixed in).
- **Cool Light, Warm Shadows:** On an overcast day or under cool studio lighting, the shadows will shift warm (requiring earth tones, reds, and oranges).
- **The Application:** Never just add black to darken a color. Instead, adjust the temperature. Drop a cool blue into a shadow to push it back into space, or add a warm sienna to pull a form forward.

Next Steps: This level of value assessment and temperature control takes practice. Apply these concepts to the color mixes provided in the accompanying guide, and observe how a simple shift in water ratio or light source completely changes the final result on the paper.

Putting Strategy into Practice



(Burnt Umber + Ultramarine Blue)

Are you looking for dark or light?

The answer is **BOTH**.

Squint your eyes when observing your subject. This immediately removes distracting color information and allows you to see only light and dark. Test your mix, let it dry, and compare the value to ensure your assessment is correct for the specific area you are painting before you commit to the canvas.



(Cerulean Blue Hue Gradient)

Avoiding the Muddy Mix Trap & The 12-Color Discipline

Over-blending too many pigments destroys the vitality of your paint. By strictly limiting your palette to a few essential colors, you force mastery over their unique logic and create inherent color harmony because every tone on your paper is built from the same foundational pigments.

Practical Application: See how a simple mix of two complementary tones (Burnt Umber + Ultramarine Blue) creates a rich, nuanced dark rather than a flat, dead color crutch like pre-mixed black. This is what gives your tree shadows depth and life.

TIP: A balanced painting uses many value levels.

Temperature Rules & The Logic of Light

You cannot blindly follow a formula; you must adjust every standard mix based on the light source. Shadows are not just "dark," they are temperature reactions to the environment. Never just add black. Instead, control value precisely using your water ratio.

Practical Application: Look at how a single color like Cerulean Blue changes from a strong, deep value to a diluted, luminous light tone with just a water adjustment. This allows you to create atmospheric perspective and build depth.



A Final Note on Mastering the Mix

Mixing watercolor is not about memorizing recipes; it is about adopting a strategy of observation. By internalizing the principles of the Twelve-Color Discipline and Temperature Rules, you have moved beyond the amateur guessing game and are now engaging with the logic of light. The greatest danger in watercolor is not making mistakes, but repeating the mistake of ignoring value. Apply the squint test meticulously. Master the water ratio. You now possess the strategic foundation to ensure your paintings are clean, deep, and luminous.

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To move beyond theory and apply these principles in a structured environment, join our academic fine art classes in Richardson, Texas.

Visit the link below to view the upcoming schedule and secure your seat.