

## Preparation for painting

Each and every genus/sub genus and variety of plant has its own unique characteristics, this is what gives us the magnificent diversity of the vast plant kingdom on Earth and it was this diversity that first ignited my passion for botanical illustration.

I use 640gms extra white hot pressed Fabriano paper and in the main I use Grahams and Daniel Smith Paints. I start all my paintings in the same way.

First I spend many hours quietly studying each aspect of the live plant. Height, overall habit, shape of leaves and how they are attached, stems, bark where applicable, thorns, flowers and/or fruit, seeds and roots.

I then measure and sketch every individual feature and chose the colour palette I am going to use which I record on a colour chart making notes. Next I photograph the plant from every angle taking close ups to ensure I obtain all the information needed to accurately portray the plant such as veining details of leaves and petals, stems whether smooth, ridged, hairy etc, basically every intricate detail unique to the plant. I make a pencil rubbing on tracing paper of the reverse of the leaves in order to ensure that I accurately depict the veining and whilst I always work from the live plants, photographs are a good source of reference when the plant loses it's lustre or a part of it dies before I have finished the entire painting.

I then compose my painting using my sketches, photographs and the live specimen. A botanical illustration not only has to be accurate but also interesting and well balanced – it's not enough to just paint what you see, it is also necessary to create a unique and beautiful painting. Once I am satisfied with the composition I then transfer the image onto the watercolour paper and having ensured that all colours are a true representation I mix sufficient paint to work on the whole painting.

I don't have any hard and fast rules on where I start the painting as this varies greatly depending on the subject. Often I start with the flower/flowers as they are generally the first to fade and die, sometimes I may start with the leaves as invariably they form the back bone of the painting. Occasionally I simply work from the top and work my way down. I refer constantly to the live specimen and to my original drawing checking that I have not misread my faint outlines. When I have filled in all the colour I then systematically go over the whole painting again, darkening down colour where needed and neatening the edges.

I then put the painting away for a few days in order to re-visit it with fresh eyes – it's amazing how much I see that I can improve on.