

## Mixing Your Greens: Never use a tube green again:

### ***Blackadder:***

*Yes, Percy. I don't want to be pedantic or anything, but the colour of gold is gold. That's why it's called gold. What you have discovered, if it has a name, is some "green".*

### ***Percy:***

*Oh, Edmund, can it be true? That I hold here in my mortal hand, a nugget of purest green? <sup>1</sup>*

**It is fortunate that we do not need to resort to alchemy** to mix accurate and powerful greens for our paintings. That said it sometimes feels like a special alchemy takes place when an artist creates greens that evoke the sensory beauty that is our natural world. In this guide I want to show you how I go about mixing greens without resorting to tube greens to get a result that is both accurate and has impact.

I have often mentioned that a limited palette of colours is more useful than a vast array of tube colours. Truth is looking at a shop display of tube colours is a bit like being a kid in a candy store. Surely buying several tubes of green is essential?

Why a limited palette then? Firstly limited does not mean inferior, but simply a reduced number of colours. From this reduced number of colours we can obtain the following benefits:

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<sup>1</sup> From *Blackadder: The Whole Damn Dynasty* by Richard Curtis, John Lloyd, Rowan Atkinson & Ben Elton

## 10 Reasons to mix your greens:

1. less cost
2. less complication
3. greater harmony of colours on the canvas
4. we learn the skill of colour mixing
5. we gain confidence as artists
6. we quickly develop a system that becomes second nature
7. less time wastage
8. we learn about neutrals and mixing greys
9. more accuracy in our colours
10. paint with greater impact

Ten good reasons to work with less tube colours!

We will start with green. It is an essential colour for the landscape artist yet it apparently creates problems for artists. So much green out there! So lets meet the problem head on:

**Colours that we will need are:**

**Ultramarine light**

**cadmium yellow lemon (or pale)**

**cadmium red light**

**alizarin (or madder)**

**titanium white**



## Why no tube greens?

Firstly tube greens seldom bear any resemblance to nature especially compared to greens in South Africa. At a push Sap green can be used but it is not essential at all.

Second and most importantly in nature we do not see colours in isolation. There are so many factors in play due to the nature of the light (direct, indirect and reflected) and the influence that one colour has upon others around it. A tube green has no relationship to the scene. It will therefore stand out like a sore thumb. To work the relationships accurately mixing the greens is essential.

**To begin:** squeeze out a puddle of ultramarine and one of cad yellow. With these two colours we can create a vast number of greens. Added to this we can use cad red to tone down a green and we can use alizarin to make interesting darks. These two reds also help us manipulate colour temperature from warm (cad red) to cool (alizarin). On top of this we can use white to tint the greens further.

**Note:** it is easier to add a little blue to more yellow and achieve a green hue, than it is to add lots of yellow to blue. So work from blue to yellow to get to green.

**5 Variations** shown below will cater for most greens in trees and bushes: from lightest at the top:



1. 1 to 20 blue to yellow
2. 1 to 10
3. 1 to 2
4. 1 to 2
5. 2 to 1

If too green then add a touch of cad red to tone it down.



**A touch of red reduces a bright green to a more realistic green.**

**To make darks**, for example within large trees and shaded bushes, add alizarin and more ultramarine until the desired hue is achieved. No black paint is required to make accurate darks.

Cool darks: use alizarin rather than cad red. Warm darks: use cad red. This is particularly important when mixing greens for shadows. **Remember** that warm light = cool shadows. Cool light = warm shadows

By adding white we can tint the green to allow more variation. For example to get a more olive green white paint will cool the green down to get a convincing olive tone. Tints are also important to create aerial perspective. White cools down the greens and emphasises the more blueish and pinkish tones that help to create the illusion of receding foliage.



**Adding white to tint the green cools it down  
for a more olive green**

You can substitute ultra for cooler blue like cerulean to get a more intense green, but I would not suggest using cobalt for instance which is too strong. Yellow ochre instead of cad yellow brings in more possibilities especially for grasses.

Above all experiment. Observe what is in front of you. Really look! Observe the light effects, relationships between objects and then mix the colour. See it, mix it and apply it. With practice you will become more decisive and your paintings will gain impact simply because of the accuracy and harmony of colours.

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If this article has been useful to you please consider sharing it with a friend. Thank you!