

SWS July 2025 Challenge Painting – Plastic or Bubble Wrap

How to use the plastic wrap watercolor technique - kerriewoodhouse.com

1. Begin with a wet loose painted background or subject

You need **lots of wet color** to make this technique work. Be bold at this stage to avoid disappointment later. You can use just one color if you like, but lots of color works great!

2. Add scrunched plastic wrap, cling wrap or bubble wrap directly to the wet paint

Before the paint is dry pull off a piece of wrap and crumble it up. Place it directly on the surface of the wet paint making sure that the plastic and paper are in contact in several places.

You can press the plastic down in different places and manipulate the shapes a little, but the joy of this technique is that you never really know what you are going to get. Add a weight on top (optional) and let it dry overnight.

Once you see the sort of affects you can get you can start to imagine how stretching the plastic into longer shapes might change your painting or make bigger or smaller individual shapes by varying the amount of scrunching you do.

3. Leave to dry completely

This is the hard part. Walk away, and don't peek. To achieve an effect you need to let the paint dry completely under the wrap. Every time you touch or dislodge the plastic you are reducing the impact of this technique.

I recommend leaving it dry overnight to be safe.

4. Remove the plastic and spend time with your first layer

Lift the plastic wrap from the perfectly dry painting and give yourself plenty of time to just look at the result. See what shapes you can find in the abstract results. Eventually your eyes will find the edges of petals or leaves, or maybe something else entirely.

5. Consider using references

If you know what kind of subject you are trying to paint - see if you can find some images of the subject for reference.

6. Use negative painting to build on your first layer

(SWS May 2025 Challenge Paintings – Negative Painting)

Once you start you may find other shapes to bring out in your painting. One of the best ways to do this is negative painting.

This technique can be used for backgrounds, trees, flowers and many more subjects of your choice.



The paintings above are the first two I ever did with plastic wrap. From experience I can tell you the heavier wrap works better. But, try different weights and bubble wrap for different effects. If you are using it for a background, use a large piece. If you are using it for the subject(s) of your painting, you might want to use smaller pieces or even light weight wrap depending on the effect you want. Letting it dry completely before removing the wrap is key. You can put a weight on it to hold it down and increase the pattern or no weight and get a lighter pattern. Experiment.