Adobe Illustrator

Change the Colors in your brush

For some interesting paint effects in Adobe® Illustrator®, try changing the colors in your brushes.You can colorize any Scatter, Art, or Pattern brush in the Brushes palette. Illustrator gives you three ways to colorize a brush: by applying tints from the current stroke color, by applying tints and shades from the stroke color, and by shifting the entire set of colors in the brush around the standard color wheel. Follow along with this tip as we try all three colorization methods on the same brush.

To see the effects of colorizing most clearly, use a brush that has a nice variety of hues, preferably with some complementary colors such as the reds and greens in our Bird of Paradise.
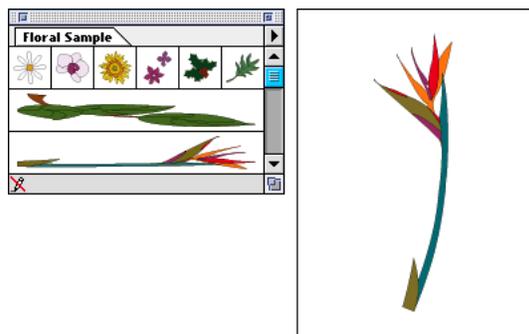

1. Select a brush, and draw an object.

Open a new file in Illustrator. Choose a library from Window > Brush Libraries, and select a brush in the library. We're using the Bird of Paradise brush from the Floral Sample library. Then select the paintbrush tool in the toolbox, and drag to draw an object. The new object uses the brush's default colors.

Illustrator comes with hundreds of Scatter, Art, and Pattern brushes organized in libraries. Some of these you can get through the Brush Libraries submenu; many more are in the Extras folder on the Illustrator CD. When you select a brush from a library, it's imported into the Brushes palette for the current file.
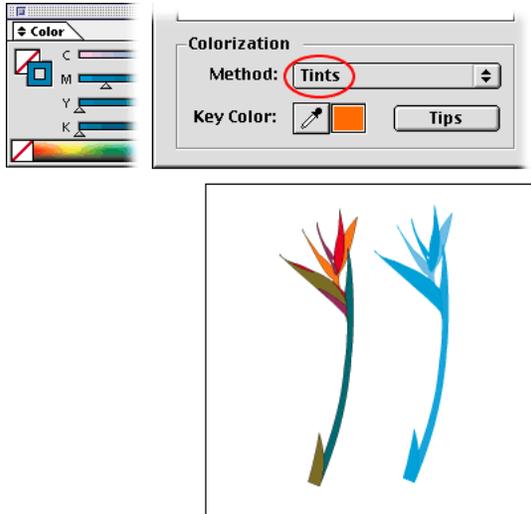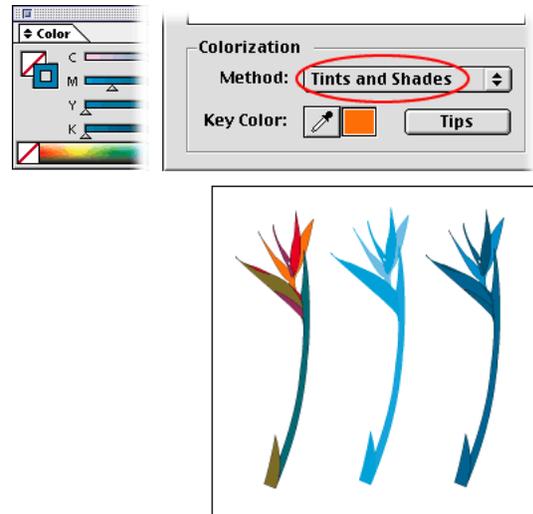
2. Draw a second object with tints only.

Select a stroke color in the Color palette. Any color except white or black will do - here, we're using a medium blue. Double-click your new brush in the Brushes palette to open the Brush Options dialog box. Choose Tints from the Method pop-up menu, and click OK. Click Leave Strokes in the alert that appears so that your existing object will not be affected by this setting. Then draw another object.

The Tints method applies a single hue (the stroke color) to a brush, with white added for lighter colors. Areas that are black in the original brush become the fully saturated stroke color in the tinted brush, areas that are white remain white, and all other colors become tints of the stroke color. In effect, we're drawing a grayscale object, but with the stroke color replacing black.

Try some other stroke colors to see more of this effect. You can change the stroke color while the object is still selected.

### 3. Draw a third object with tints and shades.

Double-click the brush in the Brushes palette. Choose Tints and Shades from the Method pop-up menu, click OK, and click Leave Strokes in the alert. Then draw another object.

Tints and Shades applies a single hue (the stroke color) to a brush, with black and white added. Areas in the original brush that are 50% black become the fully saturated stroke color, black and white remain as they are, and everything else becomes a blend from black to white through the stroke color. As with Tints, we're using this method to create a grayscale object, except that the stroke color replaces the midrange colors (instead of replacing black). Tints and Shades can give you a much wider range of contrasts than Tints alone.

Again, try some other stroke colors to see what's happening.

4. Draw a fourth object using a hue shift.

Double-click the brush in the Brushes palette. Choose Hue Shift from the Method pop-up menu, click OK, and click Leave Strokes. Then draw another object.

With the Hue Shift colorizing, everything in the brush that is the key color changes to the stroke color. By default, the key color is the color used most in the brush. In the Bird of Paradise, the key is the orange in two of the petals - notice how this orange changes to the stroke color (blue) in our new object. All other colors in the brush shift correspondingly around the color wheel so that the relationships between the original colors are preserved.
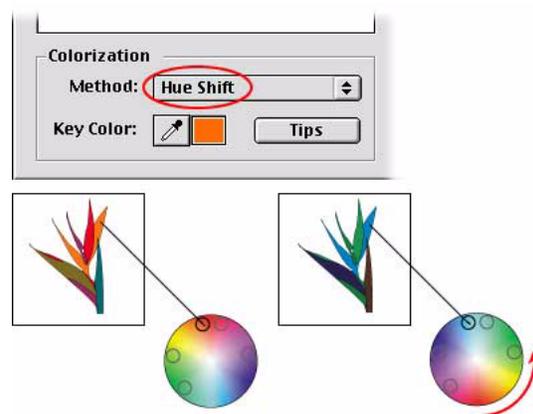
5. Draw a fifth object using a hue shift, but change the key color.

Double-click the brush, and choose Hue Shift again. Click the Hue Shift eyedropper, and in the brush sample click the color you want to use as the new key. Here, we're using the green in the plant's stem as the key. Click OK, and click Leave Strokes. Then draw another object.

Notice that this time the stem of the Bird of Paradise changes to the stroke color (blue), and the other colors in the brush shift correspondingly around the color wheel.

The effects of colorizing a brush can vary enormously, from a subtle range of a single hue to a striking and even surreal new combination of hues. Experiment with it!