

A close-up photograph of several green stems of a Tufted Vetch plant. The stems are covered in small, vibrant purple flowers arranged in dense, drooping racemes. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a natural field setting. The overall lighting is natural and soft, highlighting the delicate structure of the flowers and the fine hairs on the stems.

How to draw Tufted Vetch

A step-by-step instruction by Ivan Dmitriev

Tufted vetch (*Vicia cracca*) is challenging to draw for several reasons. First of all, its **inflorescences** (clusters of flowers) and leaves consist of many smaller elements, which means that an artist must compose the drawing in several detailed steps. Second of all, you should pay extra attention to the inconsistencies in its structure in order to capture its movement and natural imperfect beauty.

Remember that botanical illustration is a very flexible mode of drawing. Rather than trying to depict all the tiny details and colour gradients of a real plant, aim for general similarity, especially if you are a beginner artist.



Step 1

First of all, browse the pictures of a tufted vetch on the Internet. Look for both photos of the plant and the drawings by other artists. I find it really useful to have a look at already existing illustrations of the plant — they make me think of how to draw my own piece. Pick a couple of images which you will use later and thoroughly examine them. Choose a couple of the features you would like to have in your own drawing.

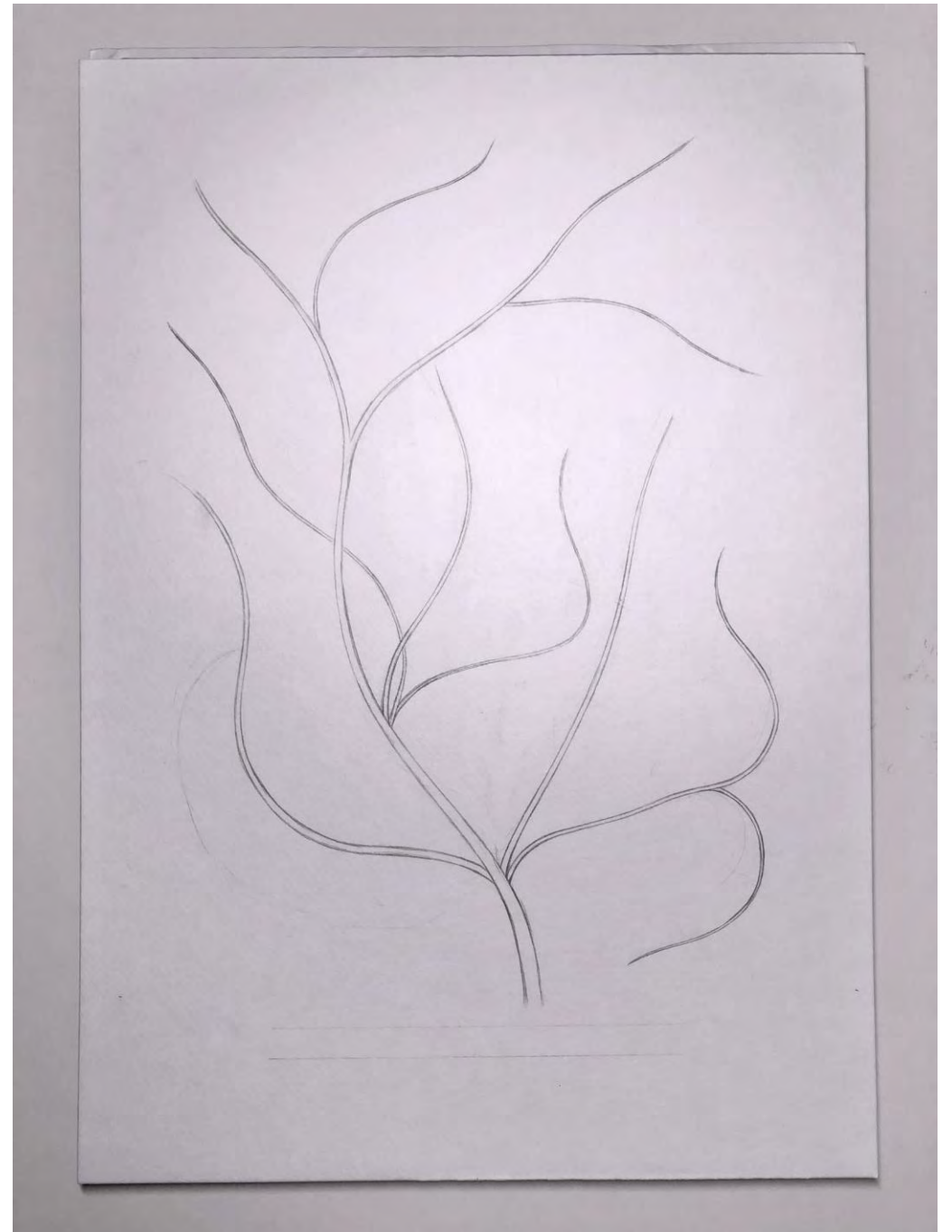
Here are the images I have chosen.



Step 2

After getting a precise idea of how a tufted vetch looks, you can start drawing. Leave some space at the bottom of your piece for the plant's name. Start outlining the stem and leaf stalks (called **petioles**) with a pencil. I usually use either HB or B1. Sketch lightly so that you can easily erase a line if you make a mistake.

This step is one of the most important ones because the whole drawing depends on what the "skeleton" of your plant looks like. Try to capture the full movement of your plant. Remember that there are no straight lines in nature!



Step 3

Start adding leaves and tendrils. Leave some space between the smaller leaves to make your illustration look light and natural. Do not make it too dense and complicated. My vetch will have four inflorescences and seven leaves.

Refer to those images that you have picked earlier otherwise your imagination will lead you astray.

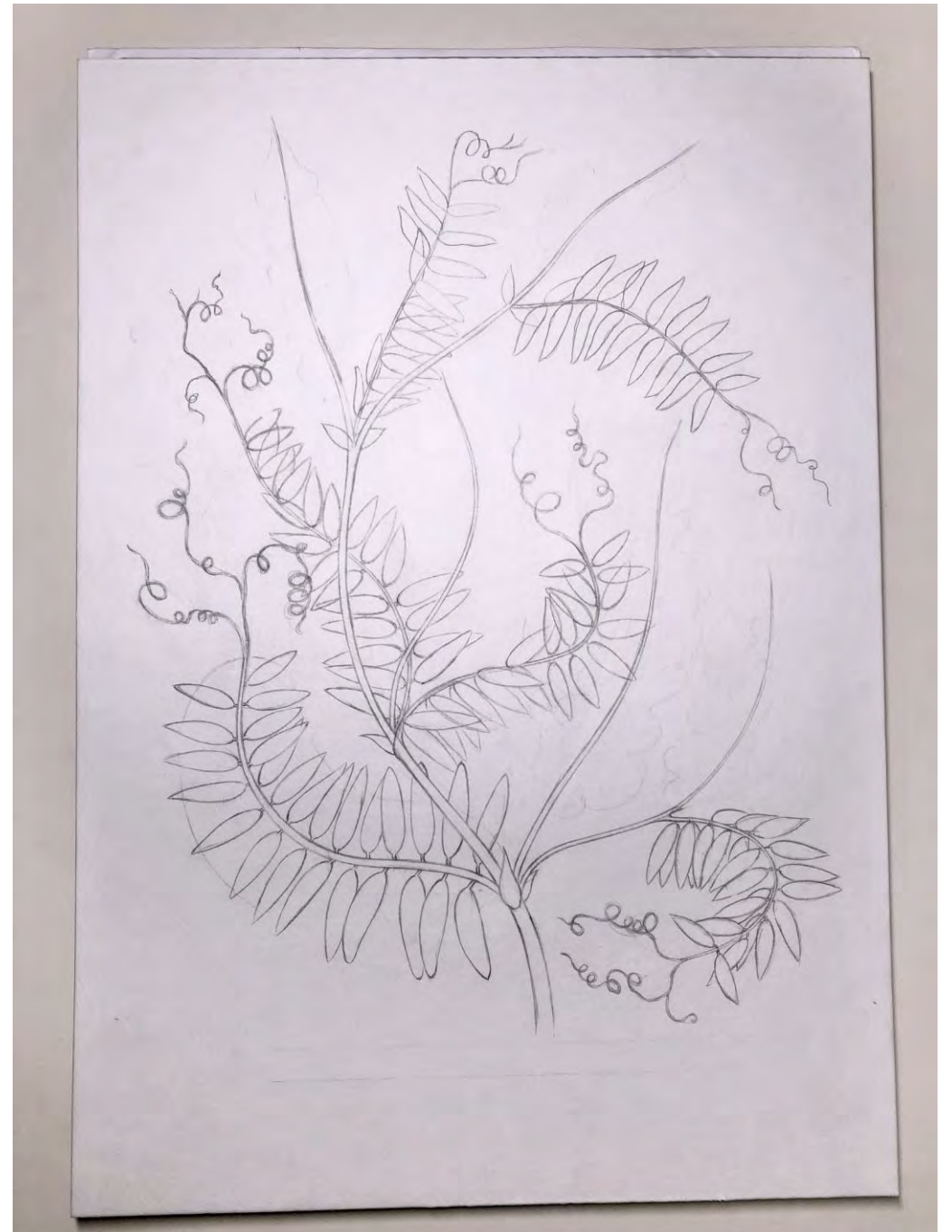
Notice: from each **node** (a point of attachment of a leaf or a twig on the stem) an inflorescence and at least one leaf grows.



Step 4

When drawing the leaves, try to make sure they are not too symmetrical, or they will look artificial. Make sure that your leaves are not all facing forwards as if they were pressed in a book. To give an immersion of depth, make sure that your drawing **perspective** (a technique used in art and design to represent three-dimensional images on a two-dimensional picture plane) is consistent and that some leaves are in front of and behind the primary stem.

Again, try not over-populate your drawing with leaves because you want enough space for the flowers.



Step 5

Now you can draw the outline of the flowers. I will draw almost all the buds closed to not over-complicate the illustration. However, if you have only one or two inflorescences in the piece, you can draw opened buds too and even add small pods which form after the flowers die (like the example on the picture from Step 1).

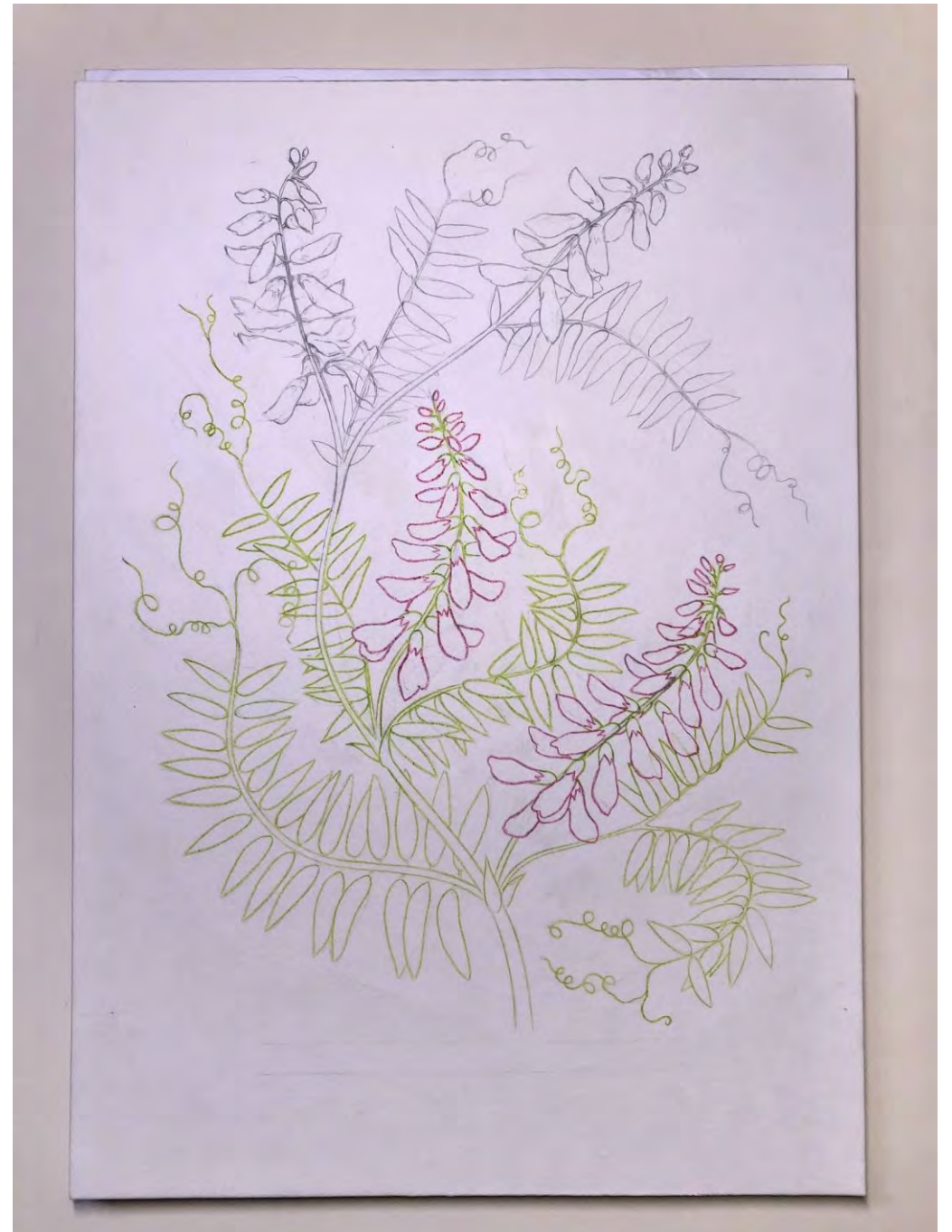
TIP: If the shape of a flower is quite unusual, I find it helpful to associate it with something familiar. In this case, the shape of the buds reminds me of aubergine (eggplant) with a slightly pointy bottom or end.



Step 6

Make any changes and adjustments to your pencil drawing before adding colour.

Erase the darker layer of your pencil drawn vetch with a soft eraser leaving only slightly visible line contours for tracing. Using a light green and pink pencils, outline your vetch again. I have chosen the lightest colours I have to allow me to add darker greens and purples for shading contrast later.



Step 7

After outlining the whole plant, fill in the leaves and stems with the same light green colour you have used for the previous step. Do not press too hard, as it is only the first layer, which will be covered by other shades of green later.

TIP: Place a piece of paper under your hand when working with coloured pencils so you do not smudge the pencil while you are drawing.



Step 8

You can now fill in the colour for the flowers the same way you did for the plant leaves, petioles and a stem. Their natural colour differs from dark pink to almost blue depending on the maturity of the plant. Young plants are usually lighter and more vibrant in colour. For this step you need to think about how you want your finished illustration to look. Refer to the pictures you chose in Step 1 if you are unsure.

TIP: You can always slightly change the **tone** (relative lightness or darkness of a colour) of the flowers, as well as other parts of the plant, by adding another thin layer of colour later.



Step 9

To make the vetch look more realistic start darkening the leaves and petioles with other shades of green. Use the darker tone for the parts which are closer to the stem and lighter tones for the distant ends of the vetch's leaves. Outline the edges and the **midribs** (central veins in the middle of each smaller leaf) of the leaves with the darkest tone of green you have.

TIP: To make the **colour gradient** (or the transition between light and dark colours) smoother, and blend all the shades well, I use a soft white pencil. If you don't have one, you can use a light layer of the light green you started your drawing with to blend.



Step 10

Although in reality the colour of tufted vetch's leaves is not as vibrant, I chose it because it will look beautiful from a distance and attract the viewer's attention.

Make sure all the leaves are similar in colour, if not refine them before moving to the next step.



Step 11

Using the same colouring technique darken the flowers. The smaller buds on top of each inflorescence should remain light and pink, while the lower ones should be darker. Same applies to the inflorescences' petioles.

Unlike the gradient of the leaves, the buds are lighter in colour where they attach to petioles and darker around the edges of the petals. Blend the colours with a light pink or a white pencil.

To make the flowers look more realistic add some dark purple or blue veins.



Step 12

Turn again to the images from Step 1 and check to make sure that your colours are similar. Make your final corrections where needed.

Write down the name of the plant underneath it using a sharp black pencil, an ink pen, or a fineliner.

Sign your drawing.

Well done! You've completed your first drawing.



References (in order of appearance):

1. <https://pixabay.com/photos/vicia-cracca-tufted-vetch-cow-vetch-846610/>
2. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dyluniadviciapmb.jpg>
3. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/biodivlibrary/48716924828/>
4. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/95127615@N03/34472144552/>