

How to Draw an Oil Pastel Sunset

12 easy steps for beginners



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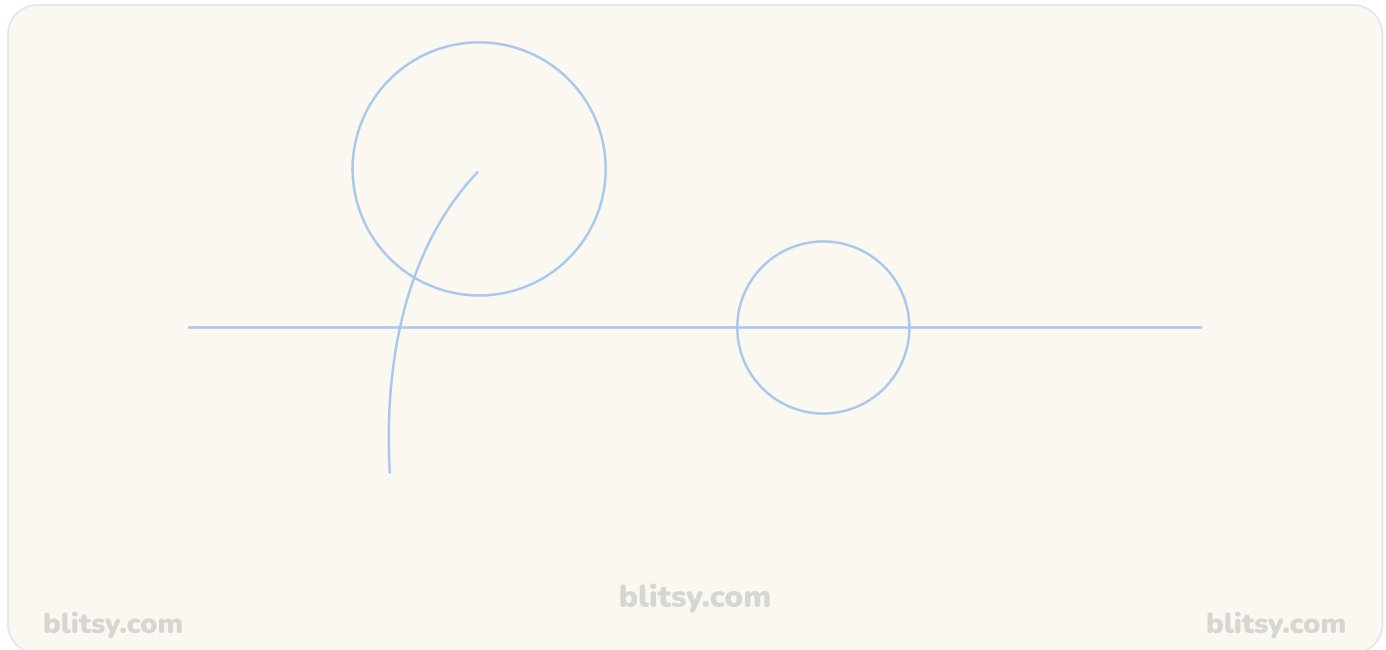
What you'll need

- Oil pastels
- Paper with tooth
- A pencil and eraser
- A black permanent marker
- Tissues or a blending stump
- A toothpick

How to use this guide

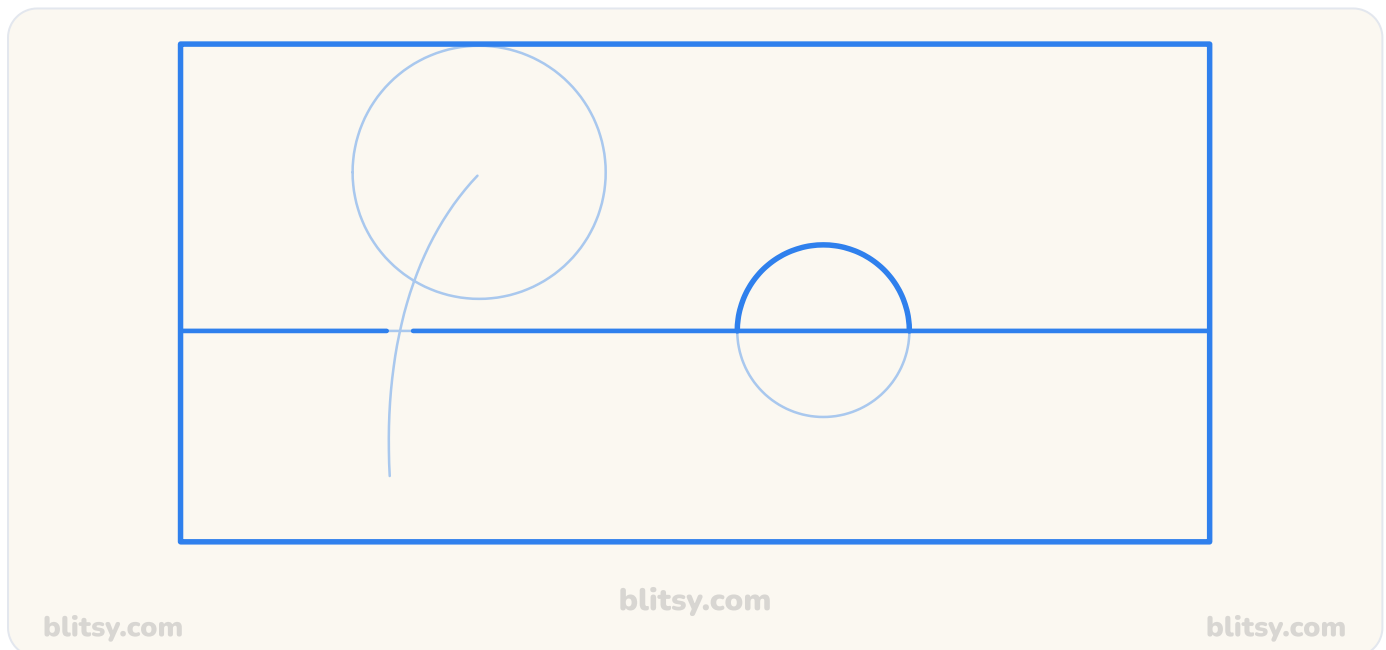
New lines for each step are shown in **blue**; lines you already drew are gray. Draw lightly first, then ink and erase near the end.

[Read the full tutorial online →](#)

STEP 1 Sketch faint guide lines and circles

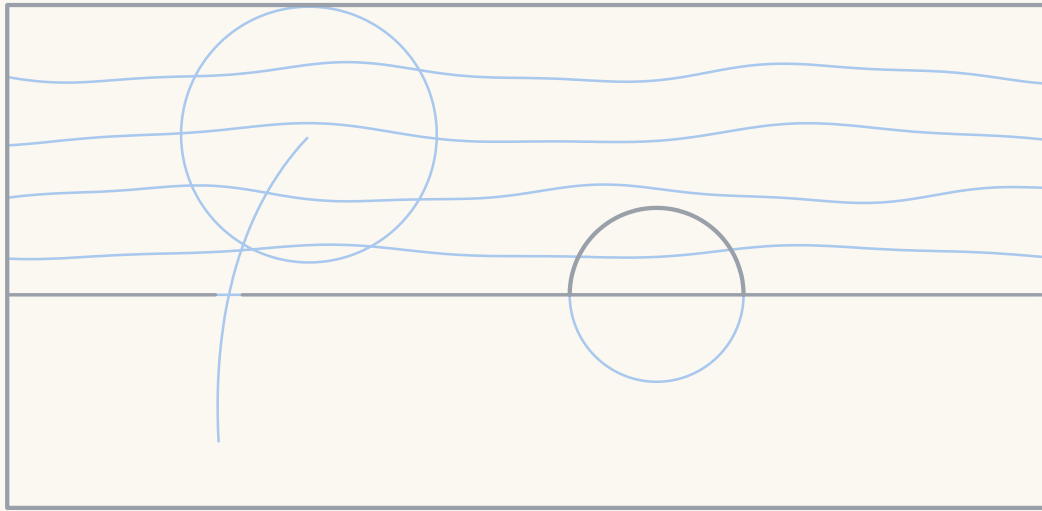
Turn your paper sideways and draw a light horizon a little below the middle. Put a circle on it toward the right for the sun, half above and half below. On the left, sketch a curved trunk line and a big circle for the leaves. I keep the horizon low on purpose, because a tall sky gives the colors room to blend.

 **Tip:** Hold the pencil near its end and barely touch the paper. Pastel won't hide a deep groove.

STEP 2 Draw the border and the setting sun

Draw a rectangle around the scene with a margin on every side. Go over the horizon with a firmer line, leaving a small gap where the trunk guide crosses it. Then trace only the top half of the sun. The hidden bottom half is what makes it read as a sunset.

 **Tip:** Masking tape along the border gives a crisp edge. Peel it off slowly at the very end.

STEP 3 Mark the bands of sky color

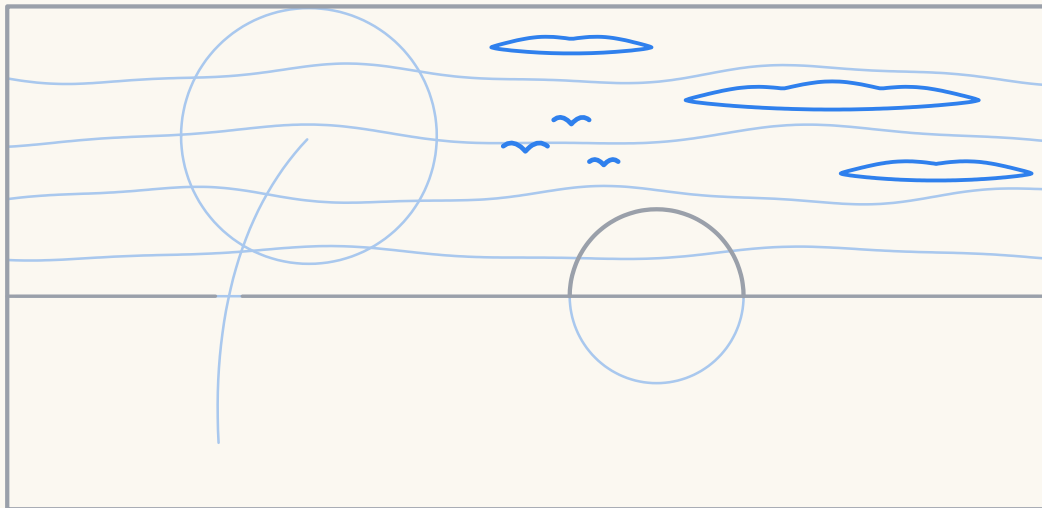
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Split the sky into five bands with four soft, wavy lines. Yellow goes at the bottom, then orange, pink and purple, with deep violet on top. Let the bands vary in height and let the lines wobble, since wavy edges blend more easily than straight ones.

 **Tip:** Number each band lightly from 1 to 5 so you never reach for the wrong pastel later.

STEP 4 Add cloud wisps and a few birds

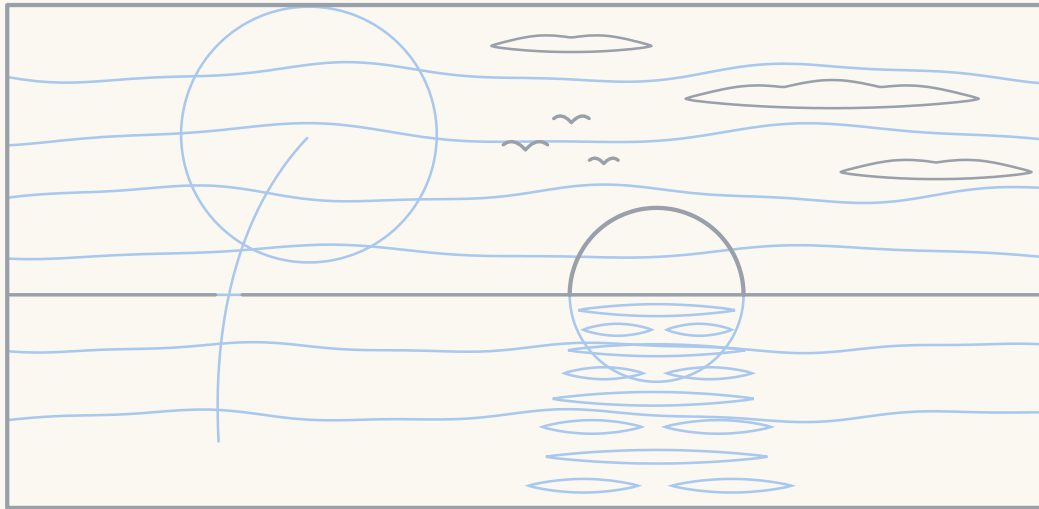
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Draw three long, thin clouds on the right side of the sky, each flat underneath with a few gentle bumps on top. Near the center, add three tiny birds as wide, shallow M shapes in different sizes. Small birds spaced apart make the sky feel huge.

 **Tip:** Keep the clouds flat and long. Puffy round clouds belong to a sunny afternoon.

STEP 5 Mark the sea bands and the sun path

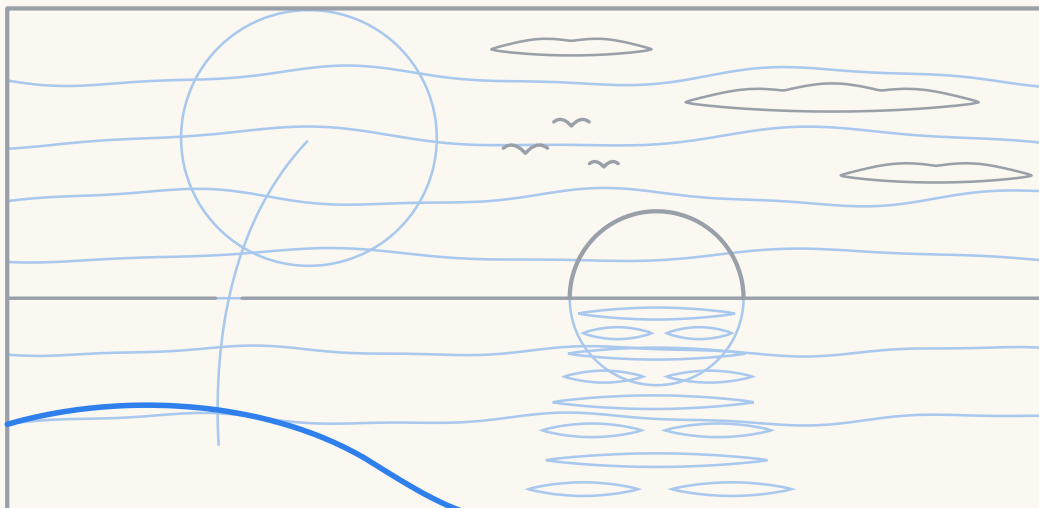
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Draw two calm wavy lines below the horizon to split the sea into three bands. Then sketch the sun's reflection as a column of flat, pointed streaks under the sun, longer as they come closer, with some rows broken in two. Water reflects light in pieces, so a solid stripe looks like a road.

 **Tip:** Line up the middle of every streak under the sun's center, or the reflection drifts sideways.

STEP 6 Draw the island in the corner

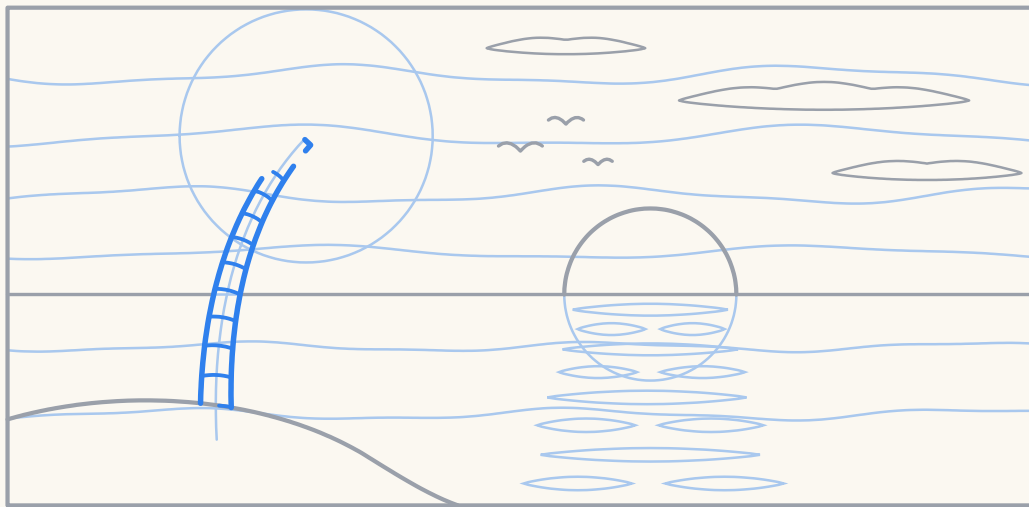
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In the bottom left, draw a low, rounded hill that starts on the left border and slopes down to the bottom edge about a third of the way across. Keep it low, because a tall island hides the water and crowds the palm. Its top crosses the trunk guide, since the tree grows out of it.

 **Tip:** Draw the hill in one slow sweep from left to right instead of short, scratchy strokes.

STEP 7 Draw the leaning palm trunk

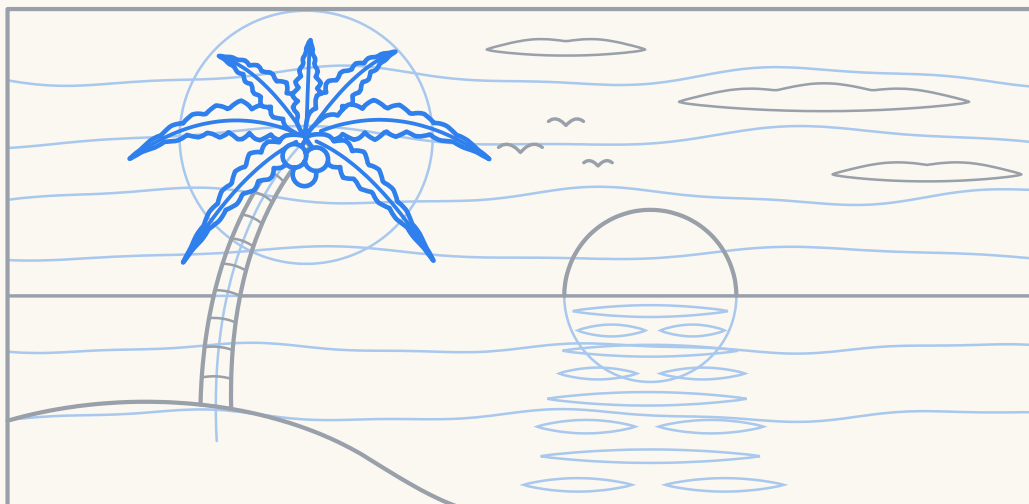
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Follow the curved guide with two lines, wider at the bottom and narrower at the top, ending at the center of the leaf circle. Add short curved rings across the trunk, a little closer together near the top. A gentle lean looks natural, as beach palms usually bend toward the water.

 **Tip:** Let the rings curve slightly downward. Straight rings flatten the trunk into a ladder.

STEP 8 Add the fronds and coconuts

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From the top of the trunk, draw seven long fronds that fan out like a firework, each with a center line and a jagged edge for the leaflets. Let the side fronds droop at the tips. Tuck three small coconuts under the crown. I start with the upright frond and work outward, so the shape stays balanced.

 **Tip:** Make the side fronds longer than the top one. Equal lengths turn the tree into a star.

STEP 9 Ink the outlines and erase the guides

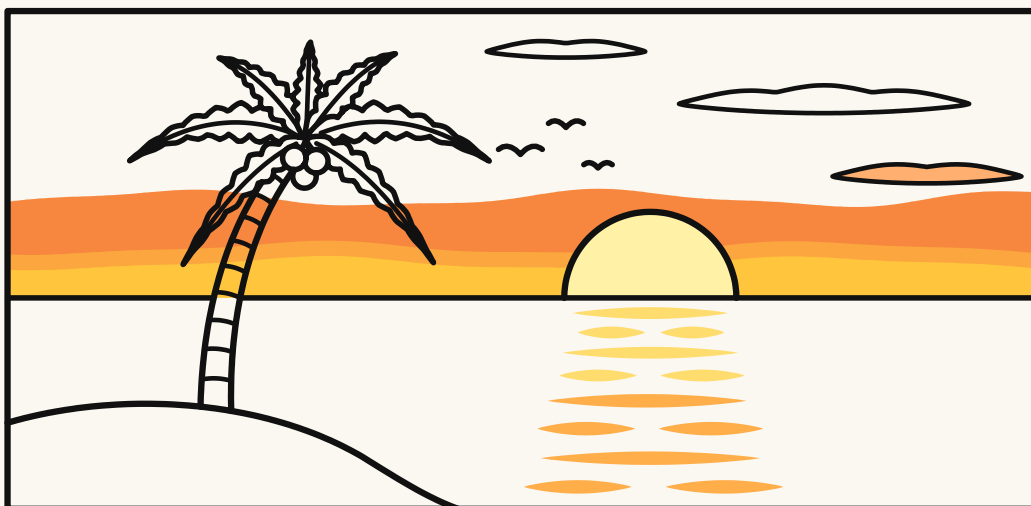
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Trace every keeper line with a black permanent marker, the palm and island included. Water-based markers can smear under pastel, so permanent is safer. Once it's dry, erase the guides with a light touch, leaving a faint ghost of the band lines to show where each color goes.

Tip: Thin lines are enough here. Heavy black outlines can dull a bright sky.

STEP 10 Color the light colors first

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Oil pastels work from light to dark, because dark covers light far better than the reverse. Color the sun pale yellow, the bottom band golden yellow and the next one orange, all with gentle pressure. Overlap yellow and orange where they meet and rub the seam with a fingertip or tissue until a soft mixed strip appears. Fill the water streaks with yellow and orange too.

Tip: Wipe the yellow stick on a tissue after it touches orange. Dirty yellow turns muddy fast.

STEP 11 Add the cooler sky and sea colors



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Keep climbing with pink, then purple, then deep violet, overlapping each color slightly into the band below and blending the seam. Color the clouds light pink and orange. In the sea, use purple near the horizon and blue below. For the front band, lay light purple first and press dark blue firmly on top; that buried purple returns in the last step. Color around the sun streaks.

Tip: Blend with a stump or cotton swab in short side-to-side strokes. Circles drag colors into each other.

STEP 12 Fill the silhouette and scratch the waves



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Press a black pastel firmly over the island and the whole palm. I color the sky across the palm first, since firm black covers lighter layers well; if yours looks patchy, leave the tree blank next time. Finish with sgraffito: scratch a few short wavy lines into the dark front water with a toothpick, and the purple underneath shows through like ripples.

Tip: Scratch last and gently. Dig too hard and you'll reach white paper instead of purple.