

ADD A SPARKLE TRAIL TO A PHOTO

In this Adobe Photoshop tutorial, we're going to learn how to add a sparkle trail to a photo, using a custom Photoshop brush we'll be creating. I got the idea for this tutorial after seeing the poster for an upcoming Dustin Hoffman/Natalie Portman movie, "Mr. Magorium's Wonder Emporium", but of course sparkle trails have been Peter Pan and Tinkerbell, and I'm sure even long before that.

Fortunately, Photoshop makes them extremely easy to create thanks to the powerful brush controls that were introduced in Photoshop 7, which are still just as powerful and useful today!

Here's the image I'll be using in this tutorial:



The original image.

Here's how it will look after adding a sparkle trail to her wand:

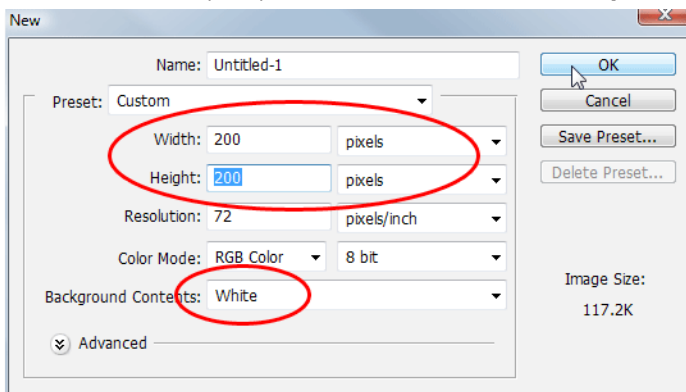


The final result.

Let's get started!

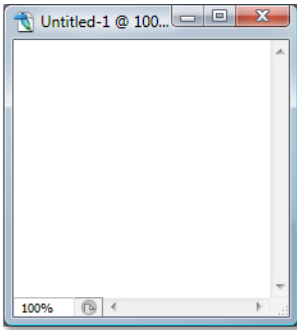
Step 1: Open A New Photoshop Document

As I mentioned, we'll be creating our sparkle trail using a custom made Photoshop "sparkle" brush, and the first thing we need to do is create our brush. To begin, go up to the **File** menu at the top of the screen and choose **New**, which brings up Photoshop's New Document dialog box. You can also access the New Document dialog box using the keyboard shortcut **Ctrl+N** (Win) / **Command+N**. Enter **200 pixels** for the **Width** and **200 pixels** for the **Height**, and make sure the **Background Contents** option near the bottom is set to **White** so our new document has a white background, then click OK:



Create a new Photoshop document that's 200 pixels wide by 200 pixels high, with white as the background color.

Photoshop opens a new 200x200 document with a solid white background:



The new Photoshop document.

Step 2: Make A Copy Of The Channel



With our new document created, select the **Brush Tool** from the Tools palette, or simply press the letter **B** on your keyboard to access it with the shortcut:

Select Photoshop's Brush Tool.

Step 3: Set Your Foreground Color To Black

We need black as our Foreground color, which is the color Photoshop uses to paint with when we have the Brush Tool selected, so if black is not currently your Foreground color, press the letter **D** on your keyboard to quickly reset

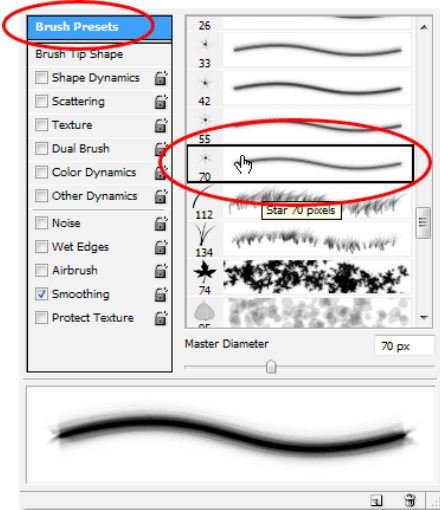


your Foreground and Background colors, which sets black as your Foreground color (white becomes your Background color). We can see our current Foreground and Background colors in the **color swatches** near the bottom of the Tools palette (the swatch in the upper left is the Foreground color and the one in the bottom right is the Background color):

The Foreground and Background color swatches in the Tools palette.

Step 4: Select the “Star 70 Pixels” Brush

The “sparkle” brush we’re creating is really just a combination of several other brushes that ship with Photoshop, and you can experiment on your own if you like with different brush combinations to create your own unique “sparkle” brush, since there’s several brushes that would work well for this effect.

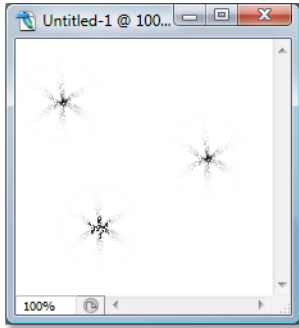


I’m going to start with the **Star 70 pixels** brush, so switch over to your **Brushes** palette, click on words **Brush Presets** in the top left corner to see a list of preset brushes on the right, then scroll down the list until you get to the “Star 70 pixels” brush.

Click on it to select it:

Click on the words “Brush Presets” in the top left corner of Photoshop’s Brushes palette, then scroll down the list of preset brushes on the right and select the “Star 70 pixels” brush.

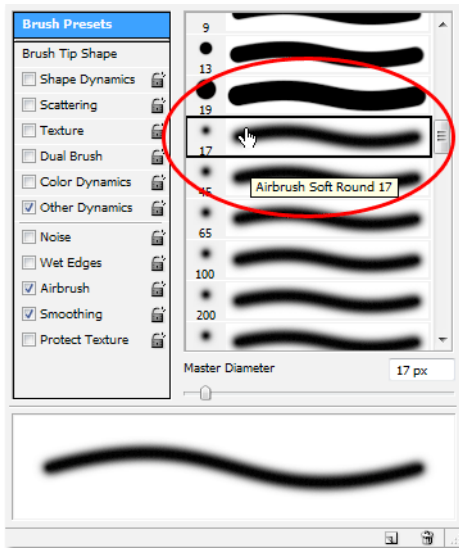
Step 5: Click In A Few Random Spots Inside The Document With The Brush



With the “Star 70 pixels” brush selected, click in a few random spots inside the document to add our first few “sparkles”. Three or four clicks should do the trick:

Click in three or four random spots inside the document with the brush to create the first few “sparkles”.

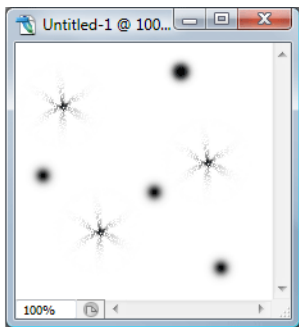
Step 6: Select the “Airbrush Soft Round 17” Brush



After you’ve added the first few sparkles, switch back to the Brushes palette and scroll up the list of preset brushes until you come to the **Airbrush Soft Round 17** brush. Click on it to select it:

Scroll up to the “Airbrush Soft Round 17” brush in the Brushes palette and click on it to select it.

Step 7: Click In A Few Random Spots Inside The Document With The New Brush

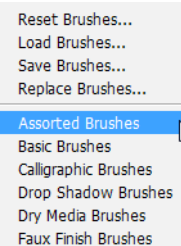


Just as we did with the previous brush a moment ago, click in three or four random spots inside the document with the new brush. This adds more “sparkles”, as well as a little variety to them:

With the new brush selected, click once again in three or four random spots inside the document.

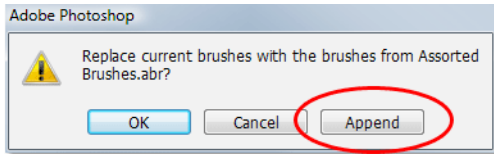
Step 8: Select The “Assorted Brushes”

Switch back to the Brushes palette once again, and this time, click on the small right-pointing arrow at the top of the palette to access the drop-down menu and select **Assorted Brushes** from the list of additional brushes at the bottom:



Select “Assorted Brushes” from the list of additional brushes in the Brushes palette drop-down menu.

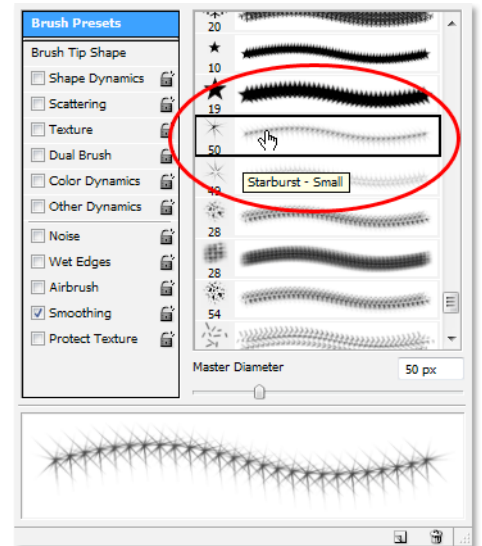
Photoshop will pop up a message asking if you want to replace the existing brushes with the new brushes. Click the **Append** option to have Photoshop simply add the new brushes in with the existing brushes rather than replacing them:



Select the "Append" option to add the new brushes to the bottom of the list of available brushes.

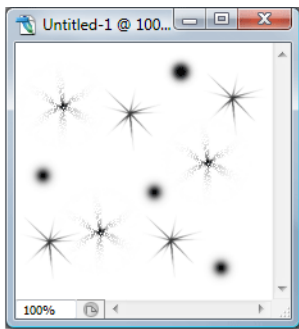
Step 9: Select the "Starburst - Small" Brush

With the Assorted Brushes added in the Brushes palette, scroll down the list until you come to the **Starburst - Small** brush and click on it to select it:



Scroll down the list of preset brushes until you come to the "Starburst - Small" brush. Click on it to select it.

Step 10: Click In Three Or Four Random Spots Inside The Document

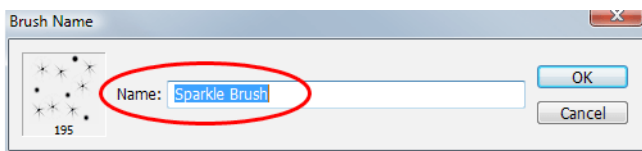


With the "Starburst - Small" brush selected, click in another three or four random spots inside the document to add the rest of our sparkles:

Add the remaining sparkles by clicking in a few random spots with the "Starburst - Small" brush.

Step 11: Define A New Brush Preset

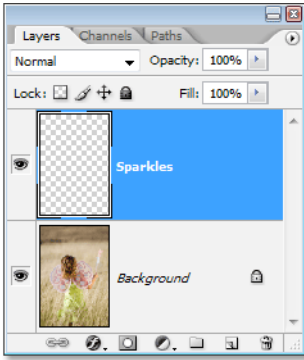
We've added all of our sparkles. All we need to do now is save them as a brush. To do that, go up to the **Edit** menu at the top of the screen and choose **Define Brush Preset**. Photoshop will pop up a dialog box asking you to name the brush. I'm going to name mine "Sparkle Brush":



Type in a name for your new brush. I've named mine "Sparkle Brush".

Click OK after you've entered in a name and your new brush is created! You can close out of the brush document at this point, since we no longer need to have it open. No need to save it when Photoshop asks, since the brush is already created.

Step 12: Open A Photo And Add A New Blank Layer



With our “sparkle brush” now created, we can add our sparkle trail to a photo, so go ahead and open the photo you want to use if it isn’t open already. Then click on the **New Layer** icon at the bottom of the Layers palette to add a new blank layer above the Background layer, which is the layer that contains our image. Photoshop will automatically name the new layer “Layer 1”. Double-click directly on the name and rename it to “Sparkles”:

Add a new blank layer to the photo document and rename the layer “Sparkles”.

Step 13: Select The Brush Tool Once Again



We need to select the “Sparkle Brush” we just created, but in order to select it, we first need to have the Brush Tool selected, so go ahead and either select it from the Tools palette or press **B** on your keyboard:

Select the Brush Tool once again.

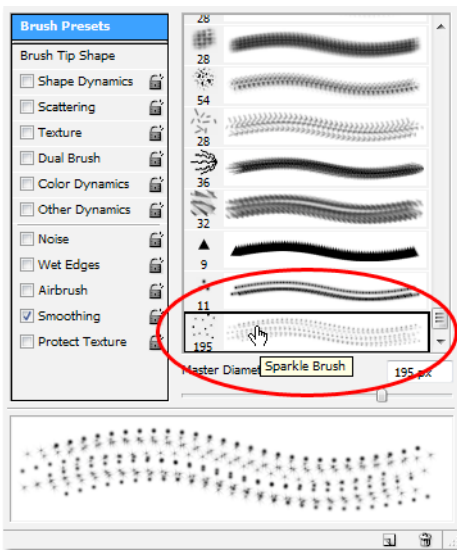
Step 14: Set Your Foreground Color To White



Our sparkle trail wouldn’t look very impressive if we created it in black, so we need to set our Foreground color to white. To do that, simply press **X** on our keyboard to swap your current Foreground and Background colors, which will set white as your Foreground color (black becomes your Background color). Again, we can see this in the color swatches near the bottom of the Tools palette:

Set your Foreground color to white.

Step 15: Select the Sparkle Brush

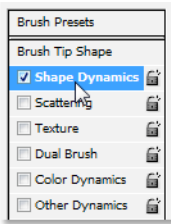


Switch back over to your Brushes palette, click once again on the words “Brush Presets” in the top left corner of the palette if the option isn’t already selected, then scroll all the way down to the bottom of the list of preset brushes on the right. Your “Sparkle Brush” (or whatever you named it) will appear at the bottom:

Scroll down to the bottom of the list of preset brushes in the Brushes palette and select the sparkle brush you created a moment ago.

Step 16: Select The “Shape Dynamics” Option

Click directly on the words **Shape Dynamics** on the left of the Brushes palette to select the “Shape Dynamics” options,

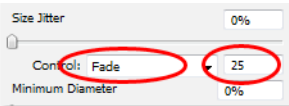


which will appear on the right of the palette. Make sure you click directly on the words and don't just click inside the checkbox on the left:

Click directly on the words "Shape Dynamics" on the left of the Brushes palette.

Step 17: Set The "Size Control" To "Fade"

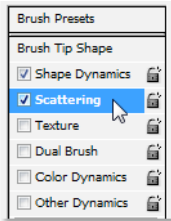
With "Shape Dynamics" selected, if you look in the top right of the Brushes palette, you'll see a "Size Jitter" option, and directly below that, you'll see a **Control** option. This "Control" option is technically the "Size Control" option and it allows us to specify what, if anything, will affect the size of the brush as we paint with it. Click on the down-pointing arrow and choose **Fade** from the list, then enter **25** in the box beside it:



Set the "Control" option to "Fade" and enter "25" in the box beside it.

By setting the Size Control option to "Fade", Photoshop will gradually fade the diameter of our brush down to zero when we paint a brush stroke, and it will do so using the number of "steps" we've specified, which in this case is 25. You'll most likely need to experiment with the number of steps to get your sparkle trail to fade out properly with your image, but 25 is a good place to start.

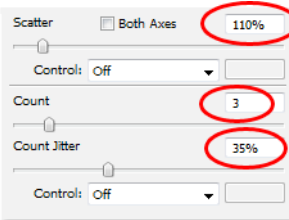
Step 18: Select The "Scattering" Option



Click directly on the words **Scattering** on the left of the Brushes palette, below the words "Shape Dynamics", to bring up the "Scattering" options. Again, make sure you click directly on the words and don't just click inside the checkbox on the left. We want the "Scattering" options to appear on the right of the Brushes palette and for that, we need to click directly on the words:

Click directly on the words "Scattering" on the left of the Brushes palette.

Step 19: Set The Scattering Options



When the Scattering options appear on the right of the Brushes palette, enter **110%** for the **Scatter Amount**, then enter **3** for the **Count** option and **35%** for the **Count Jitter** (left):

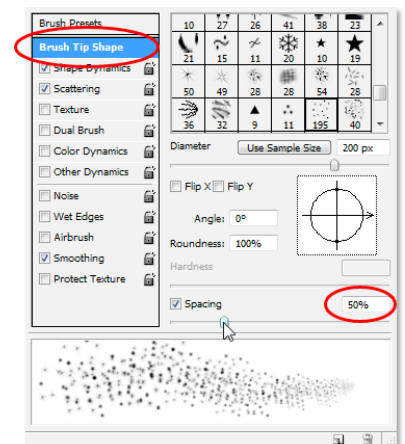
Change the "Scattering" options circled in red.

Once again, you'll most likely find you need to experiment with these values a little, since your image will be different.

Step 20: Set The Brush "Spacing" To 50%

Click directly on the words **Brush Tip Shape** in the top left of the Brushes palette, below the words "Brush Presets". Then, down near the bottom of the Brushes palette, set the **Spacing** option to about 50%:

Increase the "Spacing" amount to 50%.



In this case, the “Spacing” option determines the maximum length of our brush stroke (our “sparkle trail”), and as with the “Shape Dynamics” and “Scattering” options, some experimenting may be necessary to get your sparkle trail to the proper length for your image.

Step 21: Drag Out Your Sparkle Trail

Our “Sparkle Brush” has been created and the options have been set in the Brushes palette, so with white as our Foreground color, we can go ahead and add our sparkle trail! To do that, click either or just beside the object that’s creating the sparkle trail (the girl’s magic wand in my image) and then drag out a brush stroke in the direction you want the sparkle trail to be coming from. You’ll probably need to resize your brush first, and the easiest way to do that is by using the **left and right bracket keys** on your keyboard. The left bracket key makes the brush smaller and the right bracket key makes it larger.

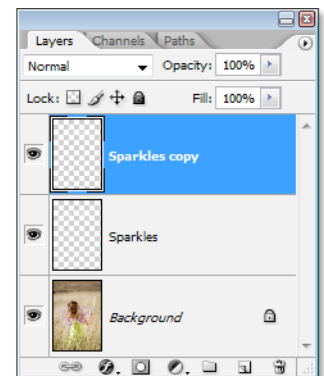


I’m going to click just to the left of the girl’s magic wand and then drag my brush over her head and down the right side, as if the sparkle trail was created by her waving the wand. Notice how Photoshop fades the size of the brush as the brush stroke gets further and further from the starting point, until the brush eventually fades to nothing, thanks to the options we set in the Brushes palette:

Click on or near the object creating the sparkle trail, then drag in one continuous motion in the direction the sparkle trail is coming from.

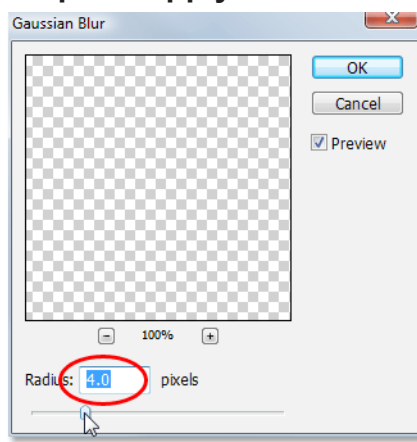
Step 22: Duplicate The Sparkles Layer

With the “Sparkles” layer selected in the Layers palette, use the keyboard shortcut **Ctrl+J** (Win) / **Command+J** (Mac) to duplicate the layer. A copy of the layer will appear above the original in the Layers palette:



Photoshop’s Layers palette showing the copy of the “Sparkles” layer above the original.

Step 23: Apply The “Gaussian Blur” Filter



We’re going to add a bit of a glow to our sparkles, and we’ll do that by adding a slight blurring effect to the duplicate layer we just created. Go up to the Filter menu at the top of the screen, choose **Blur**, and then choose **Gaussian Blur**. When the Gaussian Blur dialog box appears, enter a **Radius** value of about **4 pixels**:

Apply the Gaussian Blur filter to the copy of the Sparkles layer.

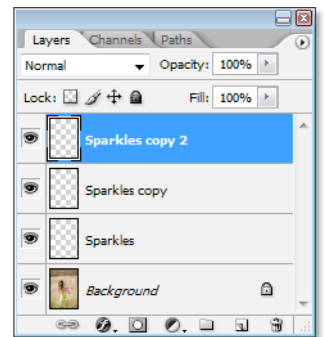
You may want to go a bit higher if you're using a high resolution image. The idea is simply to add enough of a blur that the sparkles appear to have a faint glow around them:



The sparkles now appear to have a faint glow after applying the Gaussian Blur filter.

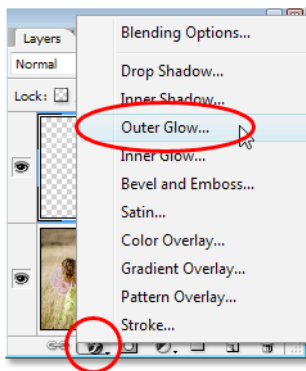
Step 24: Duplicate The “Sparkles Copy” Layer

To increase the brightness of our sparkles, with the “Sparkles copy” layer selected, once again use the keyboard shortcut **Ctrl+J** (Win) / **Command+J** (Mac) to create a duplicate of it, which appears at the top of the Layers palette:



Duplicate the “Sparkles copy” layer to increase the brightness of the sparkle trail.

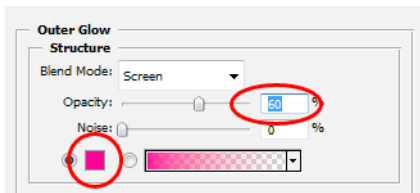
Step 25: Add An “Outer Glow” Layer Style



To complete the effect, let's add a bit of color to the glow around the sparkles. To do that, with the top layer selected in the Layers palette, click on the **Layer Styles** icon at the bottom of the Layers palette (the icon that looks like the letter “f”) and select **Outer Glow** from the list:

Click on the “Layer Styles” icon at the bottom of the Layers palette and select “Outer Glow”.

This brings up the Layer Style dialog box with the Outer Glow options in the middle column. Choose a color for your glow by clicking on the color swatch directly below the word “Noise” and choosing a color from Photoshop's **Color Picker**. I'm going to choose a pinkish-red color for mine. Then decrease the intensity of the color by lowering the **Opacity** of the glow. I'm going to lower mine to about **60%**:



Choose a color for the Outer Glow by clicking on the color swatch and choosing a new color from the Color Picker, then lower the Opacity of the glow to reduce the intensity of the color if needed.

Click OK to exit out of the Layer Style dialog box, and you're done!

Here, after adding some color to the glow around the sparkles, is my final result:



The final result.

And there we have it!

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