



A Clinic on Making Deciduous Trees

by Doug Wright

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For this clinic we used readily available materials as follows:

Woodland Scenics Tree armatures (from the “Realistic Tree Kits”) – available at Caboose Hobbies, Hobby Town , Hobby Lobby, etc. While I generally use sagebrush for the tree armatures, due to their realistic appearance, the armatures from Woodland Scenics, with a little detailing, make very nice looking trees. Believe it or not, while sagebrush is expensive if purchased at a hobby shop, it actually grows in abundance in many areas of the west, and is free for the adventurous. I harvest my sagebrush in Wyoming , right along the highway. I’ve been known to bring back a few large, black trash bags full of dead sagebrush to make trees of all

sizes. Sagebrush can be found in Colorado , but I prefer the more northern growth for its appearance. Whether you use sagebrush or the plastic version from Woodland Scenics, the technique we’ll use here is the same.



Woodland Scenics green Poly Fiber – available at the same stores listed above. This is similar material you use to stuff pillows, only died green. The black poly fiber now available from Micro-Mark also works well, actually has a better appearance and is cheaper.

Deciduous Foliage - A lot of folks use ground up foam like Woodland Scenics fine turf), which is available in many colors, but I believe the leaf flakes made by the German companies, Noch and Heki, look much more leaf-like. These come in a wide variety of realistic colors and are available from Scenic Express on the web. (Scenic Express will introduce a new leaf material called SuperLeaf around December 2012 that is very nice – I saw a pre-production sample at the Timonium train show in Maryland). Bachman also makes a few good colors (like green, early fall and autumn) in their Turf Blend line that work very well.

Aqua Net hair spray (Unscented, Extra Super Hold, available at King Soopers, Target, Wal-Mart, Walgreen’s, etc.) This hair spray is cheap and works great!

When you use the Woodland Scenics' tree armatures, you need to first spray paint them to get rid of the plastic sheen. I use Krylon brand Camouflage Ultra-Flat brown #8142. When this is dry you want to “dry brush” the armatures with a light gray acrylic paint to bring out the texture and add contrast. Remember, dry brushing is the technique of painting with a brush that has very little paint on it.



Once you are happy with the appearance of the armatures, and they are completely dry, you then twist the armatures into realistic looking tree trunks. It doesn't hurt to go out and look at a real tree to get the idea, but in nature, just about anything goes. Don't worry if the paint cracks a little while you're doing this, as it just adds to the realism. I've found that holding one end of the armature with a pliers helps in the twisting process. Obviously, the painting and twisting required of the plastic armatures is not necessary if you are using sagebrush.

The next step is applying the poly fiber to the branches. First take a small (very small) amount of the material and start teasing and pulling it apart until it is gossamer thin. When you think you've pulled it apart enough, thin it some more! Apply small amounts of this thinned poly fiber to individual branches. Do not drape the material over the whole tree! When you have covered each branch structure, spray it gently with hair spray to set it. You should now have the armature covered with a very fine, airy netting of poly fiber. To this we will attach the "leaves".

Spread out a piece of newspaper and pour a mound of the leaf product in the center. The paper will catch the excess material so you can put it back in its container when you're finished. Now spray the poly fiber netting with hair spray...enough to give it a "wet" look. Immediately, hold the armature over the paper and while twisting it back and forth, sprinkle the foliage material onto the netting. Over the paper, tap the trunk a few times to release any loose material. Let this set a few seconds and then repeat the process on any areas that need more foliage material. Don't over do this, as you want to achieve a well covered, but airy look. Sprinkling a little lighter colored foliage material on the top to give it highlights is also a nice touch. When you are satisfied with the look, give it one final coating of hairspray.

You're done. You now have a beautiful deciduous tree, ready to plant on your layout or diorama.