



A Clinic on Making Evergreen Trees

Presented at the April 2014 BMRC Meeting

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This is the first installment of a three-part series that will document the April 17, 2014 scenery clinic. This month we'll go through the steps to make great looking foreground conifer trees using furnace filter material. **Fig. 1**

Compared to the commercial trees available at your local hobby store, these trees look as good as the best and much better than most. While a 4 to 6 inch HO scale tree generally costs more than a dollar to buy, and often as much as several dollars, these beautiful conifer trees can cost less than a dime. They're quick and easy to make, and perfect for any scale.

Natural fiber furnace filters differ from the common furnace filter (generally consisting of a gauze medium surrounded by a cardboard frame) because they are made from a fibrous wood product. Available locally from McGuckins Hardware in Boulder, it comes in 3-foot wide rolls that can be cut to any length. At McGuckins, this material is called "Blue Coco" and is \$3.99 a lineal foot. A 3 x 2-foot piece will make over 100 trees in HO scale.

In addition to the filter material, you will need the following: wooden dowels (skewers, stuffing tools, hardware dowels), flat black spray paint, ground foam and hair spray. Skewers and stuffing tools are great for HO and N scale, and are already tapered. The best source for these is a dollar store or any store that sells kitchen supplies. My favorite is a \$1.99 combo pack of 100 skewers sold at Ross (50 – 5/32" and 50 – 1/8"). For larger scales, hardware stores sell inexpensive dowel in various diameters. Your best bet

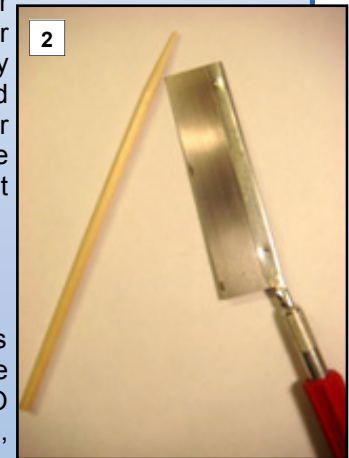
for flat black spray paint is Wal-Mart or Kmart at less than \$2 a can. For ground foam, I use Woodland Scenics brand Fine Turf or Coarse Turf (fine for N or HO scale, coarse for HO & O scale), available at model railroad hobby stores like Caboose Hobbies and Hobby Town. The two colors that I would recommend are Conifer and Soil. My favorite is Soil, which is a little darker than Conifer. Aqua Net Extra Super Hold unscented hair spray (in the purple can) works really well, available everywhere and is very inexpensive. The best price I've found is at Wal-Mart.

So, let's get started. I find working in batches is the most efficient way to make several trees, and by following these steps you will have a forest in no time.

Step 1. First, cut your dowels to the proper length (vary the lengths for a more realistic look) and taper them if necessary. Always keep your scale in mind when doing this. A 4" tree in HO scale is a 29' tree and a 6" tree in HO is nearly 44' in real life. Skewers and stuffing tools are tapered on one end, but they often yield two trees each, so you will need to taper one section and, of course, any regular dowels. While this can be done with a sharp knife, a disk or belt sander makes quick work of this project. Next, make a few passes down the length of the dowel with a fine tooth razor saw. **Fig. 2.** This gives the appearance of rough bark.



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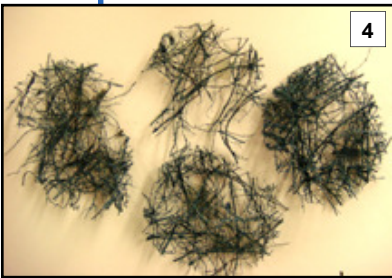


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Step 2. Now, with scissors, cut the filter material into various sized ovals (larger for the tree base, smaller as you near the top) and remove the backing net. **Fig. 3.**



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Step 3. Pull apart thin layers as shown below. This should yield 4 to 5 layers of material. **Fig. 4.**

Step 4. Skewer the thin layers onto the dowel, using the larger ovals toward the bottom and getting gradually smaller towards the top. **Figs. 5,6.** This is not critical, as you will trim the tree after all the layers are placed. Don't pack the layers too tight – a little space between them enhances the appearance. Glue the layers to the dowel using your choice of CA (super glue), hot melt glue or white glue. You can glue each layer, but this is

Ovals give a more random look than circles which adds to the realism.

Painted, your tree will look like this (below).

generally not necessary. I find that gluing the bottom one or two layers and the top layer is sufficient, as the layers in between are not going anywhere. You might want to experiment with the type of glue to determine which is best for you. I like Loctite brand "gel control" super glue in the blue squeeze bottle. Because it is a gel, it doesn't require precise mating and gives you a few seconds of working time. Its fine tip applicator is also very handy. Best of all, it seems to last forever and doesn't clog. Hot melt is quick and easy, but can get messy. You also might want to try Aleene's "super thick" Tacky Glue (pink label). It works well and grabs quickly, but requires a longer drying time. Loctite super glue is available nearly everywhere from King Soopers to Hobby Lobby. Aleene's glues are generally found in arts and crafts stores like Hobby Lobby.



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Your tree should look like the one below after all layers are skewered and trimmed.



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Once all the layers are in place to your satisfaction, trim the tree with scissors. Leaving it a little ragged often makes it look more realistic.

Step 5. The next step is to paint the tree(s) flat black (another nice look is Krylon's ultra-flat camouflage dark brown, but this is much more expensive). **Fig. 7.** Always spray your trees in a well-ventilated area. Even in the winter, I will step outside to do this as it goes very quickly. Wearing a rubber glove, hold each tree by the base and twirl slowly while spraying. This will nicely coat all the fiber material and the dowel. The very bottom of the dowel (base) will be imbedded into your scenery, and can remain unpainted. Let dry.

Step 6. Now its time to add the "needles" - your fine or coarse ground foam. Set up two areas on a work surface. Newspapers work well, and one will be for spraying and the other will be for applying the ground foam. Using the same method you used for painting, hold the base and twirl the tree slowly while applying an even coating of hair spray. Immediately move the tree over the second work area and while twirling the tree, sprinkle on the fine or coarse turf, letting the excess fall onto the newspaper. This excess can be put back into its container for use on the next tree. Now spray the tree one more time with a fine mist of hair spray to hold everything in place. You're done! **Fig. 8.**

This beautiful tree is now ready to be planted on your layout or diorama.



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