

Your helpful model rail tips.

“Thanks to everyone who has supplied these tip and making this possible. Please do keep them coming.”

I hope the small charge for this PDF hasn't offended – but the list is over 12,000 subscribers now it takes up a lot of my spare time time (well, all of it really). Getting a little something back to appease my understanding 'other half' really means a lot to me. Thank you.

Two points:

There is no shiny cover or artwork for this PDF. I hope you don't mind.

The tips are littered in spelling mistakes. All I've done is copy and paste.

Hope you enjoy them as much as I have.

Best

Al

PS As always, don't forget my fave modelling resource:

<http://modelrailwaylayoutsplans.com/fave/>

I was able to use (non-clump), kitty litter for ballast on my HO layout. I know the clumping product does not work..... I tried it once.

Another idea that was given to me by a train shop owner was how to make chain-link fence. You take screen wire and cut it at a 45 degree angle. Put some piano wire (pins) in the ground and you have fence post....walaaa.

Hope this helps, Rod

From across the pond. We use a flower called Sedum. when small-- looks like little trees. Spray with glue and dip in the " green stuff" and then carefully repeat the process. Pine trees for the upper region-- we check out the craft stores -- like after Christmas and buy " sprigs of fake pine and little trees from the display villages. For the higher mountains we start with a base of pink styrofoams used for insulation. Its cheap and can be carved with an xacto knife. A 4X8 sheet is about \$3 pounds UK. If you make a mistake you can fill in with plaster. WE hinge our tunnels so we can get back to a train wreck.

Nsked

My 009 layout includes a forest section made from the plug-in "branches" of an artificial Christmas tree. The section contains around 60 trees and took less than an hour!

Richard

I have always had good luck using drywall compound and fiber pink insulation or fiber paper insulation blow mixed together to form mountains and ridges. I shred the fiberglass pink insulation mix it in joint compound and clump on a screen or form, let dry, paint and age. Pour some plaster & paris rocks from molds and work in the arrangement for some sharper rock like surfaces to give good depth between the two textures. Also the great foam insulation in a can can be used to get both smooth like peaks or volcano lava look to a table design or when dry rough ti up and take some chunks out to give a less smooth like appearance.!

Michael J. Samol

Best tip is - give it up NOW. It's addictive and bankrupting!!

Ron

ACCESS INSIDE TUNNELS

Take an old picture frame.

Discard glass, just keep frame and backing

Integrate into the scenery above the tunnel FACE DOWN

The backing sheet can be taken off and instant access is achieved.

OK there is an oblong break along the backing sheet edge but this can be masked by bushes or a fence on the near sides.

Far sides can be hidden behind a ridge.

Alan

My only scenery suggestion is 1/8" thick cork, which is only brown in colour. It comes in rolls 18" x 1 or more yards at most smallbox hardware stores. When there is a canyon wall (long vertical jags of rock) or rolling grasses, cork shapes it best. Smooth boulders are much easier than jagged ones. Cork will take any shape that you can imagine, regardless of the distance to be covered.

The magic twist to changing a flat sheet of cork into any terrain is water. A cookie pan or appropriately sized (flatten in just enough [part of the experiments] water for best absorption. A steel, not teflon, PAN works best for cutting, or just scoring, the sheet.

Experimentation with the local cork will aid in shaping different effects. However after mastering the limitations of your 1/8" cork sheet, cutting the sheet in the drained excess water will maintain the work area's dryness.

NOTE: Soaked sheets fold (rolling-type folds) or bend (crisp accordion-shaped bends) over full-lengths or short-lined sections. This is how scoring atop or beneath the sheet helps.

Plan the terrain for best results, according to previous results.

All in all, no ground display is beyond this material. The trick to hills, as eventually with other landscape, is the DRYING. You determine the paint and painting time. While the sheet is wet, place it how, not where, you want it. Secure the shape's

position and let it dry (by air or by lamp's heat or by both.) Additional scores or cuts can achieve tighter corners/better curves.

As for rocks, the cutting of slits or removal of ungluing folds/shaping helps attain the nearest smoothness. Scoring aids sharp foldings, as it does on construction paper, for the production of jagged boulders. The latter is excellent for changing rolling landscapes (before green grass) into rougher terrain; blending boulder bottoms with supporting cork base can produce realistic structures.

Why use cork when paper-mache is familiar and reliable? LIGHTNESS.

Depending on how you fashion a bottom to this HOLLOW STRUCTURE, affects its portability. Hollowed WITH CRIMPED INWARD EDGES can suffice for careful transport. Such crimping (inward edge wherever openness results at the back or bottom) strengthens all shapes, but beware --- the bigger gaps influence flimsiness. Stiff steel wire glued inside crimped edges guaranty longevity of the shape. Where buildings are to stand atop any part of this cork, reinforcements inside the shape are required. They can be stand-alone topless cones or part of the wire skeleton mentioned above.

The best part of this scenicking method is discovered at changing the scene time. First, depending on the cork and shape, most scenery is reusable. Second, the teardown is easier and less messy. Third, the cost for a whole cliff is far less than paper-mache.

I hope that this helps in developing your scenicking techniques. I'm lazy, so I had to think this method into existence; it is not related to something read elsewhere.

Mike.

Hi,

I make pine trees from Chop sticks-the throw away kind you get at Chinese take out. they are already tapered.

John

I was thinking 6inch diameter plastic pipe cut to length and the bottom cut accross for tunnels, appropriate size jewelry chain for the railcars it is cheap at Michaels craft store. I have some branches off of trees here that are the right size for logs on the rail cars.

A small 7.2 volt motor out of a vacuum cleaner power head to make a working single drum winch.

Thanks

Leigh

I have been collecting sawdust, bits of wood, large pieces of polystyrene, beach gravel; hard paper mache packing and bits of dried up 'plastic wood' that was in a tin and which I think will form 'boulders' in a landscape. I used to enjoy making scenery so am looking forward to 'retirement' to get going. The one major problem ... where in the house can I house it!

Cheers, Peter BB

A good way for HO scale, with a lot less effort, is to move small scenery away from the tracks and proceed to duct-tape your camera to a 50' flatcar that's pushed in front of the loco. Works well for me.

Connor

Follow your wife, mother, sister, girlfriend, etc. to every hobby store, fabric store and craft store they go to for a month. You will find a wealth of tools, materials, techniques and ideas that you would not know existed.

cheers,

Mike

Since I'm modeling mid 1950's I use many of those plastics used to mount items to cardboard, such as nail clippers, small paint bottles, cars, trucks, and farm equipment in place. I paint them flat OD green and cut them to fit as flat car loads. It may not be the best idea, but as I'm going to buy the product, I see what I can make out of the packaging. I get two for one this way. I could use flat black as well, but for my time period canvas was the most popular. Those modeling modern eras could use many other colors because of the many colored tarps.

Thank You John

I use the grit when they tarmac the roads, I put the grit in a sock then bash it with a hammer ,then spray it black for my coal, then i put the polystyrene in my trucks then i put pva on top then sprinkle the grit on top ,but don't put to much in it will be to every.,or you can put blue tack in them ,but paint it black first, when you make trees when you put the foliage on i spray them with watered down pva let the dry then spray them with airlaker.

OO Scale

Round toothpicks \$1.50 for 500 in a plastic container, chop the point and turned top off and you have round logs/fenceposts for a wagon load

Polystyrene cut to shape and painted with granules glued to it for wagons loads - could be coal, gravel, sand, rock etc

Matchsticks drilled with 1mm holes to allow thin copper (armature wire) to be threaded for fences

Fibreglass/plastic/wire flyscreen cut diagonally then supa glued to fenceposts (straightened paper clips 37mm long) set in 1mm holes 5mm deep gives 8ft fencing

Instead of modroc/plaster gauze, I use household painters masking tape crisscrossed then thinly coated with polyfilla plaster for landscapes.

Look out for polystyrene sheeting from packaging of appliances for building up landscapes. Use a box cutter knife (v sharp!) to shapes. Less mess than with bread knife.

Greg

For tubes and things that are hanging around in railway yards and factory yards visible from the railways use tube spaghetti,you can paint it any colour you wish,rusting tubes and pipes,looks fantastic !

Micropore plaster is fantastic stuff,if you want to fix something quickly or even build things then apply the plaster first for example to two card joints of a building,touch the plaster with cyno adhesive,and zap ! welds like rock so keep your fingers away.

Wooden bobbins as used for cotton reels make super electrical wire holders,paint them up and wrap suitable wire around them,you can even add discs of card on the ends to simulate the part where the cable is fed.

Never throw that material you get from oranges as they are held together in packs,the mesh can be put to good use for hoding the loads onto wagons etc,or vehicles around the layout,it is mesh made from nylon normally.

Tie wraps have many uses in holding things securely to the layout board,you can drill holes into the board and thread them through.

Lots more ideas if you want them ?

Barry.

----- Original

I never pass any barbecue sticks by,they come in all sorts of diameters and sizes,also lollipop sticks as well can be fashioned into all sorts of things on your railroad,you can easily make your own telegraph posts from the sticks,to make a batch make up a simple jig that determines the length of the cross pieces,with a round Swiss file cut s semicircle into the places where the cross pieces go and glue them into place,the wires can be fashioned from button thread,just make sure that you drill holes for the posts and glue into place before attempting those wires.

Kneadable rubbers obtainable from art shops make great track cleaners,you can pull off a small piece and dispose of it once the crud has been lifted from your precious rail track.

Why buy weathering powders ? go to the sae art shop and purchase some pastel sticks,burnt umber,Yellow ocre,a good green will do,on a piece of glass crumble the pastels with an old rolling pin,then decanter them into jam jars,label up and you will have enough weathering powder to last you for some time,mix the colours and apply with a cheap art stiff brush,you can fix the colours with a flash of artists fixitive,a trial piece first to check compatibility is a wise move.

Those track pins have more uses than fixing track,you can assemble balsawod buildings with them dry,then once happy flash some cyno down the joints,after a quick rub down spray the balsawood with car/ auto primer,do this outside as it is smelly,once dry rub down and paint the buildings with acrylic paints.

To make an effective locomotive/rolling stock oiler take a cork and push a small dressmakingneedle into the cork so that the eye part shows,dip the oiler into thin oil and the eye retains just enough lubricant to do the job.

Another quick oiler is made from the humble cocktail stick,just make a small slit in one end,this retains enough oil to do the job,once used just dispose of them.

The metal mesh that comes in those car repair body kits makes a suitable fencing material once cut into strips with any old pair of scissors.

Why not make yourself a track cleaner utilising any old railway wagon ? add a block of balsawood stuck with epoxy resin underneath the wagon and glue a piece of felt onto the block,make it so that by applying slight hand pressure on top of the wagon the felt just touches the dirty track,apply a dab of tree alcohol to the felt and with your hand run the wagon over the rails and see the dirt lift,allow the alcohol to evaporate before useing,never use inflammable materials near a flame and open doors to allow the fumes to go away.

Signal arms are expensive,have you considered making your own from Plastruct ? design the signals on paper first and assemble with polystyrene contact cement,signal arms can be plastic sheet or even those flat lolly sticks mentoned above.

Fine sawdust mixed into any old left over household paint makes good crud for scenery work,you can also mix the sawdust with PVA adhesive (Elmers I think you call it in the USA ?) either paint later or add acrylic colour to the mix.

Florists wire twisted to make tree trunks then worked at right angles for the various branches,dip the trees into PVA adhesive and hang up until dry,paint them then apply spray adhesive and dip the branches into flock for the leaves,they look superb.

Happy ingenious and money saving modelling to you all !

Barry.

One word.....PATIENCE!!!!

Al,

Here are a few tips I have used in my layout.

I am a diabetic, so medical supplies are abundant in my house. Especially insulin needles, finger sticks and such. I have taken the orange protective cap from over the needle and cut it down a bit to make traffic control cones which I use around my road construction sites. I went to my son's sign making shop and asked him for a piece of scrap reflective white vinyl which I cut into strips to make the white stripes around the top of the cone. The other end of the needle has a cap which protects the plunger. Orange paint makes these look like the traffic barrels used around construction sites also. Decorate it with a strip of white reflective vinyl and you will have a perfect traffic control device. Also, a little black or silver paint, makes these look like trash cans that are set out on trash day.

My glucose test meter uses test strips that are dispensed from a drum. I peeled the label off of the drums and painted them silver. They make excellent rolls of steel for my steel plant. Naturally, a little weathering makes them look more realistic. Place them outside the steel mill as inventory waiting to be shipped by rail or put them in the rail car as a load.

I haven't tried it yet, but I was looking at the bottles the insulin comes in. If I paint them white and letter them, I just might have made a propane tank for that service station at which you buy propane for your BBQ grill. (I think I'll get my son to make the decals for the tanks) I'll let you know how this works out.

Green sponges found in the kitchen, make great hedges around some of my houses. I purchased the sponges and sliced them into strips. I lined a few of the yards in my layout with these hedges and they look pretty good. Vary the width of the strips for different size hedges.

Its funny, but when you're into model railroading, you look at trash from a 1/87 point of view.

Happy trash picking,
Richard

Yes ALASTAIR ,,,,One of the things in my Saw Mill I use on the floor is Saw Dust and dried tree branches, Dressed and trimmed to look like logs ,,,,, Also for trees I use Old Christmas tree branches Hope you can use these Peter
Hope you can see the photos

Peter

I use natural products for scenery, usually i just find it in the field by my house. Its a cheaper more realistic alternative to most products. On top of that I use a lot of ground foam to thinken up scenery. (dry weeds work great for trees)

Andrew

One tip I use ho scale telephone poles to make the hook up for the switch track for the fiber pin. They fit fine when you cut the poles about inch or more to fit the track neutral side.

Garry

Hallo Al

I thought of using "raw plastic" or plastic beads to simulate stuff like coal or some other ore that are being transport by rail. It is very lite weight so and by doing so one can make it look very realistic.

I'm still thinking of a way in which one can simulate overhead power lines and the poles for the trains.

Let me know if you need more advice. I like to share things.

Jacques

I think the most important thing is laying track properly so the trains stay on the track this can make for frustrating model train experience hence giving up on a fun hobby early ? This goes especially for HO slots the beginner sets are impossible
!!!!!!!!!!

John

Hi Al,

Am totally new to the construction of layouts. Have made a tunnel system-nearly 3ft in length using washing up liquid containers. Cut to size-(n gauge) then covered with plaster bandage and landscaped, then finished with conventional tunnel pieces.

Any other innovations-I'll let you know.

regards martin

The best tip is. To have grade A track work & wiring for faultless operation.

William

Hi Al,

I'm afraid I don't really have any tips, except to tell you that I don't **buy** trees for my layouts. I make them from twigs picked up on the roadside or in parks, and use tacky glue to stick the bought foliage on them. I find this makes them more realistic and costs a lot less than buying ready made trees, which usually don't look real anyway. I have an N gauge exhibition layout, and am collecting track and other accessories in Z and T gauge to make two more layouts, the same size base, but with those gauges, to show the advantage of the really tiny trains, in that, you can get a lot more track and scenery as you go smaller. Model trees for these two layouts It **are available**, but not always when you want them, and I can make my own, as small and as many as I like at little cost!

Don't know if this is of interest to you, but thought I'd pass it on in case any of your contacts haven't considered doing this.

Liz

Builders skips are full of items you can use.

But the best is the tins of expanding foam, spray it on, let it dry, cut to shape.

Adrian

"one can make endless tracks using matchsticks as 'wooden sleepers' and the track can be thick copper wire with the right dia!"

Lionel

A very easy way to make "asphalt roadways" is to use the self-stick type of 'non-skid' strips used for stairs, diving boards etc. (has the roughness of about 80 grit sand paper and comes in black). One such piece was sized at 14 inches long, 8 inches wide. You can cut it with scissors or a razor blade. Using whatever color paint you wish, draw a dotted line (or double yellow etc.) down the center. Have done bike paths on the side also with white paint. Then peel and stick your new roadway wherever it's called for.

Peter

In reference to hills and cliffs, I have found on many fine layouts, the cliffs to be clearly 'Trowelled' and not realistic. Here in New Zealand, we have thousands of river (water) or Weather etched terrain to model from. River cuttings can be done by layering polystyrene (polyfoam) foam held in place with wire (DO NOT glue this will leave glue lines and lose the effect) and spray with Solvent Based spray paint. This will effectively weld the layers and give that weathered look. For Rock Cliffs, I do the same thing tufting ledges as they would appear in real situations.

Wayne

To make hills, fields and rock faces cheaply and quickly, I have always used strong brown wrapping paper (got 2 sq metres from our local furniture store) - cut roughly to a bit bigger than the area to be covered - crumple the paper up as tight as you can - smooth it out again (roughly for rock faces - smoother for hills) - using clear Bostic stick one edge down using 1/4" overlap - then trim the other edge to 1/4" overlap and stick it down in the same way - rubbing smooth - if it's quite a big piece then some crumpled newspaper underneath will help to support it. Once dry (10 mins) you can paint it with any suitable paint (I used Homebase satin green, brown or grey) and sprinkle with coloured sawdusts while still wet (use a sieve) and hey presto, 24 hours later it has all set solid. Vertical rock are painted grey or brown, and when sprinkled with green grass it sticks to the horizontal surfaces - quick and easy. I can complete a whole section in a couple of hours..! Note: try not to get Bostic on your fingers - excessive amounts can dry the skin...

Have a look at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKrEEhWFmJs> to see one of my grandsons at play - all hills and rocks are brown paper only...

Duncan

Like the use of the Sedum flower for trees, I use the flowers off the shrub 'Spirea', there are a few varieties of this popular shrub and all produce very useful flowers that make great looking trees.

I spray them first with florist paint oasis 'brown' to give its trunk colour and to seal the flower. I first tried to spray with a very strong glue that upholsterers use but found that it went all over the trunk and branches and didnt really look good with the final green scatter all over the wood. Now I just use PVA glue watered down as the spray. I give them a 2nd coat of glue & scatter to get different shades of leaves.

The finished product is better in appearance from the usual trees on offer for sale. Down point is they get brittle and do not transport too well. However the small broken branches do make good shrubs which are needed in abundance on a good landscape scene or garden.

The use of the pink insulation foam is by far the best material for hills & cliffs, but I havent found any for £3 a sheet. I found some in B&Q stores about 4'x2'x3"thick but it was much more expensive than £3. I did however get plenty offcuts from a local housing scheme who were cladding the houses with it. I find with water based emulsion paint it looks great. I have plenty pictures of this.

Mattin

my best tip is to keep an open mind in regard to model building supplies. you never know what you'll find that you can use for a model. like using the little individual coffee creamer cups painted a silver color to use as trash cans in O and larger scales.

Tom

believe this or not. If one was to take a bag of plain old kitty litter, strain it through a piece of screening, like you would find in an outside door, or, window, you will come up with an alternative to store bought ballast, at a much cheaper rate. This works just as well as store bought ballast, and reacts the same to a mixture of water and Elmers glue to hold it in place. It does work, believe me.

I have a very inexpensive landscaping tip. I use florists Oasis, its the stuff that they stick the flowers into when the florist makes a display . You can shape it with your fingers ,its easy to cut and its great for small mounds of earth or even large embankments. It can be glued with PVA or Evostick and I normally smother mine

with diluted PVA and then throw on the scatter material .It looks good when used as an embankment and because its so light telegraph poles and trees can easily be pushed into it. Ive also used it as the bulk of a mineral wagon load. Just cut it to the right length, mould it with your fingers, stick it in the wagon and then stick your ballast or spoil onto it,easy and cheap.

Here in Canada you can buy it from the Dollar store ,the equivelant of the bargain store in England. I pay a Dollar a block but I look for it when it goes on sale I then buy several at a time. I hope this helps some modellers especially the ones on a tight budget like me . Happy modelling Keith.

Keith

I wanted real water on a mountain that was pre-made from a hoppy shop. It had a place that looked like a water fall. So I took a fish tank air pump and opened it up. Put a hose from the air intake out of it and hooked a fish tank hose to the air output side. Punched a little hole at the top of the mountain tunnel for the output hose and at the bottom of the mountain there was an area that looked like a pond. Put the intake hose up threw it to suck the water into the pump. Plugged it up and I had a water fall to a pond below. Cheap and easy water to have a water fall.

Glenn

Another alternative for making ground cluttuer or trees is to harvest wild flower growth or weeds, tie together in a bunch, then spray with regular old hair spray to preserve and "solidify" so they do not fall apart after drying up. The hair spray acts as an adhesive, keeping the weeds bunched together. If you want to make mountains out of moleholes, so to speak, use watered down drywall joint compound, thinned down to resemble the texture of pancake batter, wad up old newspaper, or ,grocery sacks, soak in this compound, then, form over cardboard strips, laced throughout each other to form your mountains, Much cheaper than commercial compounds sold at hobby shops for the same purpose.

Alastair,

my 'best tip' for modelers in any scale is never, EVER get married ... sorry but i got's no pics fer that one ...

no need to reply - just sayin' -

nic

I am a newcomer to your e-mail (only a few weeks) and enjoy the tips. Another great source for "the right size" tree stock is to find a Bonsai enthusiast. The trees are constantly being trimmed and shaped; instead of throwing the clippings away we now save them. As with any other flower a gardener would grow, sometimes one of these little guys die (especially after the winter). Since the plants are "miniaturized", the branching is also smaller. Trees for different gauge railroads just need to be taken from different parts of the branches.

Bob

- 1- Take your time, Roam or you layout wasn't built in a day. And remember to have fun and ask for help if you need it, no question is too small to be answered.

- 2- Have a plan. Know what exactly what you're going to do before you do it and have all the tool ready before you start working.

- 3- Clean you track in methylated spirits before you use it the first time and your track will be easier to clean later but you will need to clean the track more often as it becomes unclean faster but comes off easier.

Zach

Hi I tend to gather dried flowers and grass plumes and when pulled apart these smaller parts can be used to represent tufts of grass ect

Albert

You can make a pretty good tie stain out of instant coffee just experiment with different ratios of coffee to water for lighter or darker

Robert

Use partitions to separate scenes on a small layout. A 4x4 or 4x8 layout can look a whole lot bigger if you can not see the other side from different perspectives. The partition can have a painted or photo backdrop. Plaster mountains can go up to the backdrop. Leave a gap between the plaster mountains and the backdrop for more realism. The height of the partitions should be enough to hide the other side. Figure between 2 and 3 feet high. Use tunnels and city structures as the transitions between the partitions.

Allen

Use green bumpy chenille (sp) - the pipe cleaner like material that varies in bumps from 1/8" diameter to 1/2" diameter. Cut it into lengths to make evergreen trees. They are good for distant hills. Lots of them quickly! A bit of white spray paint makes it part of a snow scene.

Brian

scouring pad cut into strips ,painted to look like hedgerow..don't tell everybody very effective

Ivor

Our space saver....

My son loves trains; @ 7 he can tell you more about trains - than you'd ever want to know...

he rec'd his first ho scale train set for Christmas this year (went through the wooden brio trains and Thomas the Trains; to a G scale Polar express train)

but our house is small and we don't have a lot of room to put up a train track and scenery and leave it....

So... we made a platform that slides out from under his bed; 3/4" plywood on 2" casters so - we can push it under his bed at night then can get around his room and pull it back out when he wants too play with it.

We are still working on the scenery and layout - put it's plenty big @ 70" long by 60" wide on 9 casters.. he can literally step on or sit on the platform it's self and not do any damage because it can easily support his weigh (it and mine for that matter..)

Kimberly

My pleasure. It's not as good as the old Tru-Scale tie stain but it does work. Another is a water based wood stain that you can find at most paint stores, hardware store or lumber yards. A darker stain would be best cause then you can lighten it by thinning with water. It works also for stripwood when building trestles and bridges. I stain the wood and/or ties before gluing them cause the stain will not stick to dried white glue.

Rob

Read an article once on using sanded tile grout. Best product I have ever used works just like glue, inexpensive, comes in several colors and large quantities. Need to cover large areas to look like dirt or sand? Wet the area, sprinkle some grout maybe add some other scenery products lightly sprinkle on some more grout and wet it all down with water. This product does not do well with holding down buildings or larger scenery items like trees, and never use with white glue, will leave a white haze on the layout.

Got an old blender? I use it for everything secnetic. My favorite, leaves. Every year, while conducting that infamous leaf removal. I will collect several bags of

mulched dry leaves and run them through the blender. Dependent on how fine you want the product, I get instant scenery for under trees, I've even used it for dirt roads.

Gerry

For dirt I dry used coffee grounds and dry them. They work great.

Richard

The best tip is a simple one. To clean ho gauge track, we use rubber errasers. They are sold in our local walmart store, and we buy them for 25 cents each. They last about a year and work perfectly. I live in the southwest of the united states, and we get lots of wind and dust. The HO gauge track collect the dust, faster than anyone can imagine. So the only way to protect the track is to clean it before each use, that means daily! Normal track cleaning machines do not seem to work very, and it saves us money to use the errasers.

Robert

I have a tip I can share for making your own tree foliage (leaves). I look for old sofas or chairs that has foam rubber cushions. I use this cushion that I cut into small cube shapes about 1 inch. I have an old blender I got at a yard sale (don't use your mom's or the wifes!) Put about a pint of water to start with in the blender and add some foam cubes. Keep doing this as you chop the foam into a fine pulp like texture. Then pour some hobby paint of your choice of color and blend well. Use a strainer and dump the water and all foam through and save the colored water for future use. Take the foam in the strainer and dump into a shallow pan or cardboard box. Stir this foam to dry it out I use a hair blow dryer to speed things up. When its all dried you have foliage/ leaves for your trees!

Clint

If you have to relay or replace any track.

Leave the old road bed in place to look like an abandoned railway.

Tear up old track but leave old sleepers & rails on the roadbed & Plant grass on it.

Or place a crane & model work crew on it

Paul

I take locomotives that dont run well, turn them into dummies and the add a relay with a decoder making a DCC uncoupler loco. The relay is conected to the coupler with a piece of black tread and the decoder is reprogramed to the same address as a

nother loco, and reprogram rear light to Fn 3. When you push Fn 3 the relay works and you have a uncoupler

One of my favorite tricks is to take advantage of another hobby. I do a lot of wood working. This means I generate bags and bags of sawdust, from my saws, my sanders, and my drill press. The first, most important tip is that you can color sawdust with food coloring. The food coloring soaks into the wood for a permanent, non-fading color. You can also use old stains. Local hardware stores often put old stains on a bargain table and you can pick them up cheap. Water-based stains seem to work best and can be easily diluted for more even coating. Put the sawdust in a plastic bag, add food coloring or stains diluted with either alcohol or water and shake vigorously.

It can actually pay to sort your sawdust.

Very fine sawdust from a belt sander makes a beautiful lawn or road surface. Slightly more coarse sawdust from larger grit sanders or a saw makes a fine ground cover or simulated gravel, and the curls from a drill press make great bramble along a fence, base of a tree, or forest ground cover.

Spread the sawdust where you want it, and spray down with a dilute solution of white glue to "fix" it in place.

A second trick is another "zero waste" idea. So many devices these days have Styrofoam packaging as end caps, and protective spacers. Take a serious look at those pieces as sources of buildings for your layout. One Styrofoam end cap, painted with water-based colors reminiscent of the 1950's, made a great art deco museum. The coarse texture of the Styrofoam made an interesting stucco effect after painting. The key is fitting the appropriately scaled doors, windows, and other features to the complex. Creating a convincing roof with air handlers, vents, and skylights completes the effect.

Ken Finley

Dallas, Texas

You may have heard this one before, but before you start casting your rock formations, color your plaster before you mix it. I've tried two different methods; adding powdered water-color mixes to the plaster before mixing; use a color or blend of colors that matches the color of rocks you're going to model. Or add Black India ink to the water for a gray color. This way, if the plaster gets chipped, you won't have the very obvious "white" showing through.

Gary

I've had two heart attacks. Lots of pill bottles around the house. They are hard to paint which is actually an advantage. The streaking when you overlay rust brown and silver looks naturally weathered. I use Pinewood Derby dry transfer fuel signs to add tanks to my Oil Refinery. Old parts sprue make cheap piping.

Vitamin bottles come in terrific shades of green, orange, and blue. Cut into scale two by four foot rectangles, they make great skylights in buildings with a natural curve. I also put them parallel to entry doors in homes for a 50's look entry.

Kenneth

Twigs from the Japanese Maple, Silver Birch and a certain pine shrub whose name I've forgotten make excellent dead/winter trees for N, TT, OO, and H0 scales.

Connor

Track in Tunnels .

2 insure good electrical contact, solder the rail joiners to the track

Paul

Keep a large magnet handy from an old radio or hi fi speaker. This is a great tool for picking up that dropped box of rail nails, nuts, bolts, you get the idea.

Stu

A great, inexpensive stain for ties is OUTER Black Walnut shells soaked in water (not the stuff the nuts are in at the grocery store - that HARD one on the outside). Like coffee, the longer the wood sits in the soup the darker it gets. WARNING - use gloves, tongs or other devices - it stains hands every bit as effectively (and nearly as permanently) as it does the wood! Other types of nut shells also make good stains (Pecans for instance), but the color will be lighter. If you need more ideas look for what back-to-nature people who dye yarn and fabric use (lots of sites on the web); there are lots of colors besides browns. Mushrooms, berries, grasses, etc.
- Bob -

i'd probably say that the key to a good layout is that it all runs smoothly and reliably, so make sure that all your stock and track is in good nick
a few things i do to help, is; on points, bend the ends of the gaurd rails out, so that the wheels of the train are pulled to the rail, and do not ride up onto the frog.
make sure that there is no ballast preventing wheels from rolling smoothly.
don't put points where gradient changes.
put weight in your stock (i blutak down spear heavy nuts and bolts).
make sure that the track and locomotive (and stock!) wheels are kept clean.

Robert

I use roofing felt paper for roads and parking lots, looks like asphalt.

Eric

I am an operator, so my number one tip to enjoying this hobby is "Get the track work right." I hate cleaning track. All the cleaning in the world will not correct bad track work. Smooth transitions into curves, switches, and grades make all the difference in the world. Poor operating equipment operates better, operation looks more realistic, the modeler is happier when they spend less time on maintenance and more time operating.

I'm new to the site so I don't know if these have been posted before. I know that sticks for logs have been mentioned. The best one that I found is a butterfly bush. The bark is rough and looks a lot like older fir tree trunks.

Small bamboo branches are good for smaller tree trunks and wood fence posts. It also can be used for rail fences. Moss has undoubtedly been posted for shrubbery. Bags of green moss can be had at craft and garden stores and can be used for taller shrubs like rhododendrons. I've found that moss that grows on your roof, at last mine, grows in small tight clumps. It has really short foliage which makes for very realistic shrubs.

The final tip is for roads and parking lots. Use roofing felt (tarpaper). Unlike the premade model road material, it is cheap and can cut it to whatever configuration needed. For curves, the commercial ones just have sharp 90's and doesn't look that realistic. For center lines and fog lines, use a paint pen. If your lines aren't quite perfect, no big deal. You can blame on the road department. Rolls of the paper are available at home improvement stores but it is a large amount. A person could probably grab some scraps at job sites where a roof is being replaced.

Emil

Just for fun I used *real* (red) soil and rocks from Arizona to landscape an N-scale desert layout that I did a few years ago. You should've seen the quizzical looks on

the airport employees faces as I passed through security with my bags of rocks and soil especially when I told them that they were for *a model train layout!* Most definitely added realism to my scenery. Cheers!

Walter

“Well may I tell you how I fixed my tunnel? Ok, When I built my tunnels the little lights that you put inside each house, and inside each bussiness, work really great inside the roof of the tunnels. You might suggest to him that if he takes his telephone poles, Cut the base off of them, stick the pole into a small hole, Glue the pole, Than take some small welding wire from a wire feed welder, Glue the wire to each peg that sticks up on the telephone pole, He can run the wire to , like I said to all buileings , attach the wire to the accessory on his transformer , He can run the wire through a sideing switch so to turn the lights to his buildings on and off when he wants.

Also, Here in NORTHWEST ARIZONA , Mohave county, We have a weed that grows here and it gets up about 3 to 7 inches tall, and they look just like the trees grow in AUSTRELIA . I just knew that I was going to mess that word up. SORRY. anyway the weed , When it goes dorment for the winter, it turns red And the top of the weed where the leaves would be , turns out like a canipie.

“

April

“ My tip refers to people who try to stop modellers changing to DCC. Do NOT listen to the 'DC forever' brigade, go to as many Model Shops as needed and try DCC systems and find out for yourself how easy it is to use.” Geoff

My tips

1 iif making a road use the dvla online highway code as it has raoad makings ECt and can use the coloure as the road (if n gauge it's the same sizeif copy past it)

2 if using a flat baseboard for simple hight and to add river use then cover with 2 foam boards as if using foam under can take top 1 off and it right hight also styrene is easy to cut to make rivers embankments and lower levels

Matthew

“The red and white napkin and utensil wrappers used at TGI Friday's can be cut down and make excellent safety stripes or no clearance markers. The corrugated hot cup sleeves at 7 - 11 when turned inside out & trimmed make a decent cat walk or yard crossing.

“

Paul

Republish this below here – next two were the only new ones that went out in the duplication.

My model railway tip is:

On a large layout, don't just rely on the rails to conduct the current the whole way round.

Provide a feed to perhaps two or more places on the layout, on opposite sides, so that there is always plenty of power on the track.

Mike

Buddleia bush flowers when dry (at the end of the season) make excellent pine trees - the flowers come in lots of different size. Cut them off the branch and let them dry (I put one lot in the freezer, one lot to naturally dry hanging from a piece of string (like a washing line) and one lot sprayed with hair spray) all worked - they can then be sprayed with any colour paint you like.

Regards

Ken

A very easy way to emulate corrugated siding reasonably for metal structures is to get a piece of the desired material made of polystyrene in your scale from a

supplier such as Woodland Scenics, Evergreen Scale Models etc. Cut the piece in half or use a second piece of the same material, reverse it so that the grooves of the two pieces fit into one another. Place some heavy duty aluminum foil on one piece and use the other as you would a putty knife at a proximately 30 degree angle squeezing and scraping the foil strip into the grooves of the plastic. Cut the foil to length and width desired. With just a bit of practice you can make all the corrugated needed for your next project.

Lowell

not sure if this is a new idea - but for what it is worth : the next time you are out for Chinese food - save the chop sticks - they work great for logs. Roy

Dried used tea leaves make an excellent ground cover over a painted surface. They come in a wide variety of shades depending upon brand. They are great combined with twigs etc. as a forest floor. They can also be crushed finer for earth.

Fred

I've got one - I've used this idea many times in building my layouts - When laying track (either flex or 'snap track') I've strategically placed rerailer track pieces (in my case, HO code 100, Atlas Snap-track rerailers <http://www.atlasrr.com/Images/Track/Trackphotos/844.gif>) every 6 - 10 feet. First it similar to generic grade crossings w/o gates or lights and can be used anywhere. Second, you can use it in tunnels or near backdrops (whre you might get a hand stck). If I have a minor mid train derailment, there's no need to stop the train, keep going, the rerailer will fix it in short order.

Dave C

Hi Al, Our model club used dry flowers for trees. I think it's called caspia. Anyway, any hobby store that sellls dry flowers sells them. Buy a bundle and break it up into

twigs. Hold a few and wrap with brown floral tape. In two football games I can build an entire forest of trees and people always complement about how great the trees look during a club open house. Fast, easy and cheap.

You asked me what I considered to be my best tip for Rail road Modeling .
Such a hard question as I pondered over which is my best tip.
My very best tip is something I fail at quite often.

Create a system of organization and hone, it stick to it , and have it become second nature,
This will save you time and time is also money.

If you can, put up a few peg boards and a chalk or grease pen board. Remind yourself of priorities.

Use the peg board to hang tools that you use all the time (label tool placement) you'll know where they are in an instant.

Shelves for supplies , designate areas for supplies.

Keep a journal , it is very helpful to know what steps you left off on a certain project if you have to stop and order supplies for it.

Organize has to be the best tip I can give anyone. Final organization tip below.

GLAD makes cheap clear plastic containers that are stackable I find them indispensable for organizing just about anything small.

They come in many sizes. For instance you want to paint 5 freight cars ,(Have your journal handy make notes about things like paint mixtures , brands ect...)

label 5 containers 1-5 with inkjet labels , place a label

as you disassemble each car and place those parts in their own separate containers, use a plastic bag for each cars small parts put it in the container also.

Use a simple system 1-5 it can be reused for the next batch. Some cars may look the same but that does not mean they are exact.

so if you keep parts designated to that car you will have less trouble later. When you finish your car .”

Martin

“My tips

1 if making a road use the dvla online highway code as it has road markings ECT and can use the colour as the road (if n gauge it's the same size if copy past it)

2 if using a flat baseboard for simple height and to add river use then cover with 2 foam boards as if using foam under can take top 1 off and it right height also styrene is easy to cut to make rivers embankments and lower levels “

Matthew

“I am an operator, so my number one tip to enjoying this hobby is "Get the track work right." I hate cleaning track. All the cleaning in the world will not correct bad track work. Smooth transitions into curves, switches, and grades make all the difference in the world. Poor operating equipment operates better, operation looks more realistic, the modeler is happier when they spend less time on maintenance and more time operating.”

Michael

“A great, inexpensive stain for ties is OUTER Black Walnut shells soaked in water (not the stuff the nuts are in at the grocery store - that HARD one on the outside). Like coffee, the longer the wood sits in the soup the darker it gets. WARNING - use gloves, tongs or other devices - it stains hands every bit as effectively (and nearly as permanently) as it does the wood! Other types of nut shells also make good stains (Pecans for instance), but the color will be lighter. If you need more ideas look for what back-to-nature people who dye yarn and fabric use (lots of sites on the web);

there are lots of colors besides browns. Mushrooms, berries, grasses, etc.

- Bob -"

Couple of things i done in the past has been

1 I would save all saw dust and use that for contruction scenes

2 I have also use a 24volt transformer like the kind use for door bells and and ran all my street lightsoff of with simple copper wire and plug it in to a regular outlet with a timer so it only came on at night time to light the city.

3 I have also save all my packing stuff from boxex and they make great tunels and mountainns with a little newspaper and glue.

Hope they help you out.

Tom Somers Sr

Hi,

On diesel/electric locos i like to replace the plastic fan grill with an etched brass one, however, the roof is curved, how do i curve the etch to match?

i use a mouse and a wooden dowel, place the etch on the mat and roll with the dowel, checking regularly until the profile matches the roof

andy

ALASTAIR; I HAVE AN IDEA ALMOST LIKE THE CHAIN-LINK-FENCE. BUT YOU USE 2 INCH BY 2 INCH MEDICAL GAUZE

UNFOLD IT UNTIL YOU HAVE ONLY ONE LAYER THEN SPRAY,

PAINT EITHER YELLOW. OR AN ORANGE. WHEN DRIED CUT INTO

STRIPS AND MAKE SAFETY FENCE AROUND A CONSTRUCTION SITE. YOU CAN SUPPORT IT WITH PIANO WIRE, OR USE SOME STRAIGHT PINS FROM A SOWING KIT. IT REALLY MAKES A NICE

JOB WHEN FINISHED. AND IT DOES NOT COST VERY MUCH EITHER. THANK FOR THESE TIPS THAT YOU SEND MAYBE THIS ONE CAN HELP YOU. KEEP IN TOUCH STEPHEN

Dear Al I've used a hand cranked meat grinder to grind up old couch cushion foam and then die it for background ground foliage and I used a lot of pencil shavings for ground cover

BB

Best tip I can offer anyone is to try to use real material, ie sand for beaches and break up real coal for wagon loads.

David

For those who like pink insulation foam, but don't like the cost, try the nearest construction site and talk to on site supervisor. There are usually lots of scraps and they will probably let you have all you want. Sometimes I had to climb into the roll off dumpsters and other times I just had to go around and pick the stuff up

Free Free Free No better price than that!

Fred Minnesota

Here is a tip for ensuring your track flows smoothly. Use a ladies square handbag mirror sitting on the track and angled toward you instead of getting down to eye level, which is very difficult in tight corners or on wide baseboards! You sure can spot the dog legs or misaligned fishplates with this one.

Steve

green scoring pads cut in strips for hedges!

John

"Old fashioned curtain rods, painted flat black, makes perfect HO scale I-beams for bridges and overpass, or extra weight for flatbed cars.

Matt

Track ballasting - - - I use natural materials only.. This saves money as well as making the ballast look "right".. I scoop gravel from beside the street and dump it into a coffee can with the bottom end covered by metal window screen.. Shaking the can produces nice size HO ballast.. Different colors can be "manufactured" by adding sand or other material of the same type.. If you live near a beach (such as North Hampton New Hampshire) go down onto the beach and look for the mottled grey coarse sand and scoop up a bucket.. It looks almost identical to Woodland Scenics ballast although it is heavier
it is free.. Shake it through a screen to remove any debris and it is ready to use...

Hi Al

I don't know if this is new but I use all my old phone chargers to supply power to lights etc. the chargers are a variety of 5 to 12 volts and great for the 6 volt lights as you don't require resistors. Jaycar (a local electronic supplier) has an adaptor to suit all charger pins.

regards

Rick

I cut round toothpicks, paint them silver and use those as fence posts. I also use 3/4 inch wire brads for fence post. Push into layout 1/4" and you have a 4 foot fence post. 1-1/4" wire brad pushed in 1/4" and you have a standard 8 foot fence post.

1/8" dowels painted brown cut to 2.75 inches. Cut 2 -1" pieces paint brown. On the longer piece cut 1/2 " from the top a groove about 1/16" deep. Repeat making a second groove 1/2" below that. Glue in the groove the two one piece cross members. You now have a telephone pole. String black thread from pole to pole for telephone wires then glue a piece of thread from the pole to the building as the power lead. 1" from the bottom of the pole you can glue a 1/8" X 1/4"X 1/8" piece of balsa painted red. That is a fire call box. You can also paint one blue for the U.S. Mail box.

Roll fine steel wool in your fingers make it about 1/4-3/8 inches wide tapering at the bottom. 1/2-1 inch long. Paint dark green. let dry. Then use a pointed small dowel and put small dots of pink, yellow or orange paint. You now have a flowering bush.

Use 3/8 inch dowels. Taper bottom of the dowel a little with a pencil sharpener. Cut about 5/16 inch in height. Paint brown for a wine barrel planter or terra cotta red for clay. Glue some short bushes to the top. Flower planters.

A 1/4 sq dowel painted brick red. Make horizontal lines with a very fine marker 1/16" apart than make vertical lines in a staggered pattern looking like laid brick. Top with a 1/4 in piece of round toothpick painted black. You can then top off the toothpick with a piece of cotton ball touched with a gray marker to look like smoke.

“i use blue rope ligts along my ceiling in my train room.shut off the main lighting and its nite time but you can still see to operate.and its nice to see it looks like the real world with all the building lights”

Dan

...I added 2 thick layers of pink insulation to the table for cuts and topological interest.

Don

I don't know if someone has already suggested this for train weights, hints say hammering lead flat is the way to go, but I have found that Duck or Goose Decoy weights are easier, they are about 8-10 inches long, already flat, about 1/8 in. thick, and 3/4 in. wide. The lead is very soft and cuts easily with a large wire cutter.

Lee

you can buy small rubber bands (in the women or girls section) that girls use for pony tails. these will replace rubber tires on older AHM locomotives. They will also work on some Tycos

LF

dont know if this is a tip or not but to make clouds I use the stuffing that is in stuffed animals. I cut it down shape it and glue it to the board.

Bob

in answer to your question, if any body is looking for chain link fencing in N gauge you can by a sheet of hole filler for cars, by plastic padding, from halfords and cut your own.

Ray

Al, one of the best modeling tip I ever hear for ground [work] material was to sweep your basement or driveway and then sift what you had picked up using various size kitchen strainers. You then store the sized material in small jars. This material works well with all types of models - trains, military miniatures, airplane, tanks, etc.

John Kuchar

I am just starting in trains but I have done a lot in miniatures and doll houses. There are a lot of things you can use for railroads from these two areas.

You probably already know this suggestions

In the miniature/doll house sections of craft stores you can find flowers that fit in perfectly. There are tons of lights for yards etc., bricks sidings roofing that fit.

Meat trays are good for building outdoor scenes they are easy to cut and to paint and gluing is no problem. On the web you can find doll house patterns for wall paper, rugs, and posters resize to fit the inside of your buildings to give a realistic look through windows and doors if need curtains scrap pieces of lace looks great.

You can use a tuna can or a jar lid to make fish ponds use fine gravel or course sand depending on size, paint inside a blue or blue green color, use miniature fish and water plants (in miniature section or in beads/jewelery sections of craft store) after setting it up pour in clear epoxy, varnish or whatever you prefer about half way add fish etc., pour in more clear resin (you can dye some to look like water) add plants big rocks or logs, turtles and frogs etc. make sure they are partly in the resin, let dry till tacky then add a little more to create waves of circle waves to give the impression of movement, let dry completely place in model add a water fall on one side using the epoxy to create water. you can use real rocks for this. Just enlarge it to fit your needs and it looks great.

For coal try bits of charcoal used for drawing and spray with sealer used for ceramics and for drawings you can glue them in a pile then spray. It seems to last longer than hairspray and is not affected be humidity as bad as hairspray.

I have found a lot of neat ideas in doll house and miniature books that will go great in a train layout you would be surprised what these people come up with and what they use to create some amazing stuff.

Thanks for your time and for the news

Lavonda

I have several tips to send along. One is to save the rigid plastic forms that fit over any of the many items we buy all the time, ie here in the states everything seems to come packaged inside rigid plastic glued to a cardboard bottom. Most of these see thru rigid plastic forms are designed in round, square or rectangular shapes, but some are molded to fit the item itself which provides some intriguing shapes for the creative modeler. You name it, everything from light bulbs to computer parts come sandwiched between these materials. I save the plastics all the time for a variety of things. They get cut to the right size and are windows for my home made buildings. If I get really creative with an interior I put skylights in the tops for a peak inside the rooms. I make all my buildings, sheds and so forth from scratch. Just cut out the appropriate size window, use indelible magic marker or cut outs from paper for the window decoration, glue them to the plastic and when all is set glue the window into the opening. I used a larger one (a flat rectangle) for a view into my tunnel. It sits over the tracks supported by the tunnel sides. Almost all of them have flanges on all four sides to be glued to the cardboard packaging so they provide a nice flat edge all the way around for stabilizing them on the tunnel frame. I made a sculptamold landscape top for it that fits like a hat on a flat head. the plastic top is hidden unless I want to see inside the tunnel. It lifts off easily as does the plastic top for servicing the track if necessary. The sculptamold top has trees and foliage. The seams were thin enough so they were not seen unless you looked closely, but I recently made another with little flaps all the way around to hide the seams. I'll send you a picture when I get the time. Joan

AL -

I've used red velvet and white lace from Doll House material to use as curtains & trim for the business car and private car on my layout.

Dave C

Just read email and comment I've looked at made me think I should contact you, I don't know if these have been suggested before but here goes, I once purchased some look alike coal off ebay I then went to my local pet store and found the self same thing in the fish tank department the black gravel give a realistic look and a 3kg bag cost the same as 2 x 100g bags on ebay.

Secondly, abrasive paper especially the black WET & DRY type is ideal for roads and car parks, for the high class roads the RED OXIDE paper serves the same purpose with the finer grit looking more realistic.

I, like many of your other readers look at loads of plastic rubbish before it gets discarded, it's surprising what a rough up with abrasive paper and a coat of grey primer paint sprayed on changes the looks of even the oddest pot, tub, straw etc....

Keep up the good work.

Mark Taylor

HEY AL,

I HAVE ONE FOR YOU, I HAVE BEEN MODELING FOR YEARS, I ALWAYS HAD TROUBLE WITH THINGS I SAT ON A FLAT CAR VIBRATING OFF THE CAR.

THEN ONE DAY A PLUMBER LEFT ABOUT A 1" BALL OF PLUMBERS PUTTY AFTER DOING A PLUMBING JOB AT MY HOUSE, I PLAYED WITH IT AND THEN THE IDEA STRUCK ME.

ON SMALL LOADS FOR THE HO LAYOUT I JUST MADE A VERY SMALL BALL ABOUT THE SIZE OF A BB AND STUCK IT ON THE BOTTOM OF THE WHEEL OR ON THE BOTTOM OF A STACK OF LUMBER IN SEVERAL PLACES AND PRESSED THE LOAD DOWN MASHING THE PUTTY FLAT, THEREFORE MAKING IT INVISIBLE WHEN THE TRAIN GOES BY. YOU CAN WIPE IT OFF WITH A RAG AND IT NEVER STAINS THE CAR OR THE LOAD. YOU CAN USE IT OVER AND OVER TOO.

WHEN I USED HOT WHEELS FOR LOADS IT IS IDEAL ON THE BOTTOM OF THE WHEELS.

TRY IT YOU WILL LIKE IT.

HAPPY MODELING,

LEW

hi i use white plastic tile spases for fencing just cut 1 piece off so it leaves a t shape make small hole & put them in it makes good white fencing... john...

I made a microwave tower by taking the cross arms off of a High tension tower (from a kit) then I found some acorn husks in my yard and painted them up to resemble the reflectors on some of the real towers. I topped it off with a red round headed pin stuck in the top for the obstruction light.

I really enjoy your 'tips' emails!!

Joe

I used to wrack my brain trying to get the right look of RUST on my models and dioramas.

After trying various concoctions, I realized that I was making it too complicated. RUST DUST! gathered by sanding a rusted piece of sheet iron with 400 grit sandpaper and applied to a surface with a soft brush LOOKS JUST LIKE RUST...

DUH,
simplify...,
Ray

I pretty much agree with Dave on all his tips. But it's not always problems with the track work. Get rid of the plastic wheel sets that come with most kits. Gunk tends to build up on the wheels and eventually cause derailments. Always file your points on turnouts. I don't really feel it's necessary to drop feeders every 3 feet. If you solder the rail joints every 9 to 10 feet will work. Use insulated rail joiners at turnouts or cut gaps in the rails. Dave has a very valid point about getting the track work right before stating anything else. I would love to go back and relay a lot of my rail but there are many areas that it would be next to impossible and at today's prices, not in the budget. Which brings me to rail code. I know code 83 looks more realistic, but when I started, code 100 was the most affordable. Also engines at the time had deep flanges that didn't run on code 83. I thin if you weather and ballast your track properly the overall effect can look almost as good. Attached is a shot of one of my industrial sites at McMakin, WV on my Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. Yes, that really is code 100.

Thank you for a very excellent source of model railroading tips.

John

Al

Here are some ideas that I've used on my layout now under construction. The photo illustrates trees made from local weeds and a little clump foliage and or Model Railway grass. Layout 1 shows two varieties. In the foreground is a variety of Queen Anne's Lace. I dipped the tops into a mix of white glue, water and a drop or two of dish liquid. Then shake in a bag filled with a little Grass mix. I mix several

shades for variety and I think it helps with realism. The weeds in the back are common Pig weed with Clump foliage glued to the branches. I like to leave some branches bare on some trees so that it gives the appearance of diseased trees. In the real world trees are not all perfect like the models we buy for our layouts. Layout 5 gives a good illustration of what I mean. Lay out six shows more of the Queen Anne's Lace in the foreground. In the back is another weed (I'm not sure what it's called), but I give it the same treatment as the Queen Anne's lace save I use a darker colour. Mix in some manufactured trees and you've got a cheap and realistic looking forest.

You have my permission to use the photos and ideas if you choose. Just provide acknowledgement. Thanks. Hope this helps.

Lorne

Al, I use Reversible Pot Toppers from Michael's for any spot on my R.R. that needs tufts of grass or weeds. They are quite cheap and work wonderfully. If you turn them over it looks like really nasty ground cover. You can pluck it for tufts or cut it for bigger sizes.

I am not sure if this is the kind of tip you wanted, but it is one of my favorites.

Also, strip the rubber coating off of electric wire, and you have hoses of any size that that can think of. Doug

Paint your undercarriage and trucks with Pollyscale Oily Black - a greenish/brownish black which approximates the color of real wheelsets - before weathering. Looks way better than putting dirt on a glossy black plastic.

EA

HI AGAIN AL,

MODELING A COLE MINE. CAN BE EASY. YOU CAN USE A HOLE IN THE SIDE OF YOUR MOUNTAIN. TO BACK YOUR ORE CAR INTO THE HOLE JUST FAR ENOUGH THAT YOU CANT SEE THE END, THAT MEANS YOU WILL HAVE TO LAY A LITTLE TRACK IN THE HOLE. TO ACCEPT AN ORE CAR. BACK THEM IN THE HOLE TO MAKE THEM APEAR TO BE REMOVING COAL. YOUR IDEA IS GREAT TO SIMULATE A COAL LOAD ON YOUR MINE CARS HOOKED TO A SMALL SWITCH ENGINE.

THE COAL CAN BE MODELED BY USING YOUR IDEA WITH THE CAT LITER, GET SOME BLACK FABRICK DIE AND MIX WITH WATER LIKE YOU WERE GOING TO DIE A SHIRT. MAKE A DESPOSEABLE TRAY W/A PIECE OF ALUMINUM FOIL. IN A LARGE MEASUREING CUP MIX THE DIE AND WATER WITH THE CAT LITER, WHEN IT IS MIXED WELL SPREAD IT OUT ON A TRAY MADE OF THE ALUMANUM FOIL DON'T MIX MORE THAN A CUP OF CAT LITER IN A 2 CUP GLASS MEASUREING CUP STIR IT WELL WITH A STICK YOU CAN THROW IT A WAY. WHILE YOU ARE MIXING WATER WITH DIE YOU CAN TELL ABOUT HOW MUCH WATER AND CAT LITER TO USE.

WHEN IT IS MIXED WELL SPREAD THE CAT LITER AND DIE IN THE TRAY AND PUT IN A COMMON OVEN AT LOW HEAT TO DRY, AFTER POURING OFF THE EXCESS LIQUID PLACE THE TRAY IN THE OVEN, THE LOW HEAT CAN BE UP TO 150 DEGREES FARENHEIT. NOT ANY MORE.

WHEN THE CAT LITTER IS GOOD AND DRY YOU HAVE SIMULATED COAL TO LOAD YOUR CARS WITH AND PILE IN YOUR YARD STORAGE AREA PUT ON YOUR LOADER BUCKET ETC. YOU CAN USE DURHAMS ROCK HARD WATER PUTTY IN A DRY POWDER FORM TO SPRAY WITH A MYSTER AND MAKE IT STICK TOGETHER. JUST MIX IT WITH THE DIED CAT LITTER AND MIST IT WITH WATER AND A SPRAYER.

WHEN IT DRYs AGAIN IT WILL IN ONE PIECE. THE MAIN THING IS TO POUR IT OUT IN THE SHAPE IT WILL BE FALLING OUT OF THE CONVEYER. YOU CAN MAKE PILES UNDER THE END OF THE CONVEYER AND IN THE STORAGE YARD. A PIECE IF 1/4 INCH PLYWOOD PAINTED DULL GREY TO LOOK LIKE CONCRETE CAN BE USED TO MAKE A STAGING AREA IN THE YARD.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO USE A MINE SHAFT BUILDING TO LOOK EVEN MORE REAL THERE IS A KIT AVAILABLE AT WALTHERS. IT IS CALLED A BLACK BART MINE KIT. FOR ABOUT \$20.00 BUCKS. THAT REALLY MAKES IT LOOK REAL. REMEMBER TO SPRAY WITH WATER AFTER YOU HAVE MIXED IN DURHAMS ROCK HARD WATER PUTTY. SO YOUR PILES OF COAL WONT

GET SPREAD AROUND. IF YOU WANT TO SIMULATE AN END LOADER DUMPING A PILE OF COAL PUT SOME IN THE BUCKET AND SOME ON THE GROUND AND WET BOTH PILES WITH A SPRAYER OF WATER WITH THE WATER PUTTY MIXED IN WITH THE COAL. LEW COOK,

I cut a 1/8" dowel 2.75". Then cut a second piece of dowel 1.25". Make a groove on each piece on the long one groove should be 1/2" from the top. On the short one the groove should be 1/4" from the end. Affix with glue to the grooves and clamp. you now have a LIGHT POLE. cut the heads off of 1-1 1/4" dry wall screws. Affix with super glue 1/8" from the end of the short piece. Paint with aluminum paint. Counter sink to a depth of 1/4" and glue. You now have a HO scale 20 foot light pole.

Big Al

Careful superelevation of curves, particularly tight setrack curves, can really add realism to a small layout. Transitioning gradually from level track, you can use scrap cardboard to superelevate curves which then makes the visual effect of tight radii less disturbing....

Grahame

Thanks for your inspiring tips. I've just started into Scale Model Railways, and the best tip I could suggest is to check your layout sizes properly before you start! If a layout suggests, say, 9 foot by 12 foot, you may be happy knowing that that is the size of your space, but don't forget it is wise to be able to get at ALL areas, and helpful to have walkways around your layout for various reasons. One is access to otherwise out of reach areas for servicing, and to be able to view ALL areas of your well designed layout. I only know because I didn't do this. I fille the room, and now have to turn buildings around to see all the effort I put into scratch building them, and mountains I had planned on, I couldn't build, because they would block parts of my interesting scenery! Once again, thanks for all your hints and tips, keep it up.

Regards,

Tom Oliver

When building a tunnel for my grandson's HO railroad I used a flexible 3" metal hose similar to that used for a clothes dryer duct. When cut lengthwise it can be shaped to form the perfect inside to a tunnel. Painted flat black it looks exactly like the inside of a real tunnel which has been blasted out of a mountain. For the outside I built my "mountain" out of foam and covered it with paper mache.

Don

Hi Al,

Here are a couple more tips. For corrugated pipe, I roll a piece of aluminum foil around a bolt. As you roll it on, press the foil into the threads and glue the end onto the tube. You can just unscrew it. For longer pieces get a piece of all thread. It's not very strong so it wouldn't work under a road but great for a flatcar load. For a little more realism, daub silver paint onto the foil. It will make it look more like it is galvanized.

Here's an inexpensive tip for pipe loads. Use brake tubing. You can get it at any auto parts store like Napa or Car Quest or whoever you have across the pond. It comes in diameters from 3/16" to 1/2" and lengths from 8" to 48." It's coated to prevent rust but can be sanded off to weather it. It can be painted over though. To make a more accurate wall thickness, the inner diameter will need to be hogged out on the ends.

Emil

I found a good way 2 make chain link fences.

What I do is get some security window screen mesh, cut it 2 the required size.

Get 2 or more match sticks & glue them 2 to the mesh, paint it Humbrol Matt grey on both sides, allow 2 dry then install.

Paul

Like most modellers I do believe in

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"Never throw anything away"

I do believe in the 3 Ps

Plan it (on Paper)

Perfect it (with trackage)

Play (trains)

A 6 ft x 4 ft can become a giant Wurlitzer if you don't believe in K.I.S.S.

In all aspects of railway modelling always

Keep

It

Simple

Straightforward

Anything is possible Work within your own abilities and capabilities

Mac

PS You can buy Scenery plaster bandage

**at a highish price So far I have,over the past 20 years used
about1.5hundredweight.**

Total cost to me was zilch except for a 1st class stamp 20 years ago

**I wrote to the Chief Exec of the local hospital where we lived. I asked if he would
sell the plaster off cuts from the fracture clinic**

I can have as much as I need for Free

MORAL

Look around you the answer is closer than you think

Basics. I often wondered why some modelers go to great lengths making their bench-work like fine cabinetry. When I visit other railroads I don't look under their skirts to admire their woodwork. The scenery and fascia board is going to hide it anyway. And why go to such extraordinary trouble to make sure the bench-work is absolutely level. The real world certainly isn't. That's why the real railroads have cuts and fills. As long as your mainline and yards don't look like a roller coaster it doesn't matter. and where it does, you make sure the risers are level from one to the next.

Cost saving tips. Look for alternate materials that cost less than the published recommended items. I scavenge hunt new home building sites. Be sure to get permission from the foreman. When you tell them you're a model railroader they usually go out of their way to help. For my sub-roadbed I used the same stuff that they use for roofs. It's a kind of wafer board and they throw lots of it in the dumpster. And if you have to have a full sheet for some reason, it's a lot cheaper than plywood. For the actual roadbed I used an insulation board called celotex instead of homasote. At the time I was building roadbed and such, a sheet of homasote was \$14.00 a sheet. The celotex cost only \$4.00 at the time. It was easy to cut with a utility knife and could easily be beveled with a rasp.

I have formed whole mountains from the cardboard they throw away that refrigerators or other appliances were packed. It's light weight and with proper planning can be built on a table top or workbench, scenery added and then put in place on the bench work. At a later date I'll send some pictures of how to make lift outs from corrugated card board. Attached is a photo of some of my West Virginia mountains.

John

John/j2

I have found a very inexpensive way to generate ground foam. Take some Green, Florist styrofoam, and grate it on an old cheese grater. You can use the different sizes of the grater, to make fine foam, for lawns, and courser foam, for bushes and tree foliage.

I have also used the corrugated part of a flexible drinking straw, as highway colverts. When painted and place on my layout, they look very realistic.

Ronald

Hi Al, I find your tips very helpful as I'm new at this hobby. I've only been working on my first layout for a few weeks, but I may have a tip or two for everyone. I've been using pink foam sheets for terrain and I have found that carving terrain is quick and easy with a sanding disk made for paint and rust removal. It fits in a drill motor and is very aggressive, removing foam rather quickly. Also, a can of Static Guard nearby keeps the foam bits and dust from clinging to me and my clothing. Thanks, and happy modeling.

Phil

Hi Al thanks for your emails most interesting, On my layout to produce tunnels and rock faces have used cardboard boxes etc covered in mesh and sprayed with plumbers expanding foam, when it hardens it can be shaped to the req,d contours and painted with grey emulsion paint This will take trees bushes and scatter materials.

Regards Dave.

and by the way, replacement of plastic wheels with metals wheels reduces rubbish building up on the surface of the rails and improves running!

Lowe

a tip for you ordinary biro pens buy them 20 for a pound clean out the ink glue a few together paint black add a little rust in parts put on flat bed chain with cheap jewellers chain very cheap and convincing load of steel pipes straight out of the foundry.

Roy

A local grocery store was remodeling their front facade with a plaster/stucco design (Exterior Insulating Finish System....aka...EIFS.) and I was able to get the excess pieces of 4 foot long styrofoam forms they used. These will provide ample stability for mountains, tunnels and roadbeds along side of mountains. Several different shapes were available including angles and slopes for grades. Free materials with endless possibilities to shape and fabricate "solid" yet lightweight structures & scenery.

Regards,

Brian

I use blue foam board (insulation from Lowe's) to act as a base for my layout. It can be bent, molded easily, cut easily and glued in various shapes. It also can be cut to change grades and is much cheaper than the woodland scenic riser system. Mistakes and adjustments are easily done. The board is sold in 8' sheets in varying thicknesses, which also makes it very versatile.

Paul

Keep baseboards, track and electrics (or electronics) as simple as possible.

1. Use lightweight base board materials- don't overengineer it
2. Track plans to be 'less not more', ie don't try and cram a quart into a pint pot
3. Unless you like lots of wires, isolating sections and electrical

glitches, use DCC

CN

one of the easiest items i picked up was some very tiny road chippings glued into place and stained with a very light dusting of creosote make brilliant field walls total cost £0

Roy

Heres a couple of tips using household items first is bubble wrap I use bubble wrap for a fast moving river with lots of differing size rocks cut the BW to shape paint it whichever Blue you want paint the bubbles any Greys, Beiges etc as rocks you can also paint the front of a bubble black the rear of the bubble blue and stick some small strands of cotton wool over the top to give the impression of spray (tip put the cotton wool strips on while the paint is still wet and it will glue it forever) second tip is birds fat ball feeder nets want a rock fall ? use small BW and put the FB net over it to give the impression of the falling rocks being held in place (tip use workmen at the bottom to show they are working on the problem and put roadwork signs to stop cars/people getting to near) I got all this after a trip to Yosemite last year and the drive along the Merced river.

Steve

My suggestion for chain link fences is to use matchsticks and open weave surgical gauze, matchsticks can be substituted with toothpicks if you require round poles, using dark green food colouring for the gauze makes it easy to colour

Keith

Hi Alastair,

I'm relatively new to the hobby, but here's a little tip.

When I first started I bought a bag of trees for \$20. The next Christmas I found the same trees for \$5 at Home Depot and I bought 2 more bags. If you can wait for Christmas, I suggest HD. They have some snow on them. I just spray painted them green.

Glen

Everyone with a computer printer eventually sees it die (they are so cheap replacing the ink twice costs more than the printer). Don't throw it away! Ask around if yours isn't on life support - someone around you has or will have a dead one! Inside are motors, gears, springs, shafts, small screws, cables, do-hickeys and whats-its you will find lots of uses for.

WARNING: Put down plastic or newspaper BEFORE you begin disassembling - there is dried ink in little balls inside that can make a mess; having a rag or paper towels at hand is not a bad idea either. Today's ink is made from soybeans and is water-based so it is safe (as long as you don't get it on the wife's carpet, furniture, or other items - then there can be unsafe swinging of frying pans!), and you can wash your hands with soap and water quickly.

If it has a glass plate for copying be careful. And BE SURE to remove the ink cartridges before you begin! Remove all the screws you can find, then pry the case open with a flat screwdriver - don't worry if you crack the case, it's being thrown away when you are done anyway.

Usually the death of the printer is in the circuitry, so the motors, etc. are good. There will be a motor to move the ink back and forth, one to move the paper, and if it is a copier, one to move the scanning assembly; motors with more than two wires are stepper motors which need electronic control (lots of info on the web if you look up robotic hobby sites or remote control airplane sites should you want to use them).

The others (usually the paper & ink motors) will run on 12 volts fine - use your train throttle control to determine an acceptable voltage if using for animation, etc. Many components from the circuit boards can be removed and used if you have the patience (connectors, switches, transistors, resistors, etc.) and are into the electrical & electronics part of the hobby.

I found several things that I will incorporate in a turntable. Use your imagination! Remember it's all free stuff if you are willing to put a few minutes into mining for it!

I've found that cutting window screen for fencing (HO = 1/2" Ht.) is made much easier by laying the screen on FROGTAPE, paint bordering,

then line marking the tape using a yard stick and cutting with old scissors.

The screen is much more consistent in height for the whole length.

Austin - Goodlettsville, TN

Hello Al,

I appreciate your emails and helpful tips. Everything on my end is a work in progress and will be for several months. Here is what I have to share at this point so far....

...Use the "extra" vinyl slats from plantation style mini-blinds after you have trimmed the blinds to custom fit your windows at home. Some uses are: Supports for hillsides, mountains, tunnels, embankments, bulkheads. Also used for roofing on buildings, roadway bases, and for making sliding doors on garages, cattle gates, billboard signs, etc.....

Recycling products teaches our youth to respect mother Earth and to keep expenses down.

-How about using the mesh/ metal wire cover of a computer speaker as a chain-link fence. Just flatten it out and solder it to some large, rigid wire for posts.

-Go to an art/craft store and buy a bag of the cheapest decorative gravel (or even some new aquarium gravel, natural red is common) and apply hobby-tack to a building, wait for it to become tacky, and shake on the gravel. It instantly looks like a cobble-stone building.

-Finely crush real coal, and add into Woodland Scenics Smooth-It road mixture. Experiment with the amount of coal added. If done properly, it would look like a asphalt road OR a blacktop road, depending on the amount of coal added.

-Worried about trains derailing inside tunnels? If out of view, keep the backs of the tunnels open, so it's easy to reach and rerail.

A tip I wish to share is when laying curved track, lay a row of matches (used of course) around the outer edge of the curve just under the sleepers, this will give a good camber on your curves just like real life and will mean you can run trains faster through curved sections. Just lay the curved track (without fixing down), draw a pencil line around the edge of the sleepers, remove track and glue matches on the inside of the pencil line. fix track on top of this and ballast in the normal way. Result is a better looking curved track, trains will also lean slightly into the curve. Can't do this in curved station areas.

Brian

for ground cover, i collect sawdust from my saws, sift out the fine stuff, i use latex paint tint mix with water , soak saw dust particals in it, drain and let dry., i have also used food color,printers water based ink, green of course.

Larry

Ideas for N gauge model trains.

Dirt and ballast

I used real dirt (in this case red) for my layout that I put through a sieve to take out rocks and lumps. I also therefore have a box of rocks and lumps!

I found that using half white glue, half water and a few drops of dishwashing liquid perfect, however pouring it on ground cover is not easy as the drops leave 'dents.' The other tool I have now is a fine spray (used originally to hold cleaner for reading glasses) which has water and dishwashing liquid in it (No glue). This can be

sprayed over everything safely and cuts the surface tension prior to adding the glue and water.

The applicator for glue and water is also worth some thought. I use a plastic sauce bottle, with a thin piece of brass tube inserted (drilled push fit) into the top. This gives fantastic control. Ie by squeezing air out of the bottle before holding it down will keep all the liquid in there and under control. Great for doing n gauge turn out ballast!

In a similar way found a great source for ballast from the local garden and sand shop. Came away with a bag of the right colour stuff for free and sieved it. Then sieved it again in front of a fan to 'winnow' out the dust. I now have far more than I need. (Not sure what the neighbours think!)

Coffee grounds is a great source of ground cover.

Roads

I have used aluminium flashing for roads (used by builders) and practically anything. It is cheap, light and can be cut with scissors. It has 'memory' when cutting and bending. A spray with etch (grey) gives a terrific base coat to produce practically anything.

Corrugated iron roofing

As above, take some flashing and spend some time scoring it with an old knife. The scores need to be one mil apart at least for n gauge. Once it is done it makes perfect corrugated iron roofing. Rust can be applied using burnt sienna acrylic paint and a paint brush that is flat and about as wide as a scale sheet of tin. Deft touch and there is a perfect roof.

Track laying

I used rubber strip from the local rubber store for a track bed. (50 m by 3m strip. Bought in a role) Cut down the middle and reversed allowed for the 'uncut' edges to be aligned with the centre line for the track. Used caulk (appropriate colour) to glue the bed as it is easily removed.

When the track is ready I used caulk to glue it to the bed. Once again easy to remove the whole thing if necessary.

Brake Light

I have put a simple car reversing light in series with my layout. This reduces the 'cut out' incidences from the DCC unit, and allows the reversing circuits to beat the DCC cut out, thus making them work.

Turn out control

I have used atlas code 80 track, which has switches for all turn outs (points) that are ugly and impossible to use from an aesthetic perspective. I attached a camera to one of my cars to see what the layout looked like and all I could see were huge black switches.

These are now replaced with a simple rod and switch. I used cheap electrical switches as they provide an excellent mechanical 'throw' and drilled through the toggle near the base to provide enough movement for the turn out switch. Then used simple stainless welding rod (can be bought in copious quantities from any welding store) as linkage. (1.6ml is practically perfect). All accessible switching now occurs manually and I have thrown away the code 80 switches, unless I have kept them for electric remote switches. I am now working on camouflage..

John

Hope you've enjoyed them.

Happy modelling.

All the best,

Al

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