

SCENERY MADE EASY!

By Robbo

Building Trees for the Bridge Diorama

Number 5 in a Series

This Scenery Made Easy article is aimed at showing how some of the trees were created for the Bridge scene, namely the large Douglas Fir and also a Silver Birch (which ended up not being on the diorama because it was too big for the space available), a dead tree and two other trees, being a Birch and an Oak — however these two were “shop bought”, but I will be explaining the way they were created.

The basic method creating these is pretty standard for most tree builds, it is just a matter of the foliage style created and the colour of the ground foam used, as well as the colours used for painting the trunk and branch armatures!

So I decided this would be a little more “illustrative” in showing the building techniques with photos and short descriptive captions, instead of the text heavy manner ... so without further ado, let's become arborists!



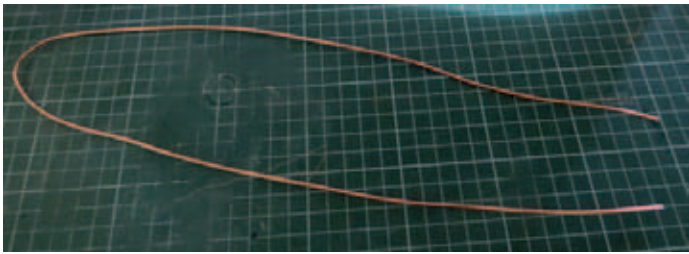
DOUGLAS FIR



Start with a length of SISAL ROPE — don't try to use the new styles of nylon ropes available today, you need to be using Sisal so that all of the natural fibres making up the rope can be unravelled to create the base of the pine.



Cut approx 10 lengths of rope to about 90mm wide, these amounts will depend on the size you want your tree to be, both in width and height. Then unravel each piece and lay them out similar to the photo above.



Here I am using a piece of copper wire, approx 2mm thick. You could use pretty well any kind of wire as long as it is easily bent and twisted.

Make your wire length to be more than double the height of your tree PLUS more for the top and bottom areas to allow twisting and clamping — see each of the following photos.



Using a piece of scrap timber, twist a CUP HOOK into the top of the board to hold your copper wire — make a loop twist in the wire and slip it over the cup hook. Lay out the wire as shown above and then place a bead of strong glue, such as Liquid Nails or similar construction adhesive, onto the bottom most wire.

Place your sisal as above, leaving small gaps between each group and then bend the topmost wire over the entire unit, sandwiching the sisal between the two wires. By now you can see where we are heading!

This method is an adaptation of the old “bottle brush” Christmas Tree from years ago!



While the glue is drying, use small spring clamps or “dog clips” to keep things in place. The wire and sisal unit can be lifted from the piece of scrap timber originally used when doing the layout.



Once the glue has dried thoroughly, with a pair of sharp kitchen scissors trim the sisal either side of the wire into a rough conical shape, see above.



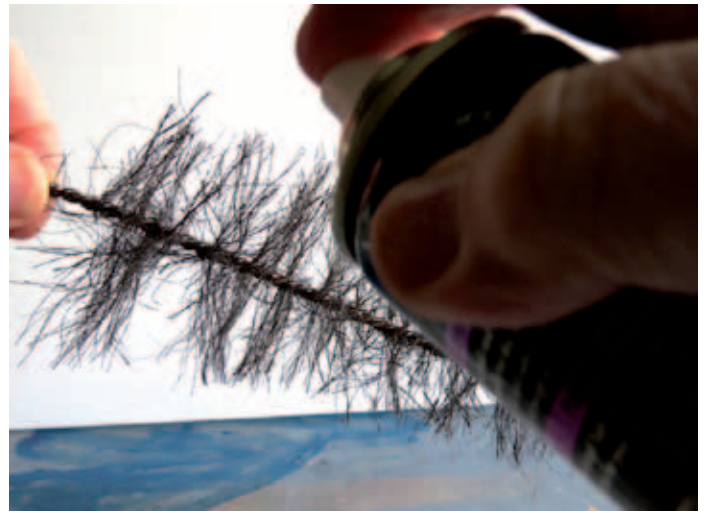
With a nail or screw fastened to a sturdy work bench, place the loop of the wire over the nail/screw and firmly clamp the other end of the wires into an electric drill or old hand drill.

SLOWLY twist the wire until it looks similar to the photo below. You will find that the sisal will spin out with the individual strands forming a “body” of branch armatures into a circular pattern around the twisted wire. Release the wire from the drill and work bench and fit the resulting piece into a hole in a scrap piece of timber to hold it while painting!





Using a spray can of brown paint (gloss or matt, it doesn't matter) completely spray the tree and set aside to dry. Then trim off the TOP of the wire very close to what will be the top of your tree with wire cutters.



Use a CHEAP brand of lady's hair spray and thoroughly cover the tree with the spray. It does get messy, so try not to get too much onto your fingers, because the next step will have the foam sticking to you, as well as the tree!



Holding the tree by the BASE over a large container (such as a large plastic bucket or ice cream container), sprinkle the MEDIUM ground foam over the "sticky" tree from the UNDERNEATH of the branch armatures.



Have two grades, fine and medium of a deep, dark green coloured ground foam. See Painting Techniques Number 5 on how to create your own ground foam. Depending on the number of trees being created, you will need a plentiful supply on hand.



Repeat this last step, give it another good spray of hair spray and sprinkle more medium foam, but also sprinkle from ABOVE, so that the foam is being built up on the tops and under parts of the tree!



With most of the tree almost complete using the medium ground foam, again give it a good spray over and “drizzle” some of the FINE ground foam on the underparts as well as the tops of the branches.

This will give you quite a compact, heavy foliated looking tree as shown above.

If you wish to create a SPARSELY leafed pine, then obviously you will be using much less of the medium foam, but still apply the fine foam because this is giving the tree the finished appearance of foliage.

To create highlights on your tree, gently sprinkle a LIGHTER shade of green fine foam onto the branches.

To finish off your tree and making it ready for “planting” on the layout or diorama find a suitable stick or shrub branch from your garden to use as a trunk for the pine. One with a nice texture to simulate the pine tree “bark” would be ideal. Cut it to a suitable size and drill a hole large enough to fit the base twisted wire and then slide your tree wire twist through the hole and fasten with a suitable adhesive.

Make sure that you still leave a length of the wire poking out from the base of the “trunk” so that you can have this wire piece to affix into a hole drilled in the layout terrain or diorama terrain for holding the tree in place — it will be quite top heavy so will have a tendency to topple over unless well secured!

Have fun, the more you try it, the better your trees will become. Vary the size, height and coverage for variation, and when “planting” always have an odd amount, never even, as in nature!

READY MADE TREES



The trees above are from Woodland Scenics but other companies such as FALLER, NOCH, BUSCH also manufacture ready made trees. They are also available through ebay from one or two Chinese suppliers, which although not great can fill a spot reasonably cheaply — unlike the first four brand names, which do get pricey.

There are also companies who specialise in some of the more unusual trees, such as Palm Trees of different varieties, as well as Ferns and bushes.

However, the two examples above have been created by first making the tree armatures from twisted wire. You can use a heavy gauge fuse wire, multi- stranded electrical cable (stripped) with individually thin wire as a core, thin copper wire — any wire that is malleable.

A bunch of wires are gathered together in a bundle — and starting from the base working upwards, smaller groups of wires are pulled away from the main core bundle in ever decreasing thicknesses creating a web of thinning branch armatures. It is easier to study the photos above to grasp the methodology.

Once the armature has been created, keeping in mind the type of tree which will determine the final SHAPE of your tree, and the style of how your branches are arranged, it has to be covered in some type of covering.

Some methods are: using DAS modelling clay the armature is covered with a thin layer and set aside to dry. Also, before drying, it is often a good idea to “texture” the DAS to create a bark suitable for your type of tree, this can be done with a sharp toothpick or similar to give it the desired finish.

Once dried the DAS can be painted with acrylics, oils or poster colours, something that has a thicker consistency than just water colours.

Another way of covering the wire armature is to use your moulding plaster, mixing up a sloppy mix and “dipping” the tree into the mixture. Not too sloppy otherwise the plaster will drain off too much.

Emulsion paint can also be used to dip the armature into; as well as using Liquid Latex for the same thing.

Trial and error may be needed to find the best material that suits your needs. When painting the tree, reference images to show you the colours and shade variations that occur on the bark of the tree. It doesn't have to be perfect, but it should indicate the type of tree that is being modelled.

For the FOLIAGE there are available materials specifically designed to simulate the leaf coverage on your tree. One of these is shown below — again it is a Woodland Scenics product. It is a layer of thin fibre mesh that is impregnated with fine ground-up foam. Pieces are cut to size and teased apart to shape and then glued to your tree branch armatures with a quick drying glue or contact cement. It is a little tricky at first, but persevere and you will be very happy with your finished tree.

Another method is to first use poly fibre as the base for the “leaves” to rest upon, this is sprayed with hair spray and again a medium grade of ground foam is sprinkled over the poly fibre. Don't try to do it all at once, instead spray, sprinkle; wait — then repeat these three steps until you feel a satisfactory result is achieved.

Once the base is done, a different shade of ground foam can be used to represent highlighted leaves; or it can represent younger leaves, with the older, darker leaves being underneath. Also a Fine grade of ground foam can be sprinkled to add “texture” to the tree canopy. If desired you could also sprinkle some of the NOCH Leaves that has been mentioned previously in the Bridge Construction article. All the time using the hair spray as the binding adhesive.

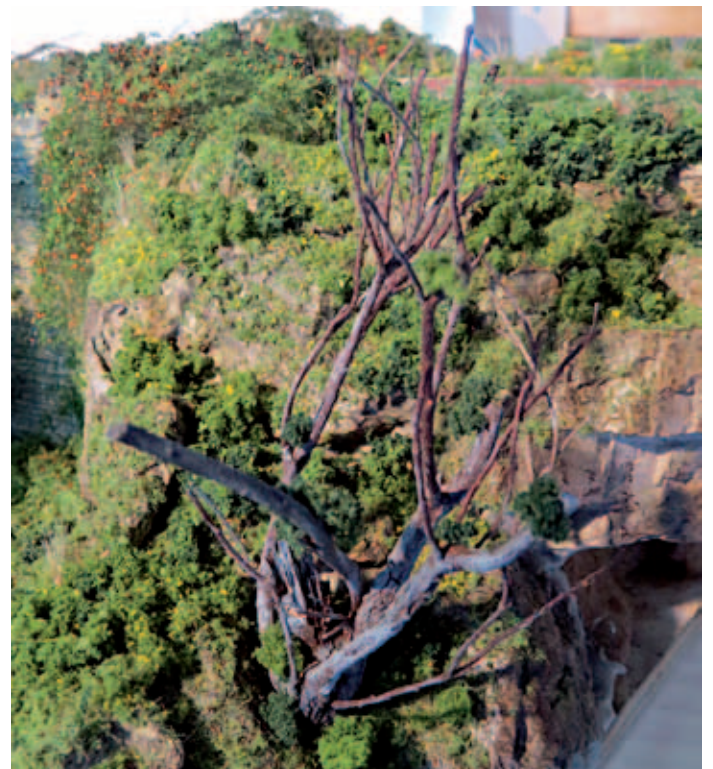


THE DEAD TREE

Any suitable shrub, tree, hedge or underbrush from your garden can give you a supply of materials to create an easy “dead tree” for your scene. It is simply having an image in your “mind's eye” of what you are looking for and carefully looking in the garden or outdoors for a suitable donor. It might be necessary to trim out the section from a larger piece to get the correct “layout” of branches that you want for the tree.

Also, on occasion I have found a great piece to use, but there simply were not enough branches — so drill a small hole in the “trunk” of your tree and ADD branches with twigs, etc. until your shape is created.

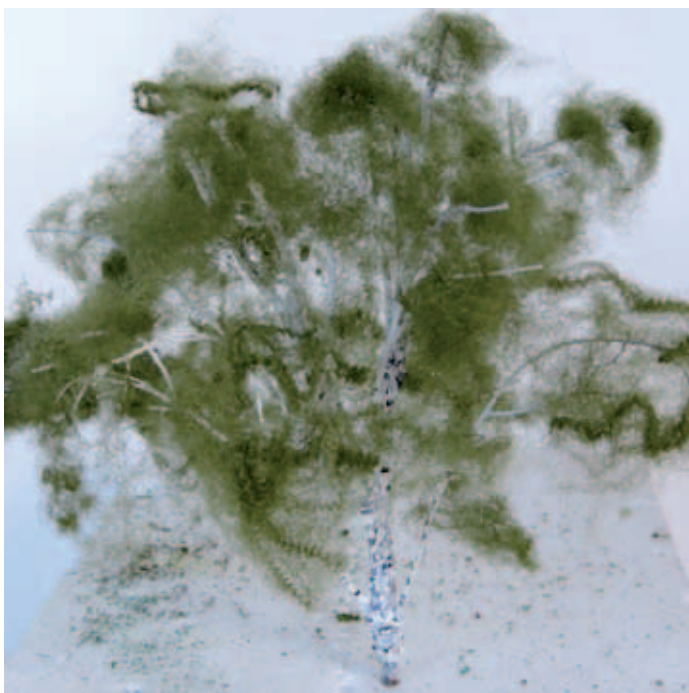
With the one I am using here I chose it because of the piece that had been broken off, leaving a representation of a large trunk that had been broken off in a storm from the main tree trunk. Suitably painted to give it an older, decayed look about it, with bits of ground foam strategically placed to replicate clumps of mistletoe!



LARGE SILVER BIRCH

This was created to go onto the Bridge diorama but ended up being too big to sit satisfactorily in the area that I wanted to position it, so it has been set aside for another Linka Project.

A suitable spindly armature was found from a shrub located while I was out walking my dog. It was trimmed to the basic shape and sprayed white from a cheap can of spray paint, allowed to dry and then the “tell tale” Birch black rings were painted using an acrylic paint and a small paint brush, see photos below.



The photos probably show the different steps easily enough without too much text — but simply it was first applying the coloured poly fibre to the branch armatures, then applying the hair spray and the ground foams as previously stated in the earlier pages of this article. I have used varying shades of greens for my foliage, as well as three different shades of the NOCH Leaves to add highlights and young and old foliage. Remember that nature never has an even colour to it, there are many subtle variations in the foliage colours, either caused from highlights and shadows created by the sun, or more mature parts of the tree compared to new shoots forming new leaves — AAHHH! NATURE!



Give it a go, never be worried about failure, because with this style of modelling there is no such thing as a failure — you simply say — “Oh, it was unfortunately damaged in the storm we had last night!” and then move on and try another one. Never throw them away, they can be resurrected for another try, nothing is ever wasted, we always can reuse the materials. And when all is said and done, you probably are going to ENJOY creating a tree, simply for the relaxation and fun of DOING IT!!!

Happy Modelling peoples — until the next article!

Rob