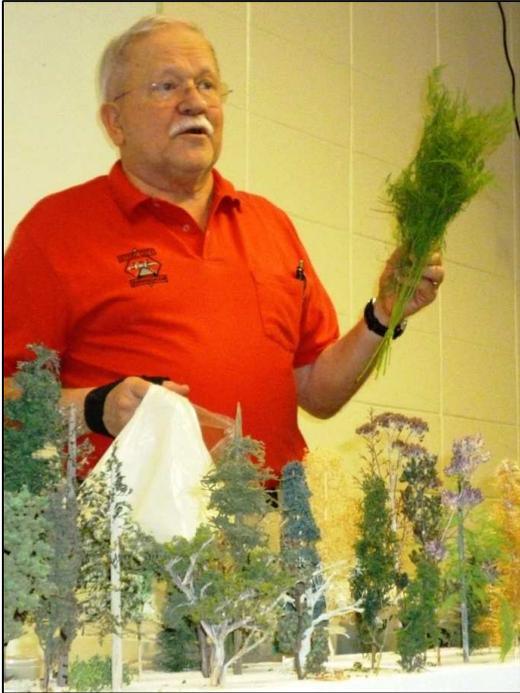


Thinking Scenically – Trees

Steel City Division Feb 16, 2012

By Bob Beaty, MMR



There have been some famous Model Rail Roder tree makers over the past several years. Some whom you may recognize like Leaf Ericson, Walther (Wal) Nutt, Olie F. Hydrangea and George “Bumppy” Chenille. These wizards all had secret tree making procedures that they shared with me, and I will share with you. James Joyce said “only God can make a tree...” But you can make a pretty good model of one with little to no effort.

Model trees come in different categories.

Manufactured. These trees can come in all various shapes and types (and prices!). Some manufactures are: Woodland Scenics, Scenic Express, JTT, Faller, Heki, AMSI and Tall Timber Models to name a few. All need some extra help to provide individuality and uniqueness. Look in the catalogues and ads in the magazines for distributors.

Kits. There are several tree kits on the market from Campbell Scale Models, Woodland Scenics, the Tree Farm from Rock Quarry, JTT and Scenic Express. These models vary in size and complexity but a based on a central theme: Take an armature (tree trunk) and put green stuff on it. Some are easy, some tedious and all look pretty good when you finish if you pay attention to the directions.

Scratchbuilt: You make it with materials you scrounge or buy and customize them for your layout. This is the area we will explore in this clinic.

Furnace Filter Firs: Make a trunk armature from either a shaped piece of wood, dowel or shish kabob skewer. Scratch bark texture on it and paint a dark brownish gray color. Take a standard mesh furnace filter and cut appropriate chunks (your scale) and separate the strands to make them “airy.” Using the armature, pointy end up, impale these clumps (with some glue) in a conical shape. Spray the raw tree with hair spray or adhesive then sprinkle ground foam of your choice over it, making sure you get it well covered (but not a blanket). Spray again, and sprinkle a lighter color for highlights. Plant, pointy end up.

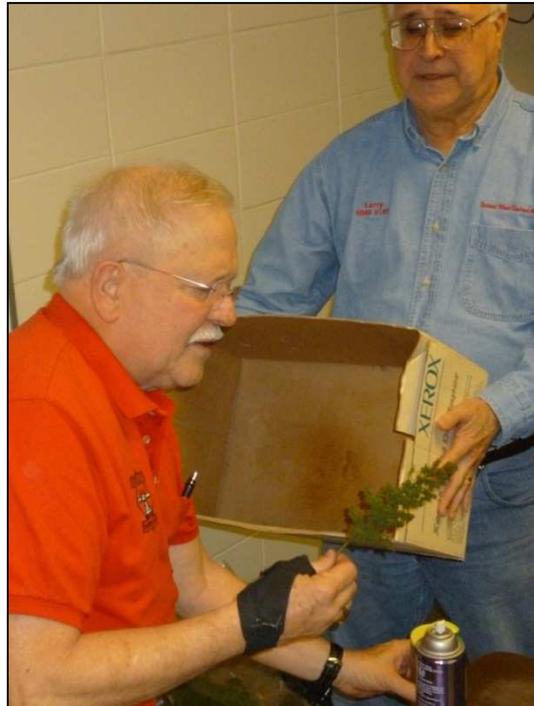
Bump Chenille Firs: Buy some 15mm Bump Chenille at Michael’s or Wal-Mart. Cut the “bumps” apart. Trim with scissors to form a “tree.” Dump out some appropriately colored ground foam in a small tray. Spray the “tree with adhesive then roll in the ground foam. “Fix” the tree with dull coat or matte medium. After it is dry, drill a hole and plant. These are great as background or N-Scale trees.

Pick and spray. Some fairly decent trees can be made quickly by spraying dry Golden Rod and Ragweed blossoms with green paint and sprinkling ground foam over them. Spirea, the brown

spike looking weed along the interstate can be trimmed and sprayed to resemble Lombardy poplar trees. Sedum and yarrow can be dried and sprayed as individual trees or grouped to make a large deciduous tree. (Wrap the stems with florist tape to form a solid trunk).

Generic Deciduous Trees: Some really great trees can be made from the blossoms of the Oak Leaf Hydrangea. Harvest the blossoms in the late fall when dry. Trim off the flower petals, leaving the “trunk” and seed pods. Shape the tree to your liking, using garden scissors, removing some branches and the little “blossom hairs.” Now that you have the tree armature there are several different routes to take to the finished tree. In a hurry? Use cheap (.99) green spray paint and spray the tree shape. Immediately sprinkle on ground foam. Spray again with hair spray to fix the foam. Plant.

Not so much of a hurry? Dip the tree shape in diluted matte medium (or white glue) and drain. While wet, sprinkle on ground foam. Allow this tree to dry. After it is dry, spray with adhesive or diluted glue solution and sprinkle on more ground foam (use an accent or highlight shade). Allow this to dry. (I stick the finished trees in a piece of Styrofoam, The edge of corrugated cardboard or hang by clothes pins). Plant.



Using the above process you can make trees from all sorts of different materials, shrubs and weeds. “Trunks” can be made from Nandina stems, Crepe Myrtle, Azalea stems, or even root systems from unwanted weeds. Take the trunk and glue on a leaf texture carrier. This can be lichen, clump ground foam, fiberfill (pillow stuffing) or even paper holes. Once you have attached the carrier material, spray with adhesive or diluted white glue and sprinkle on ground foam. Vary the shades of foam to give a variety or to accent highlights. (All trees are green, not all trees look the same green).

Build Up process. Several dried flower-arranging materials can make excellent trees. However, the process is time consuming and tedious. Oregano, Gypsonella, Candy Tuff, Baby’s Breath, Asparagus fern, Caspia and lichen moss, available from craft stores, can be used to make believable foreground trees. Sagebrush is an excellent armature for a foreground tree. Several vendors provide this material. Or, if you travel out west and have a sharp saw or hedge loppers, you can get your own. Don’t even try with a pocket knife.

Type 1. Select branches of gyp or Baby’s Breath and form a tree in your hand. Wrap wire or florist tape to hold the “trunk” together. Apply spackling compound or caulk to the trunk for texture. Paint the trunk and larger branches a dark gray and dust with ground foam. “Fix” the foam with hair spray of a pastel fixative.

Type 2. Trim a trunk shape from a ¼” square (or larger for large scales) balsa stick or a dowel rod. Texture and paint the trunk as mentioned above. Drill or punch in holes randomly around

the trunk. Insert Caspia or Asparagus fern with a drop of white glue into the holes. Dust on highlights with foam and fix.

Type 3. Select a length of hemp rope (about a foot), unravel the three main strands and boil in hot water until limp and straight. Hang out to dry. Once dry cut into 2 inch lengths (3-4 if modeling in O scale). Take a piece of florist wire and bend in half forming a “V.” Place the lengths of hemp between the two wire legs and twist into a bottle brush. Use glue to hold the strands and a drill to twist the trunk. Shape the tree with scissors then spray with brown paint (well-ventilated area, please). While still wet, roll the tree in green foam of a color you want. Hang the “tree” to dry. Inspect the new tree and add foam as necessary secure it all with cheap hair spray. You can add an extended trunk to raise the foliage above the ground surface.

Distant horizon trees. Clumps of Lichen, or puff balls made from fiberfill can be dipped into a diluted glue solution then covered with ground foam to provide the tree shapes for a ridge top or to simulate distant forests in a forced perspective scene. Take other scrub trees that don’t look good close up and add to the background foliage to increase the density. Then using your good foreground efforts, place them in front to create the forest.

Making trees can be fun, relaxing and even a family activity. Everyone in my family, including my wife helped me make trees. As you get into it, you realize how much trees enhance your layout and convert it from a toy train to a model railroad. Once you start, you also realize how many you will need. The search for the perfect model tree is a quest, not the Holy Grail but perhaps its coaster.

