

SCENERY MADE EASY!

By Robbo

Number 1 in a Series

CREATING SCENERY EFFECTS

I thought we might digress a little from the last four “Painting” editions and look at something completely different — but very essential for our Linka Buildings. **SCENERY** — and the many variants that come into play.

Again, some people are wary of creating scenery because they may feel intimidated by the mere thought of it. **BUT — it’s even EASIER than painting!** *There, how’s that for a statement?*

I want to show you how it can be not only enjoyable in “dressing” a scene, but also how it can be done **INEXPENSIVELY** by making your own materials from stuff that is laying around the house, or even found in kerb-side clean-ups!

To enhance our building, once it has been nicely painted and finished, we need to look at how we can “present it” with suitable greenery, shrubs, trees, etc.



To create a small diorama for your building not only makes it more visually interesting to the onlooker, but it also enhances the building itself.

Each Linka project built will have a reason why it was done in the first place — it could be for War Gaming, Railway Layouts, or simply built as a Display Piece to go in a cabinet or on a table. Whatever the reason, by going a few more steps will really give you the satisfaction of seeing it in a situation of “realism” — ie. where it belongs!

With my model railway layout that you may have found on this website, I find I have more pleasure from actually building the “scenery”, rather than operating the trains. In fact, the trains are almost a secondary item so that they give the scenery a reason for being! And, of course, the buildings are also to enhance the scenery.



SCENERY MATERIALS — HOW TO MAKE YOUR OWN

We all know that scenery materials are readily available on the internet, through ebay and online hobby shops — but they are expensive — especially when you have large areas to cover.

Even if you are creating a “one off” diorama for your model the material cost soon adds up, and may never be used again (although unlikely) — some items can be re-purposed and used for something different.

GROUND FOAM RUBBER

Used for grass, shrubs, tree foliage and probably things I have never thought of!

Some “foam rubbers” are definitely better than others — some are quite dense, others less so. I try to find one that has been used for padding in furnishings or even bed mattresses. (See *illustration below.*)



I presume Local Councils have clean-ups of some kind in most western countries around the world, like they do here in Australia, usually that is where I get my foam rubber — from a kerbside clean-up!

You will also need a way to grind your foam. I have seen on YouTube people using electric blenders (watch out ladies!) but that can work out expensive, especially if you burn out the motor trying to grind too much! Because you are using foam rubber (either wet or dry) in the blender, the motor will become very hot and you must be careful.

I found an old meat grinder which works wonders — and gives me 3 different grades of “ground foam” in ONE OPERATION! I use the “blade” with the smallest apertures, but sometimes the medium one as well. The one with the largest holes does not work well for me. (See illustration below and bottom next column.)



I find it best to COLOURISE my foam BEFORE grinding, doing it after is too hard. Here I use ACRYLIC or POSTER paints (cheap craft shop paint — cheaper the better), you may also have success with house emulsion paint.

With acrylic or poster paints I dilute the paint with water — trial and error here — to a suitable consistency and then chop up my foam into cubes (not too big, 4-5cm cubes) remembering you are going to HAND grind them. In a plastic bucket or similar, place your foam and dowse with paint/water mixture.

Make sure that ALL pieces are covered and immersed (they want to float) so I put an old china plate with a brick or heavy weight on top of it all to make sure the foam stays immersed — and leave it for 3 or 4 days, or until the foam takes on the colour completely.



I have found that the coloration varies considerably, and not evenly, but that's OK! Alternatively you could use a clothes dye, but you don't have the colour variations like you do with paint! My colour range includes dark green, “spring” green, sap green, olives, browns, even autumn colours of yellows, oranges and reds.

Once you are satisfied with the colour of your foam you need to let it dry. Try NOT to squeeze the foam, because a lot of the colour mixture will go and leave you with an unsatisfactory piece. The method of drying I use is to have a piece of wire mesh (chicken wire or bird wire used in cages) stretched over a void — such as having the wire stretched over a wheelbarrow.



FINE

MEDIUM

COARSE

3 different grades of “ground foam” in 1 operation

The reason for doing this is because with foam laid out on a solid surface the weight of the water/paint mix will press on the foam and the colour will leach out onto the surface. Even on the wire, the mixture will drip out, but with luck most of your colour will remain embedded in the foam.

Now let it dry COMPLETELY before attempting to grind it up.

SAND or SAWDUST

These materials can be used as a “grass scatter” or for shrubs, trees and flowers (*see illustration below*). Greens and browns for grasses or trees — reds, yellows, oranges, purples for flowers. Unfortunately WHITE does not work with these materials. If you want white for flowers, it is best to use ground foam and PAINT it.



Treating both these materials similarly — find suitable water soluble colour paint and mix with the water but not as liquid as used for the foam. In fact, you probably will need a much stronger ratio of paint to water, especially with the sand.

Again, using a suitable container, mix the sand or sawdust/colour liquid, adding only small quantities of each at a time, and stirring the mixture (almost paste-like) until the colour has been evenly distributed throughout. Set aside and do next batch. If you try to do too much at once it will not distribute colour evenly!



This time, your mixture can be spread out onto sheets of newspaper to dry — but NOT in clumps. Try to spread the mixture out evenly so that it will dry evenly. Drying may take some time, the sawdust will dry much more quickly than the sand, I have left my sand undisturbed for well over a week.

Once dried thoroughly the mixture (coloured sand or sawdust) needs to be “rubbed” through a fine mesh sieve and stored in a container for use. These are best used by “sprinkling” with your fingers over the areas. It can be used to represent flowers in a meadow or blooms in shrubs. A light green or a yellow could even be used in trees, by sprinkling from ABOVE the tree the flecks of colour can be made to replicate the sun making highlights in the foliage.



Both above images have had coloured sand sprinkled on foliage to represent flowers

CARPET UNDERFELT

I use this to cover large areas on my layout to create grassy hills, embankments or mounds. Before laying it out, I pull the felt out into layers. You will probably find there is a “string mesh” in the middle to hold the felt together, by pulling out roughly from the middle the felt will come apart in two layers quite easily. I prefer to do it this way than using the felt as a solid piece. Once it is pulled apart you attain a much better “loose grass” effect — the strands tend to “stand up” giving a nice long grass appearance (*see illustration next page*).



Once I have built a “formwork” of card strips or styrofoam formers to the terrain contours and heights for my hills, etc. I use a white PVA glue at 100% to glue the felt pieces onto the formers! You can even use a staple gun if fastening to ply or styrofoam.

You will find it gives you a very pleasing effect (see *large illustration below*) — it can be left “natural” for dead grass or can be painted. As my “base” I use a sloppy paint mix of the green colour to represent my grass and then with a 1 inch house paint brush I “paint” the hills. A word of warning — if using only card strips you have to paint very gently, also because it is a water based paint (acrylic or poster) it can work through the felt and soften your card formers. Not so much of a problem if using styrofoam pieces!

This may take a number of days to dry. If darker or lighter areas of green on your hills are wanted, then you can overpaint those areas, with a paint brush or even an airbrush for more subtle effects.

Better still — use your ground foam scatter materials, with variants of greens to denote spring or summer/autumn/winter grasses. Nature is NEVER evenly coloured! Even a very small area of grass will have different shades, including earth, sand and stones.

With your coloured sand or sawdust, lightly sprinkle different colours to represent the wildflowers in meadows, grassy fields or roadside embankments — or your lawn surrounding your Linka Building!

Next issue we will look at commercially available materials and how to incorporate them into our Linka scene!

Great modelling Linkarites!

