SCENERY MADE EASY!

By Robbo

HOW TO CREATE A TREE

Continuing with our scenery, I thought I would go through a few easy steps that anyone can easily follow and build a simple but effective tree,

This can be for any scale, but more importantly, it can be used to add scenic effects to our Linka buildings.

Rather than going to the expense of buying ready made trees (some of which cost a fortune), what I am going to create will cost virtually nothing — AND that would also relate for either one or one hundred! The only big expenditure will be your TIME!

If you have been following this series, in the very last issue I talked about creating our own home-made "ground foam" for trees and landscaping, so I will be using some of that in different colours and grades.

For the tree armatures — I have been out walking and found some suitable "tree armatures" that have a great bark texture to them — from a REAL tree!

In Australia we have a type of shrub/tree called a Bottlebrush — these are members of the genus Callistemon and belong to the family Myrtaceae. They are closely related to paperbark melaleucas. *(See illustration below.)*

There are quite a few different types, but the one I have used grows to only a small sized shrub. When they get old and gnarly the branches develop a lovely kind of texture which I feel are ideal for a number of different styles of tree.

The pieces I have used are from branches which have been cut and left to "dry out"! There are even fungi patches giving it an even better "feeling" of a very old tree. *(See illustration below.)*

I am pretty sure that a suitable substitute can be found overseas, wherever you live. In America there is "Sagebrush", also suitable — in the UK, hedgerows and similar could be looked at. Rosemary shrubs often have some great shaped pieces that can be used, particularly the old bushes! I'm positive that once you start exploring you will find many suitable species that can be utilised!

Keep in mind that the "base armature" will probably NOT have enough suitable branches — so we will be adding more *(see illustration below)* . I gathered quite a selection of "real" donor branches of different sizes so that I had a choice for thicker or thinner pieces to use as "model branches" on my "model tree"!

SKEWER ADDED HERE TO AID IN "PLANTING"

Choosing carefully, and trimming to size, I cut my "branch" at an angle to "fit" nicely on the trunk armature *(see illustration bottom previous page)* — then attached this with a small Hot Glue Gun — again, these are readily available cheaply at "Bargain Stores"!

Once glue is dry and the branch is firmly attached, any excess glue can be trimmed away. If any glue is still visible, it can be covered with a suitable colour acrylic paint. In some instances, it could even be covered with fine ground foam to replicate moss or fungi.

Now I know that a lot of people create their tree armatures using thin, twisted wire, making their "trunk" from many strands and as they go higher in the tree, using the strands in ever decreasing sized "bunches" to create the branches and sub branches of the tree.

Once that has been made the trunk has to be covered somehow with a medium to create the "bark" — then painted suitable colours with paints.

I was originally going to "go down this path" and purchased a large bundle of Florist Wire off ebay. For me this was a much better material than many strands of twisted wire (usually fine copper wire or fuse wire) because it already had a green fibre wrapped around the single strand of wire, partially eliminating the need to "cover" the trunk/branches. *(See illustration.)*

By using a "real tree" for my armature I not only save time but I find the end result far more realistic — and pleasing — BUT, **"beauty is in the eye of the beholder"** and some people may not agree with me! So — let it be that you choose the best method to suit your own personal needs, from what has been suggested.

Before adding foliage, decide whether you want to include a **Root System** at the base of your tree — this does not need to be overly complicated.

Because I am going to create a large OAK and an old WILLOW, I decided to include quite a large root system around the tree.

My trees are rather large and are supposed to be very, very old so these roots are almost as important as the tree. I have created these with a 2-part epoxy filler, rolling out and using pieces to place around the base.

Before attaching the epoxy pieces I have the tree sitting on a piece of "Baking Paper" used in cake making, so that the epoxy does not stick to my scrap timber holding the tree.

Once the epoxy has been roughly positioned, I use a bamboo skewer and shape and texture the epoxy until I am satisfied *(see illustration)*. The appearance and amount of roots does look overdone at this stage, but some of this will be covered with our landscaping materials and can still be camouflaged!

I try not to keep these roots too "flat", but I lift some so that it appears the roots are "raised and twisted" — also try to visualise the tree in a "real life" situation, you could also do a search on Google for suitable root system images.
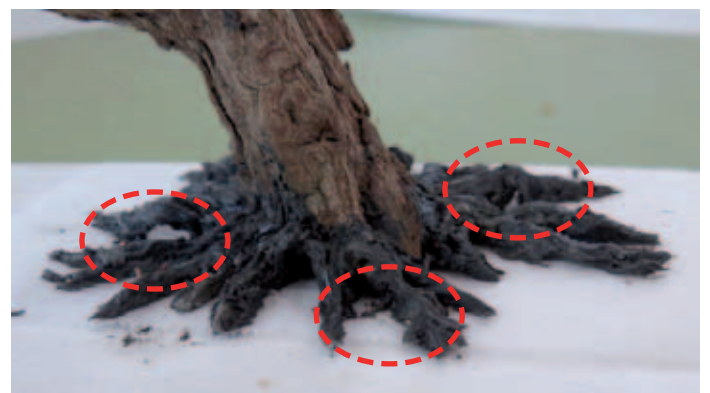
Creating the Foliage

The one thing you will need to purchase is a quantity of Poly Fibre for the basis of your foliage. Now you could pay anywhere from £3.25 to £6.25 for a 16 gram pack (AU $5.93 to $11.41) from Woodland Scenics *(see illustration next page)*.

There IS a much cheaper alternative — Poly Fibre Filler used for stuffing toy bears and cushions, available from most Craft Stores.

In Australia at a Homeware and Craft store called **SPOTLIGHT**, I can buy a 1 kilogram pack for only AU$13.49 *(how many times does 16 grams go into 1 kilogram?)* — enough to make a zillion trees, when you consider the weight is virtually NIL! You should be able to find a similar cheap price in your own particular country.

Fibre Filler used for soft toys/cushions

The only drawback is that you will need to "colour" it *(see "before and after" illustrations)* because it is white, but this can be done easily with a spraycan or better still — watered-down acrylic paint in an airbrush, even a suitable clothes dye! Remember, it will eventually be "underneath" your foliage and not easily seen — but it does need to be a suitable colour.

With my "tree armature", I have drilled into the base and inserted either a small, thin nail, or with larger "tree trunks" I have used a bamboo skewer to a suitable length. This will allow your "tree" to eventually be stuck into your landscape.

It also allows the armature to be held upright in a piece of scrap timber (drill suitable size hole to hold it tightly) while you are working on your tree.

You can use a cheap hairspray or artists Spray Adhesive — spray the "branches", then "tease" out the poly fibre and attach pieces to your tree *(see illustration previous column)*. Once the pieces are attached, they can still be teased out more to expand the area that will be covered with your ground foam.

Holding your tree upside down over a large piece of clean paper, spray the "underside" of the poly fibre with the hairspray/spray adhesive and then "drizzle" the MEDIUM size ground foam over the fibre network — I am using a dark colour here for my foliage to create something similar to the dark leaves on an oak tree! *(See illustration below.)*

Continue doing this until you are satisfied with the result. Shake your tree to remove excess loose foam foliage and set aside the tree so that the excess can be carefully poured back into your container, ready for the next step.

If you wish, a lighter foliage shade (medium size foam again) can be used, but in fact, I am using the same dark colour and following the same procedures as previous, I will do the "topside" of the tree — so holding the tree at the base, vertically this time, we again spray the adhesive on small areas and apply the ground foam. Continue doing this until you have done the complete tree — again, shake off the excess loose foam. *(See illustration on next page.)*

Carefully look at your tree and decide if any areas are needing further addition of ground foam. You will probably have to repeat this process a number of times until completely satisfied with the result.

At this point, we have the makings of our tree — but we are not quite finished yet!

To give the tree a more "3 dimensional feeling" I am going to drizzle over the top of the tree, some FINE ground foam that is a LIGHTER shade again. This is only done in small amounts and in much smaller areas. The intention is to give the appearance of light shining on foliage and "highlighting" different areas. You could also do this using a DARKER shade (fine ground foam) giving the appearance of "shadowed" areas on the tree foliage.


Do not be tempted to overdo this process. It is very easy to get carried away… a "little can be a lot!". Having done the tree to this stage with predominantly "found materials", our cost has been minimal. If desired, you could also sprinkle some coloured sand (yellow/gold) onto the very top of the foliage, again to simulate sunlight on the leaves. *(See illustration above.)*

Alternatively, if you wanted to incorporate a commercial product instead of the lighter shades of foam or sand there is a great product put out by NOCH — these are packets of LEAVES, available in 3 differing shades of green. They are intended to be used for trees, shrubs or vines —

again being sprinkled over tree armatures, etc. *(See illustration.)*

I like to use these on my trees in addition to the "fine foam" because they give an even more realistic 3 dimensional "feel' to the tree, and are especially good for the "highlights and shadows". Where they really come into great use is when I am creating creeping vines or hedges, brambles and creepers in fields or by the roadside, or on walls and sides of buildings.
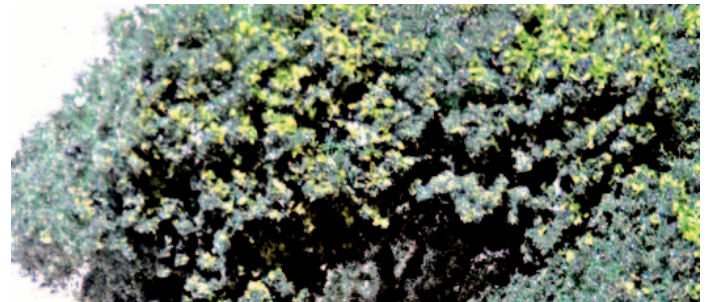
All that is left to do now is to "plant" our tree in position and to blend it into the surrounding area with grass, rocks, earth and shrubs. These are the things that I look forward to — "dressing" the scene. Maybe I was a movie "set dresser" in a past life!

In the next issue my intention is to look at shrubs, vines, grasses and reeds, bramble bushes and grass clumps — and how you can make these yourself. We will also look at static grass and how to make a cheap "Static Grass Applicator"!

Happy modelling fellow Linka-ites!

Rob