

SCENERY MADE EASY!

By Robbo

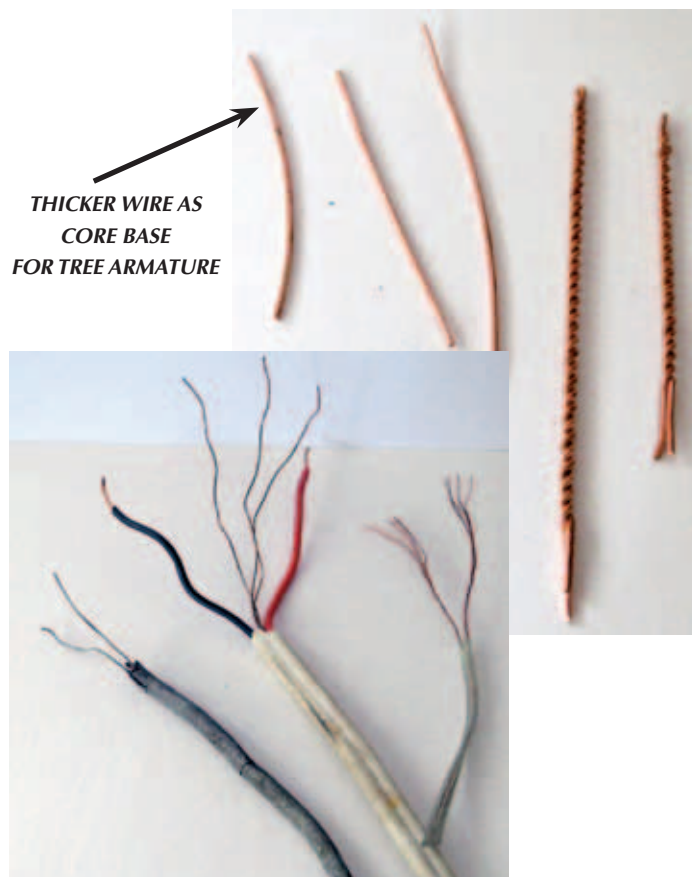
Number 6 in a Series

THE BIRCH TREE

Following on from the articles written on building the "Bridge Across the Canal" and the other Scenery articles on building and scenicizing the terrain, it was always my intention to describe with more "visual descriptions" on building different styles of trees.

I know I have already done a BIRCH, but I thought I would do another one using a slightly different approach and corresponding techniques and products.

This particular Birch Tree has been completed using the "twisted wire" armature as a base. I have included a few images of different types of electrical cable that I have used in its construction, as well as some other types that could be used for larger trees, such as Fir Trees, Oak Trees or trees that need a heavier wire as a base.



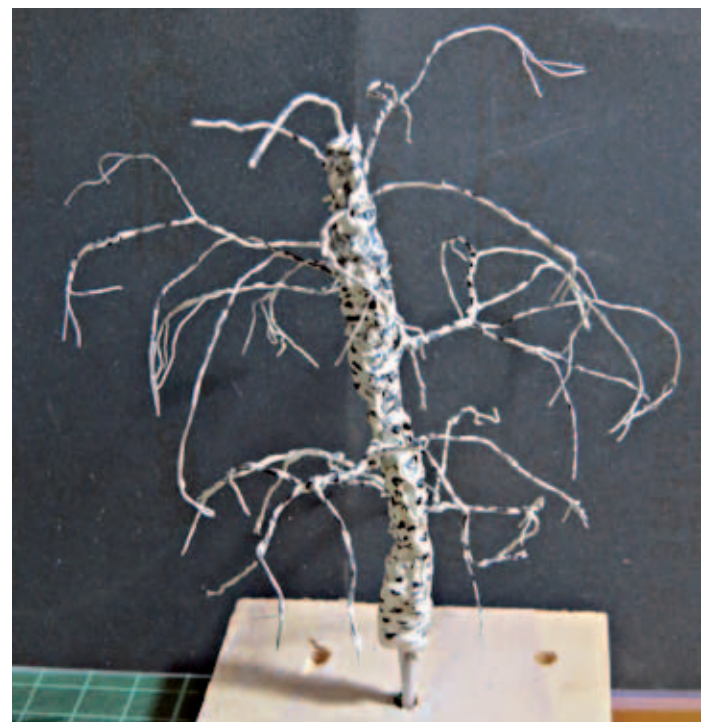
Most of the 3-core wiring used in homes today can be used, it just means that the insulating plastic materials must first be stripped from the copper wire inside. Once that has been done it is simply

a matter of combining enough strands to facilitate building your tree to the desired "trunk thickness".

Rather than building "masses" of trees to fill an area, concentrate on just doing a small number of "hero" trees — ones that are intended for close scrutiny, and appearing close to the edge of your layout, or appearing in a small scene or diorama.

For larger areas of "forestation" a much simpler method of building trees can be used, perhaps using the shrubs and branches in your garden or local area as a ready supply of tree "armatures".

Once the clump of wires has been gathered, I first use a thick piece of wire as the core centre to wrap the thinner wires around (a piece of the thick copper wire as shown in first image, or similar). This serves a dual purpose, it acts as a stiff base to work with, but more importantly, it gives you a piece of sturdy wire sticking out at the base that can then be used to "plant" the tree into your terrain.



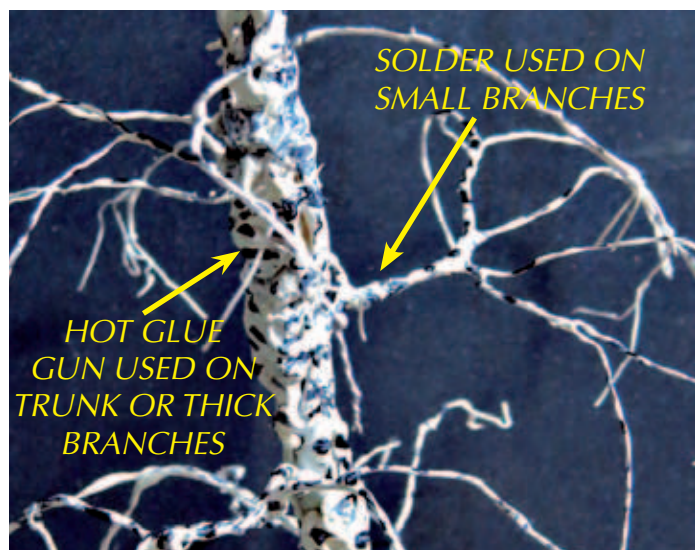
Once the wire strands have been wrapped around this "centre piece" and the base and root areas have been established (by twisting and separating), gradually work your way to the top of the tree — pulling out enough strands to twist and shape for branches, but also separating these into smaller

bunches for smaller branches coming off that particular tree limb.

It is easier to do in practice than writing a description, so please have a look at the accompanying photos. A word of warning — do not expect to build a tree quickly, a large tree can take a number of hours, I usually have some suitable music playing to relieve the tedium. The end product is always worth the time spent!

Once you have your tree armature created, the next step is to give the wire some form of “coating” to replicate the tree bark, etc. A number of techniques can be used here, either singularly or combined to produce the end result.

For the thinner branches I have used a soldering iron to “tin” the wire armatures. For the trunk I have used a Hot Glue gun, carrying some of the glue into each limb as it branches off from the main trunk.



The only problem using the hot glue is the myriad of “spider web” threads that occur when pulling the gun away from the trunk — but it is an easy matter to cut these after they have cooled.

Another method (which I have yet to try) is to dip the armature into a plaster mixture (whatever plaster you use in your Linka moulds), thick enough to satisfactorily coat the wire without completely dripping away, yet thin enough to allow the wire to be coated easily (trial and error here).

I have seen this method done on YouTube so obviously it does work, but you have to wait much longer for the plaster to harden before you can go ahead with any more work to the tree. At least the other 2 methods mentioned are instantaneous.

I then give my tree armature a spray with automotive primer to cover the “bark” — with the Birch tree I used white primer. What ever the colour does not really matter because ordinary acrylic paint (even

water based house paint can be used) is then used to paint the entire tree.

If added “texture” is required for the trunk, etc, you can use fine sawdust mixed into the paint, so that when it is painted on and it dries, a nice texture is achieved.

For the Birch tree I have also painted in a number of dark splotches (Paynes Grey acrylic) to represent the markings found on a Silver Birch. Areas of Yellow Ochre or Burnt Sienna could also be dabbed to give the trunk a “warmer” appearance.

For inspiration do a GOOGLE search for “BIRCH TREE IMAGES” on the internet!

ADDING THE FOLIAGE

For my foliage I have used a commercial product from Woodland Scenics (Foliage — WOOF52) — this is a product that is easy to use and can be used straight from the packet. It comes in different shades of green for different types of tree — I have used the MEDIUM GREEN.



It is basically fine coloured ground foam stuck onto a very wispy type of fibre (like a poly fibre filler used in stuffing toy bears, etc). You simply pull off a suitable piece and tease it out to shape and then adhere it to the ends of each branch cluster.



A suitable glue needs to be quite strong and quick drying — such as a craft “tacky glue”. PVA does not dry quickly enough, but you can also use a spray glue that is sold in craft or art stores but be careful of the fumes that come from these spray aerosol cans, they are quite harmful. Another spray glue is ordinary hair spray, But for longevity the tacky glue works best!

Once all of the foliage pieces have been placed, I then use a product from NOCH which represents individual leaves. I use darker or lighter colours to sprinkle over the foliage “mats” to indicate light and shadow areas of the tree foliage — but also to give more texture and the appearance of individual “leaves”! Use a good coat of hairspray for this!



It may be necessary to carefully bend or manipulate the branches to give a more pleasing “layout” to your finished tree — then simply plant the tree into your terrain, using the wire “sprue” sticking out at the base of the tree.

Before gluing the tree into position, I generally “trial” it in different positions in the area where it is being placed — turning it and moving it until the optimum position is found, especially when buildings are close by. Once the ideal situation is found, then drop a blob of glue into the hole, plant the tree, and use some scatter materials to “embed” the tree into the landscape.

If more than one tree is being placed, used ODD NUMBERS of trees — and trees of DIFFERENT SIZES — by doing it this way it more replicates nature and makes for a much more interesting scene.

Happy Modelling — until the next article!

Robbo

