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CLASSIC TOY
TRAINS



BEGINNER TIPS

TRAIN SET SCENERY

20 EASY SCENERY TIPS

HINTS FOR CREATING AN IMPRESSIVE LAYOUT SETTING

by Kent Johnson

ADDING SCENERY to your toy train layout is one of the simplest ways to enhance its overall appearance. For me, it's also one of the most enjoyable aspects of the hobby. While that's not always true for every layout builder, there are certainly a number of steps you can take to help make the process much less intimidating and far more rewarding. Here are 20 of my favorites tips for creating effective scenery on any toy train layout. **CTT**



1 Work from photos. Before you start making scenery, it's best to have a clear mental image of the scene you'd like to create. Since my mind often fails me, I like to have plenty of digital images, color prints, or slides on hand to help guide construction and use of color.



2 Sketch a scenery plan. You already know how essential a good track plan is to building an entertaining and trouble-free layout, right? The same can be said of a plan that references where and how you'll add terrain to your layout.

On a photocopy of your track plan, use colored pencils, markers, or crayons to sketch where you'll place mountains, trees, rivers, roads, towns, and other scenic features. Additionally, you can use this plan to estimate the materials required and help you budget accordingly.



3 Add a photo backdrop. In addition to working from photos, you can work *with* photos to quickly create the illusion of expansive layout scenery. A wide variety of printed photo backdrops featuring natural settings or cityscapes is available from manufacturers such as Backdrop Warehouse (backdrop-warehouse.com). You can also try taking your own image to a photo processor, who can generate oversized color prints.

Make sure that the photo backdrop is one of the first scenery elements you install. It may be all the "scenery" your layout needs, plus you'll find that it's much tougher to add a backdrop after you've completed other areas.





4 Scenery in a spray can. Peter Riddle, a frequent CTT contributor, turned me on to this fast and easy tip for ballasting track. In locations where the track is subject to close inspection, Pete uses rock ballast. But where it's more distant from visitors' eyes, he sprays his cork roadbed with a gray-colored textured paint (Krylon no. 18201 Black Granite or Rust-Oleum no. 7995830 Pebble) purchased at home-improvement outlets or paint stores.



5 Paint the rails with pens. One of my favorite scenery tasks takes only a few seconds to complete but will make your trackwork look spectacular. Even on days when I don't have much time or motivation to complete a big project, I can always grab a set of Floquil (testors.com) no. F3801 track weathering markers and use them to paint both sides of all three rails. Best of all, no preparation or clean-up is required here.



6 Use dirt to make dirt. The cost of commercial materials is one reason some layout operators choose not to add scenery. Thanks to my friend Lou Sassi, author of *Basic Scenery for Model Railroaders* (kalmbachbooks.com), I've found that combining raw

materials, such as dirt, rocks, and twigs, with earth-toned latex paint yields realistic ground covering. Because I can find much of what I need in my own backyard, the expense is, well, dirt cheap!



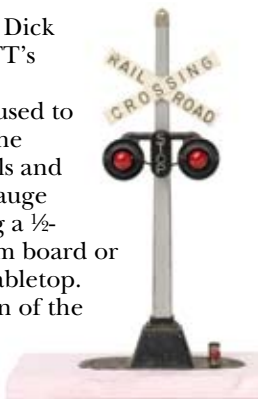
7 Just add water. Water covers most of the earth's surface, so why not try modeling some form of it on your layout? Aside from applying a coat of blue, green, or brown latex paint over bare plywood, I like to use brown-tinted acrylic sheets to represent deep bodies of water. I prefer acrylic with a smooth surface, but some sheets have subtle textures that look a bit like rippling water. This material is commonly called "Plexiglas" and is often sold at hardware stores for use in replacing broken window glass.



8 Dense forest alternative. Buying or making enough trees to fill even a small O or S scale forest can cost a fortune and take days to complete. A less costly and time-consuming alternative is to make a forest that's thinned as a result of fire, disease, or harvesting. Manufacturers such as Woodland Scenics (woodlandscenics.com) offer bare tree armatures (no. TR1125) in bulk, along with a variety of stumps (nos. S31 and S32) and dead fall (no. S30).



9 Sunken signals. Dick Christianson, CTT's founding editor, showed me a trick he used to reduce the height of the oversized Lionel signals and accessories on his O gauge layout. Start by placing a ½-inch-thick layer of foam board or Homasote over your tabletop. Determine the position of the accessory, and then trace the outline of the base with a pencil. Use a sharp utility knife to cut the outlined area down to the plywood base. Finally, remove the foam plug and place the signal into the ½-inch-deep hole. The signal may still look oversized, but this tip helps minimize the effect.



10 Use sound to enhance scenes. Complete, full-featured sound systems have become an integral part of most toy train locomotives made today. While these engines offer an ideal entry point for adding sound to a layout, there are many other ways you can bring a scene on your layout to life using electronic sound effects.

Consider installing accessories, such as an MTH no. 30-9102 operating firehouse with fire truck and alarm sounds or a Lionel no. 24110 PRR tugboat with harbor sounds. Z-Stuff for Trains (z-stuff.net) also offers easy-to-install sound circuits for reproducing station announcements, water tower operations, locomotive refueling, and even warning-bell sounds from a simple crossing gate.



11 Paved streets and buried tracks.

A layout with paved streets and highways included in the scenery makes for a great place to display O scale vehicles. Unfortunately, not all layouts have room for train tracks and wide roads. In the May 2005 issue of CTT, Peter Riddle demonstrated how to accommodate both by routing a railroad down the middle of a street – an authentic practice called “in-street running.”

Pete cut ½-inch-wide strips of black foam-core poster board to fit between the rails of his O gauge track. He then placed wider portions of foam core against the outside rails (on top of the track ties) to represent asphalt roadway. To keep the roadway surface stable and level, Pete installed shims in various locations under the wide foam-core sections.



12 Driver behind the wheel.

Most locomotives manufactured these days include an engi-

neer positioned at the throttle. You can easily maintain the same level of realistic detail on city streets by adding a figure behind the wheel of your cars and trucks. Most of my O scale drivers began as seated figures. Use a fine-tooth razor saw or rail nippers to trim the figure's legs to fit under the steering wheel.

13 Scenery safety net.

Position scenery and terrain elements, including clumps of ground foam, trees, and earthen berms, near track curves and along the edges of a layout. These elements will help beautify the scene, mask the hard edges of the table, and prevent a derailed train from plummeting to the floor.



14 Display track with a purpose.

Peter Riddle has come up with an interesting alternative to displaying his favorite or collectible toy trains on a shelf or in a case. Many small towns and cities in North America honor their railroad heritage by displaying a veteran locomotive or caboose in a municipal park. Pete does the same on his layout using older or whimsical locomotives.

Even better, the display track also serves a practical purpose. Pete has wired it to an unused throttle on one of his transformers and uses the track for charging MTH ProtoSound locomotives made without an external charging jack (see page 60 in the September 2007 issue of CTT).





15 Dogs, frogs, and other details.

People make the world go round. The same holds true on a layout. Along with adding appropriately scaled figures engaged in common activities, be sure to include animals, small fixtures, and fine details to help draw a visitor's attention to a particular scene.



16 Attractive table edges.

Even if you are not a skilled carpenter, you can still give your layout a professional appearance using pre-finished laminate flooring. These hardwood panels measure 50½ inches long by approximately 7½ inches wide and come in a variety of wood-grained

patterns. They're grooved for easy assembly and are extremely tough, resisting virtually any type of damage that might accidentally occur in a train room. Despite their durability, they are easily cut with a power saw and can be drilled to accommodate control-panel switches. You can cover the edges with L-shaped wooden or PVC outside corner molding, as shown on Peter Riddle's layout.



18 Structures as scenery.

CTT contributor Dennis Brennan is a master at enhancing the appearance of even the simplest Plasticville structures (see page 48 in the July 2006 issue of CTT). Try adding weathering effects, interior lighting, and printed signs to your buildings. They'll help visitors relate to the scene you've created and bring the layout to life.



19 Dark tunnels.

In the latest edition of Dave Frairy's classic book, *How to Build Realistic Model Railroad Scenery* (kalmbachbooks.com), he makes a good suggestion on how to prevent light or exposed benchwork and wiring from showing through the end of a tunnel. Dave uses corrugated cardboard and dark-painted rock-wall castings to create a tunnel liner that extends from one portal to the other. He has also used sheets of Styrofoam insulation, styrene, and plywood to form a liner, but I prefer using 8-inch-diameter culvert pipe.



17 Keep a clean scene.

Many scenic projects on a layout can be accomplished with paint and masking tape. I like to use 2-inch-wide blue painter's masking tape to protect track rails and ties as I add paint and scenery along the right-of-way.

Peter Riddle uses masking tape to define green-painted yards and to create straight edges along painted-on concrete patios, driveways, and sidewalks. When removing tape from delicate foam-core surfaces, he enlists the aid of a heat gun or hair dryer. With a bit of direct heat, the tape will release without leaving any adhesive residue behind.



20 Go ahead and make "mistakes."

I can't begin to tell you how many people I've heard say, "I'm not an artist, so I don't do scenery on my layout." With all the materials and publications available today, you'll be amazed at what you can accomplish without much skill. And once you do try your hand at a bit of layout scenery, don't be afraid to make a goof or two. After all, scenery in the real world features many natural imperfections.



To purchase more information about adding scenery to your layout, go to ClassicToyTrains.com and click on "Downloads."



This suburban neighborhood is a railfan's dream, with a double-track main line and an interurban line just outside the backdoor. The house at left is a Lionel product, while the one at right was made from a Skyline kit dating from before World War II.

BETTER LAWNS for your layout

12 TIPS FOR SIMPLE SUBURBAN SCENERY

story and photos by Peter H. Riddle

It's easy to overlook the common details of everyday life that make a toy train layout look more realistic. In the photo on this page, for example, did you notice that the homeowner on the left must spend hours working to give his lawn that golf-green look? His less conscientious neighbor on the right has probably never heard of fertilizer. This reflects the real world, and, as the following tips show, it's easy to replicate these differences in model landscapes.



1 Putting in a model lawn on your own layout is easy, but you have to decide what sort of lawn you need. These adjoining properties reflect very different approaches to lawn care. When a lawn turns green early in the spring, as at right, it suggests that the property owner has spent extra time and money adding lime and fertilizer and eliminating weeds.



2 First plan the locations for your houses, walkways, and drive-ways. You can place them directly on the layout table or make scenic plots, as I did here. I use easy-to-cut **foam-core illustration board**, but 1/4-inch-thick plywood also works well. Outline each building so you'll know where to plant grass and add details, like a dirt path leading to a back or side door. Cut out spaces for the driveways and walks, or outline them in pencil if you plan on painting them.



3 These turf products from Scenic Express are just a few of the many colors and textures available. From left to right are **Medium Green Fine (EX805B)**, **Dark Green Fine (EX815B)**, **Alpine Meadow Blend (EX884B)** (works well as scrub grass), **Summer Lawn Blend (EX881B)**, and **Yellow Clay Tone (EX835B)**.



4 One easy way to make turf products stick to a surface is to start with a thick coat of green latex paint. If you want sections of the lawn to appear sparse, use brown paint in those areas to suggest dirt showing through.



5 While the paint is wet, sprinkle on the turf material. Since this narrow strip at the edge of the plot will be placed beside the tracks, I used **Alpine Meadow Blend** to simulate the kind of weeds and debris that might be found next to any railroad right-of-way.



6 Shake off the excess turf and flatten down what remains with a small board. This ensures that the product will adhere well. To finish, fill in any bare spots with a drop of paint and more turf.



7 Use clay or earth tones to make unpaved paths, such as this one that leads from a side door to a driveway. The turf should extend slightly into the outline of the house so that none of the unfinished board will show when the house is installed. Note the scrub grass (**Alpine Meadow Blend**) along the curved edge, which will lie close to the tracks.



8 Next, plant the grass using the wet paint technique. Unless two homeowners work together, it's unusual for their lawns to look alike. For these adjoining properties I chose **Dark Green Blend** to simulate a well-cared-for property and **Summer Lawn Blend** for the lawn where the grass is somewhat less healthy and dried out. Work in small sections so that the paint will not begin to dry before you add the turf.



9 Glue the scenic plot in place on the layout, and, when it is secure, add driveways and walkways. I use black and gray foam-core boards. If you prefer not to cut out these areas, use black and gray paints to simulate the details.



10 A picket fence defines a property line nicely. Fences are available in a variety of styles from such suppliers as **Brennan's Model Railroading** and **Scenic Express**.



11 Down the street, this family is leaving for a camping holiday. Their grass is a healthy yet lighter shade of green, as you might expect in a newly seeded lawn. Don't limit yourself to only two colors of turf. The wide range of colors available allows your subdivision landscaping to be as varied as the miniature inhabitants' gardening skills.



12 After adding trees, vehicles, and figures to complete the scene, it's obvious that the different shades of grass give this miniature neighborhood an extra touch of realism. **CTT**

Looking for paints, glues, and structural details that will help you create a unique layout? Your local crafts store can unlock a whole new world of potential supplies for scenicking your railroad.



HELP FROM YOUR LOCAL CRAFTS STORE

GET LAYOUT DETAILS FROM A SURPRISING SOURCE

by **Cody Grivno**

photos by Jim Forbes

WHEN MY WIFE, Dorothy, wants to go to the crafts store, I'm eager to tag along. Okay, I didn't tell you that there's a hobby shop right next door to our local crafts store. However, I often find myself visiting the crafts store after the hobby shop to see if I can find items with model railroad applications.

Knowing that Dorothy and I often make joint crafts store and hobby shop runs, *Classic Toy Trains* Senior Editor Kent Johnson proposed that I write an article about crafts store finds that you can use to enhance O and S

gauge layouts. So I visited Michaels, Jo-Ann Fabrics, Hobby Lobby, and a few local crafts stores to see what I could come up with.

For the most part, I tried to find items in the \$5 to \$10 price range and available at all the stores. I also looked for products that covered a variety of interests, including scenery, structures, and tools.

The next time your spouse or child wants to go to a crafts store, offer to join him or her. You'll be amazed at how many products there you can use for a model railroad.

WORKING IN WOOD

Check out the wood crafting section at your favorite crafts store. In the photo you can see examples of two items I found. The square blocks, offered in a variety of sizes, can be decorated to look like shipping crates, bales of recycled paper, or concrete footings.

Like the square blocks, the flowerpots are also available in different sizes. The one-inch pots in the photo would be ideal for large outdoor planters. Just paint or stain the wood and put some foliage on top, and you have a quick and easy detail to place in front of a residence, house of worship, or city hall.



PAINTABLE TEXTURE

DecoArt offers a series of specialty paints grouped together by their textures (Decoart.com). These materials work well for simulating stucco finishes on buildings. Just stir the thick paste and apply it with a palette knife, sponge, or DecoArt's Texture Tool. When the material has dried, you can paint it. Both the fine and terra cotta finishes can be cleaned with soap and water.

WEDDING BELLS

Okay, I'll admit it. The last place I thought I'd find modeling supplies is in the wedding aisle. But that's where I made three interesting finds. The first was Grecian pillars for wedding cakes. These plastic columns can be painted a concrete color and used to detail a railroad station, courthouse, or mansion. I found them in three sizes, but they can easily be custom-sized with a razor saw. I also found a 12-inch plastic cake-decorating comb that is an excellent tool for modeling furrows in a farm field. Apply a layer of Hydrocal or Sculptamold where the field will be located. While the scenery base is still workable, run the comb through it. After drying, with no cold or damp spots, use a brush to apply flat earth-tone latex paint, add your favorite scenery material, and set a tractor and plow in the scene. And last, wedding tulle is a mesh that you can use to simulate chain link fencing.



POT TOPPERS

These cool items are available only at Michaels, specifically, the artificial flowers department. These 4- and 6-inch disks are filled with poly fiber and covered with green static grass fibers on one side and brown-dyed sawdust on the other. The pot toppers can be used to model a pasture or similar scene on an O or S gauge layout.

Place the side with the brown sawdust under trees, or stitch several toppers together to model a forest floor.



SEASONAL ORNAMENTS

Crafts stores sell seasonal ornaments that look right at home on a model railroad. Cut the string to use those wreaths and candy canes to decorate the front yard of a house or accent the light poles in a downtown scene. The wrapped gifts and flocked Christmas trees look great as a storefront window display or in the interior of a house.



SCRAPBOOK PAPER FOR ALL OCCASIONS

I wasn't overly familiar with the scrapbooking hobby before writing this article. However, I quickly learned that 12 x 12-inch sheets of scrapbook paper could be purchased with hundreds of different patterns, a few of which are shown here.

The first is designed to look like yellowed notebook paper. You can use it to simulate the wood floor in a building or boxcar or a flatcar deck.

Another sheet has a road trip theme with generic signs for a motel and a diner. Customize the signs with dry transfers or self-adhesive letters.

The other two sheets are examples of scrapbook paper that can be used for window treatments and wallpaper. You can give your downtown scene some history by painting the outline of a demolished building on the wall of a structure.

Then distress and attach the scrapbook paper on the exposed common wall. Just like that, you can turn an ordinary scene into an attention getter.





STICK TO IT

There is an abundance of glues and adhesives to be found at crafts stores. Elmer's white glue is probably the most common type; it can be used full strength or diluted with water to hold down scenery material.

You can also make your own scenery glue with Mod Podge matte medium from Plaid Enterprises Craft Brand (plaidonline.com). In a bowl, create a 50:50 mix of Mod Podge and water with a few drops of liquid dishwashing detergent added (the latter helps break surface tension). Apply the matte medium with a pipette or brush.

Aleene's Original Tacky Glue is another all-purpose hobby and crafts adhesive. I've heard of modelers using it to attach foliage to tree armatures and bond parts onto laser-cut wood and cardstock building kits. Though Aleene's Original Tacky Glue comes out of the bottle white, it dries clear.

Most crafts stores sell self-adhesive foam squares. Use them to mount printed-circuit boards in locomotives and attach structures to your layout.

STICKY FOAM SHEETS

Roofing material, patches of snow or dirt, and sidewalks are just some of the uses for Darice Foamies sheets. The sheets are offered in 2mm and 3mm thicknesses in a variety of colors from earth tones to neon.

They have a self-adhesive backing to stick to any clean, smooth surface. The 9 x 12-inch sheets can be used as-is or trimmed. For more information, visit darice.com.

Pounce wheel

Rotary cutter

Self-healing mat

Pounce wheel



A CUT ABOVE

The sewing department yields a variety of cutting supplies. Though you may typically associate pinking shears with decorative edging for fabrics or scrapbooks, they're handy for making your own diamond-tab roofing material out of construction or craft paper. If you like to make chain-link fencing out of wedding tulle, try cutting it with a rotary cutter. A pounce wheel can be used to simulate nail heads in decks, such as on a flat car.

To protect your work surface, use a cutter on a self-healing mat. Some, like this one from Olfa, have a rule around the perimeter and a miter guide (olfa.com).

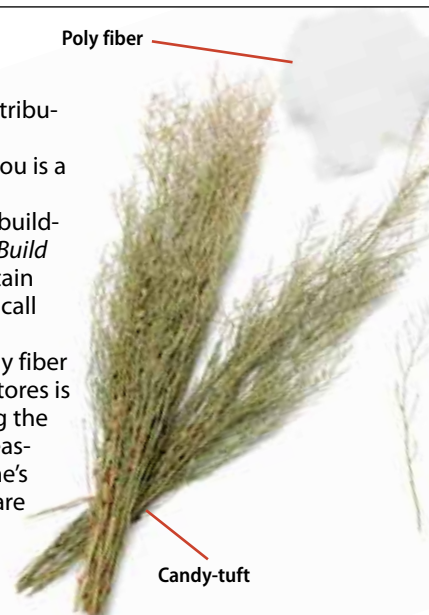
FLOWERS AND FIBER

I have to credit frequent *Model Railroader* contributor Lou Sassi for the idea of using dried floral arrangements as the starting point for trees. Lou is a big fan of candy-tuft, which he purchases at Michaels. You can read more about Lou's tree building techniques in his Kalmbach book, *How to Build and Detail Model Railroad Scenes Vol. 2*. (To obtain item no. 12454, go to KalmbachBooks.com or call 1-800-533-6644.)

For larger forested areas, consider using poly fiber balls. Though most of the poly fiber in crafts stores is white, you can paint it dark green. After rolling the poly fiber into appropriately sized balls and teasing it apart, attach it to your layout with Aleene's Original Tacky Glue. Once the poly fiber balls are positioned, mist them with scenery cement or matte medium and coat them with blended turf ground foam. **CTT**

Poly fiber

Candy-tuft



WEB EXCLUSIVE

Subscribers can see five additional layout-friendly products Cody found in his crafts store expeditions by going to ClassicToyTrains.com and check "Operating" and "How To."

