

**You've built your baseboards, laid your track and now you are staring at some clean pieces of plywood or foam and wondering where to go next! Scenery can feel very daunting to a newcomer but is actually very forgiving. It's easy to correct mistakes and redo sections so the best advice is to give it a go and not worry.**

## Basics

The first thing to do is consider your model and where it is based. Is it desert or forest, flat or mountainous, rocky or muddy, arid or wet? All of these impact on your scenery and how you build it. The good news is that the basics are the same regardless.

I always think of my scenery in terms of foreground, midground and background. I try and make my foreground the most detailed. Viewers will be drawn to this first and naturally assume that the rest of the layout is as detailed.

In reality, everything blurs with distance and you cannot see weeds or details after a certain point. We can use our scenery to add a feeling of depth that mirrors reality. My backgrounds are therefore more generic, quicker to model and less detailed. The midground is a halfway house with some leaves and details but not too many.



## Process

Here's an overview of the scenery process I prefer to use:

1. Start with a substructure that acts as a firm base for your scenery. Obviously, mountains look very different to prairies but you can use the same materials for the substructure but just build them up differently.
2. At this point you need to mock in the roads, rivers and buildings so that they have the correct height and flat areas for the water or road/building surface.
3. Next up is an earth layer that hides the base (which is often white, blue or pink!). This can be as simple

as paint or, in deserts, can be the bulk of the scenery work.

4. I tend to do the water, roads and buildings at this point. The buildings are not attached and can be removed for messy work but it enables me to work out exactly where everything will fit and get it to bed down well.
5. After this I add in trees, then bushes, then grass.
6. The final step is the details that brings it all to life, from wildlife to people, rubbish and detritus to weathering.

## Substructure

The first step in scenery is to start with a suitable base. This doesn't need to be anything fancy and can build on whatever the baseboards are made from. Depending on your baseboards, here are a few thoughts to get you going so that your scenery is not totally flat:

- Foam is easily worked with bread knives or hot wire tools and can be built up or subtracted from making it very versatile. If you or your friends have had any building work recently then you may have a ready supply of insulation foam. You can use the white expanded polystyrene too but it will need a hard outer layer as it is a bit soft.
- Plywood needs to be built up as it is generally too flat but it is a solid start. I usually use Sculptamold which is a plaster/paper maché mix to build up slight undulations and foam for larger hills.
- If you have open areas between framing you can use plaster cloth which is easily available online or from shops like Hobbycraft. I put scrunched up newspaper underneath and lay the plaster cloth on then spray with water. I find this is less messy than trying to dunk plaster cloth in water and put it in place.





## Roads, Rivers & Buildings

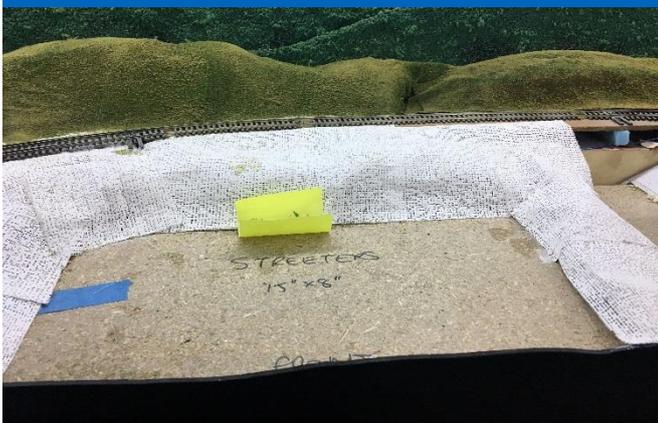
These are worth mocking in sooner rather than later so you have room for them, especially buildings, and to ensure that the scenery is flat where any water surfaces, roads or buildings need to be.

I often prefer to build mini dioramas for buildings on my workbench and then sit them into the scenery. That really helps with hard to reach areas and especially buildings which require detailed work. My workbench also has far more space to work on and is more comfortable.

At this point on the layout, we only need the bases and locations and we can add the actual roads, rivers and buildings in later.

Once you have a basic substructure the fun begins.

## Ground



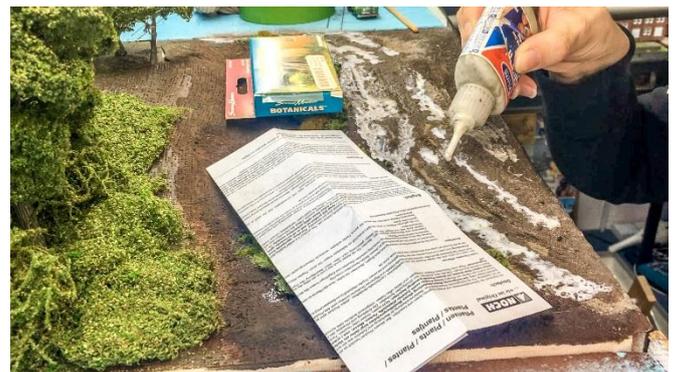
The first thing I always do is paint the substructure brown with acrylic or emulsion paint. I like basic raw umber as a colour in my New England layout. If you have any gaps in your scenery then this prevents a bright white substructure peeking through. It also seals the base slightly which can help prevent warping if you have any thin wood sections.

When the painting is done, I generally start with a thin layer of tile grout. I am a huge fan of tile grout and use it in almost every layout or diorama I build. You can buy it in a wide range of colours including brown. I prefer the dry grout and either wall or floor will do.

Using a small sieve or tea strainer, I sprinkle on a thin layer to cover the substructure. You can add a few variations to stop there being a plain flat surface but ideally the grout should be fairly thin. I then glue in place using two dropper bottles, one with a 1:2 mix of isopropyl alcohol (IPA) to water and one with a 1:2 mix of white glue and water. Use the IPA mix first to break down the surface tension. Without it, the glue will just ball on the surface of the grout. You need to thoroughly wet the area and ensure it soaks down and that there is no dry layer of grout at the bottom.

Once the grout is wet, drip on the white glue mix to fix it. This also adds a bit of flexibility so that the tile grout won't crack if the substrate flexes. Mop up any drips that run to the bottom with a kitchen towel.

That's my first step for the ground cover and if you choose the right grout colour for your location, you can leave patches to show as bare earth if needed.



## Rocks

This is a good time to add any rocks or cliff faces using castings or ready bought rocks. That's a whole topic in itself so I will leave it for another article but briefly, Woodland Scenics' talus or rock mouldings are a great place to start if you are new to this area. You can then add grout around the rocks to bed them in.

## Water

Water can cover a multitude of techniques and results. Simple water can be represented with a flat base, painted and varnished. More complex water, with waves, waterfalls or ripples, needs more complicated techniques. Rather than try and cover them all I will just talk about my favourite technique – using resin for water.

The most important thing with resin is a water tight river or pond bed. Resin is as thin as water and will leak given any chance. Make sure your underlying base has no holes at all. To plug any ends where rivers reach a fascia, I use an acetate sheet glued in place with bathroom silicone caulk. You can peel this off once the resin is set but if the worse comes to the worse, you can leave it in place and trim it back.

First up is the pond or river bed. I always paint these an earth colour and for a shallow water I add texture using Woodland Scenics' talus. You can easily paint this if the colour is wrong for your area. Start with the largest pieces of talus and then move through the sizes to the smallest. I sprinkle and arrange each size and when they are all in place, I glue using the same two dropper bottles of IPA mix and white glue mix as I used for the grout. Paint them when dry if you want and it can often help to add some green around the water edges.

Next up mix small batches of the resin. My favourite is Magic Water. It takes a while to set but is slightly rubbery, meaning it doesn't crack easily and you can trim it with a sharp knife on the meniscus against the acetate sheet.

The most important two tips are to measure accurately and to mix well. I weigh the resin, and mix, mix and mix again. Magic Water is a 1:2 mix so weighing is the easiest way to be accurate. I mix in disposable plastic cups and do about half a cup at a time. If it doesn't set, don't panic, pour another layer on top! I add a few drops of acrylic or enamel paint to add depth to my first few layers. My first base pour is the darkest and each subsequent layer is less pigmented until the top layer is almost clear. It is possible to do large areas with multiple pours so do count the number of drops of paint used for consistency across each batch.

When the resin is set I use an acrylic gloss medium to add waves. You can use palette knives or brushes to get different wave patterns. The gloss medium starts off white and dries clear but if you make the wave too thick, it may never go completely clear so it is best to build up in layers for really big waves.



Once this is all dried it is fairly robust but the water and white glue used on scenery can make the acrylic gloss medium turn white again. It will dry clear once again but to avoid this, I often pour the resin before doing the scenery and then add the waves when everything else is nearly completed.

I have tried pouring resin next to grass and I found it worked its way through the grass so I prefer to pour the resin first. Resin will also wick into the grout used for the ground too but is easy to cover up with a little more grout before you add the rest of the scenery.

## Roads

I have tried so many methods for roads but my two favourites for tarmac roads are, first craft foam and second a textured spray paint. The foam is easily found as children's 2-3mm craft foam sheets that you can buy in places like Hobbycraft. The sheets are easy to cut and have a great scale texture. You can glue them with white glue and paint with acrylic paints. I often use foam core underneath for rigidity.

The foam fits around complex trackwork easily if you want to do tracks inset into roads. To cut these out, just press the foam into the trackwork, turn it over and you can see the imprint of the track to use as a cutting template.

If you are using a more rigid piece of card, foam core or wood for your road then try the Rust-o-leum Textured Spray Paint – Aged Iron for tarmac and Desert Bisque for concrete. It has a perfect tarmac texture even down to the colouring.

I find both these techniques are excellent but the trick is to put on all the details:

- tar crack repairs – use a thin black Sharpie in random crack patterns
- patched tarmac – paint a section a different colour and outline with a thin black Sharpie
- road lines and markings – Woodland Scenics do white and yellow pens that work well, or you can buy decals
- gutters, drains and manhole covers – you can buy etched brass details for these in all scales
- weathering from road usage - a restrained amount of black pastel can achieve this if applied using a large soft brush down the middle of the lanes
- oil drips – black Sharpie or gloss black paint
- pot holes – dig out a bit of foam and fill with a small amount of tile grout. There's no need to completely fill the hole
- puddles - use small drips of resin for water
- grass or weeds in cracks – use static grass or ground foam
- leaves along the edges – Woodland Scenics' earth blend fine turf or chamomile tea leaves work well for this

These details really bring a road to life.



Also consider adding gravel and dirt tracks as well as footpaths for a bit of variety. I use chinchilla dust (from a pet store) for gravel and tile grout for dirt tracks. These are great to add ruts and puddles to. I basically apply the grout or chinchilla dust like the ground layer with a sieve and then drive a scale car through to add wheel tracks. You can drive the car through when dry or wet for different results. They are glued exactly like the ground but with really careful dripping so as not to disturb the underlying ruts and tracks.

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE NEXT ISSUE:

Trees; Bushes; Grass; Bedding in Buildings and Structures; Details