

SCENERY TECHNIQUES

Division 2 20 September 2025 Meet
Presented by David Zolnierok



MAKING ASPEN TREES

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by David Zolnierak

CLINIC OVERVIEW

- PROTOTYPE ASPEN TREE
- SUPPLIES AND TOOLS
- STEPS IN MAKING THE TREE
- PLACING & PLANTING
- QUESTIONS & OTHER
- FLOCKING DEMONSTRATION
- HANDS ON FLOCK A TREE

THE ASPEN SPECIES

1. Aspen is a common name for certain tree species in the *Populus* sect. *Populosa*, of the *Populus* (poplar) genus.
2. Quaking aspen or trembling aspen are found in Northern and Western America. Other species of the *Populus* are found in China, Eastern Asia, Japan, Europe, and North America.
3. Aspen trees are all native to cold regions with cool summers in the north of the northern hemisphere, extending south at high altitudes areas such as mountains or plains.
4. They are all medium-sized deciduous trees reaching 15-30 m (50-80 ft.) tall.
5. In North America, The aspen is referred to as quaking aspen or trembling because the leaves “quake” or tremble in the wind. This is due to the flattened petioles which reduce aerodynamic drag on the trunk and branches.
6. Aspen typically grow in environments that are otherwise dominated by coniferous tree species and lacking other large deciduous tree species. Most aspens grow in large clonal colonies, derived from a single seedling and spread by root suckers.
7. A lifespan of 40-150 years above ground, but the root system is long lived.
8. Fire and timber cutover are a benefit to saplings as they will flourish in the open sunlight, and are the first to appear on the landscape
9. Aspens seedlings do not thrive in the shade or an already mature aspen stand.
10. Wood is used for pallet material and chipped, glued and pressed for OSB sheathing.

THE ASPEN TREE
& THE MICHIGAN
POPLAR



Road from Crystal
River to Crested
Butte, Colorado

Poplar
Saplings

Presque Isle,
MI.

DZ 40





Keebler Pass, Colorado



Red Mountain Area Colorado



Snowbowl Colorado

Presque Isle
Michigan

Poplar




Presque Isle, Michigan



Trunks with Blemishes, Scarring from branches that have fallen off and insect damage

Early October
Presque Isle
Michigan





Mix of Poplar, Spruce & Balsam
Presque Isle , MI.



Mix of Oak and Poplar
Presque Isle, Michigan

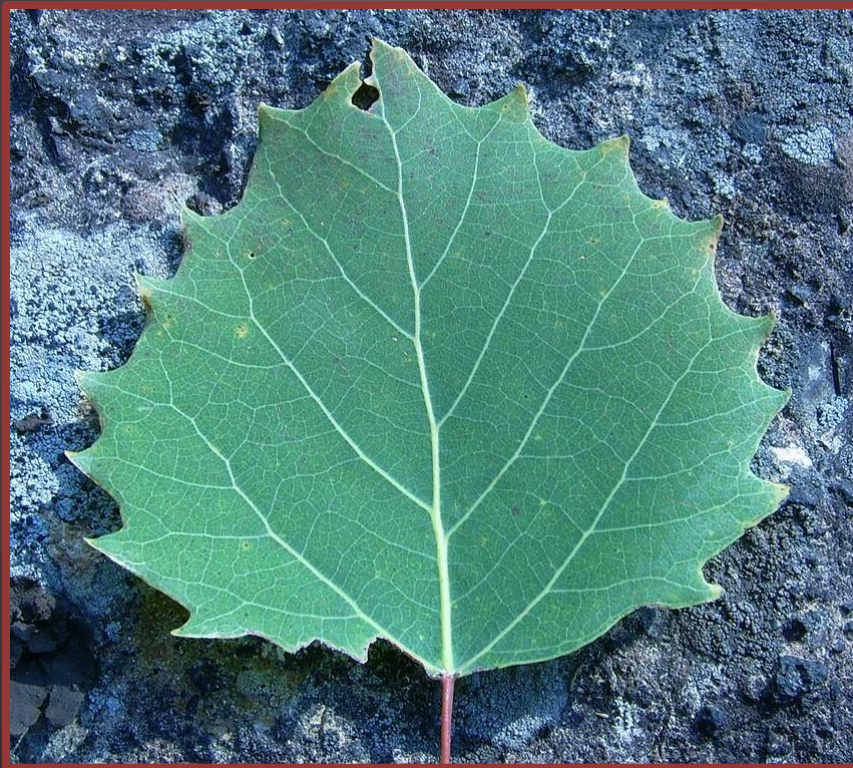
*Let's build a model
Aspen-Poplar tree*

TOOLS

- Tweezers, scissors
- Surgical Gloves
- Flat foil pans or plastic tubs
- Clothes pins
- Spray Bottle
- One ounce fishing weights or sinkers
- Clothes line or wire
- Foam (tree holder)
- Cut off plastic bottle
- Self closing tweezers



MATERIALS

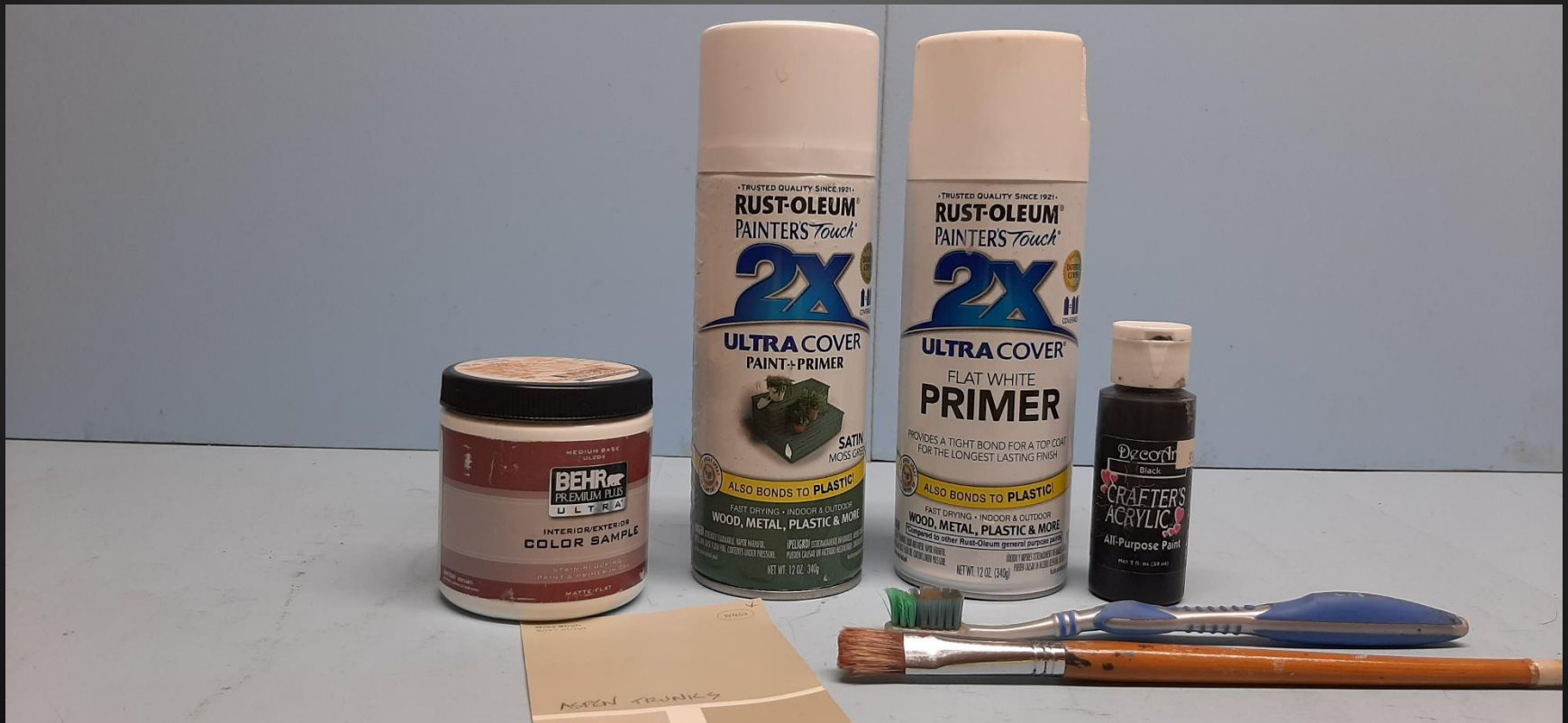


SuperTrees



Super Trees are a natural scale tree form indigenous to the Arctic tundra of Scandinavia. A distant cousin to our western sagebrush.

PAINTS



FOLIAGE & FLOCKING



- Scenic Express – Super Leaf Aspen Yellow , Lt. Greens, Maze
- Noch – Light Green and Yellow
- Selkirk Scenery –AMIS materials

ADHESIVES & GLUES



- Matte Medium
- Aqua Net Super Hold Hair Spray - All Weather –Unscented
- Tak-E-Glue
- Mod Podge

BASIC PREPARATION



Step 1 SORTING

- Sort thru material by size, remove lower branches, I make sure the trees aren't to tall for my scale
- HO 30' tree is approximately 4-1/2" for height
- About 6" to 8" maximum
- Distant trees get smaller to create depth
- Use removed branches for undergrowth trees



Step 2 PRUNING

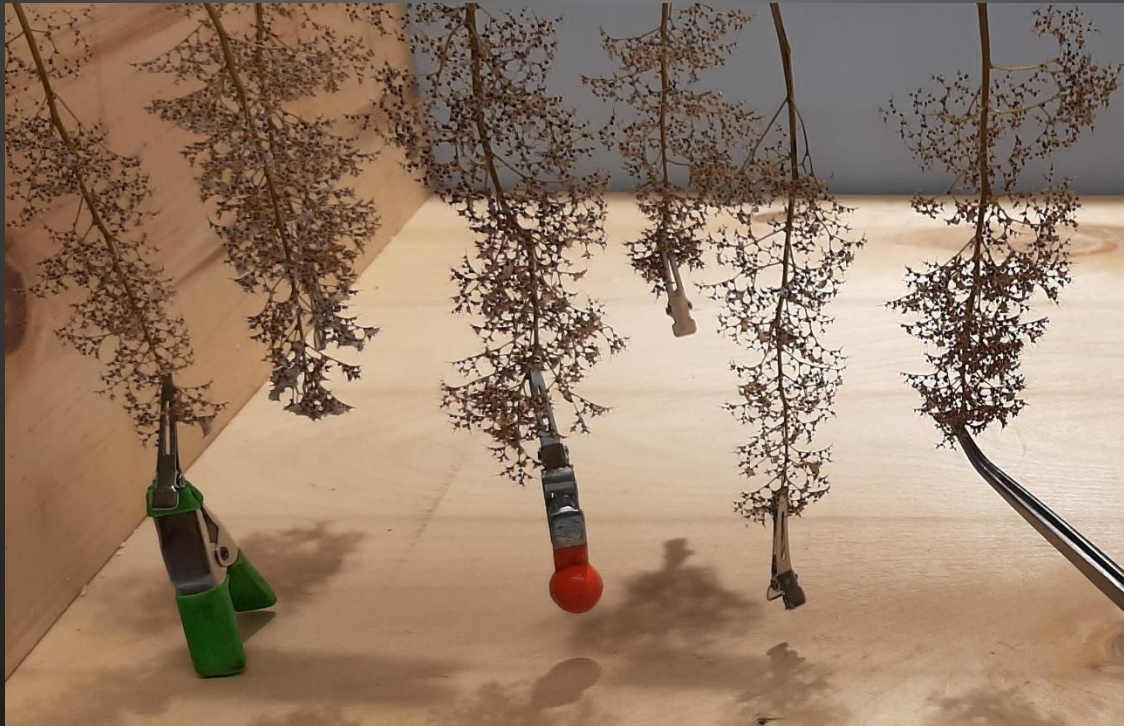
- The tree material has a leaf that needs to be removed.
- Use tweezers to reach in and remove the leaves
- Prune bent or broken branches, save for underbrush



Step 3-A Straightening Crooked & Bent Trees

Soak and Weight Method

Most bends are remedied by soaking the tree structure in the Matte Medium mixture and carefully bend and hand straighten. Soak a minimum of 30 seconds or longer. Hang upside down from a clothes line. Clip a small weight, a one ounce fishing sinker or self closing tweezers works well. Let gravity do its work till the tree is dry.



Step 3-B Straightening Crooked & Bent Trees

Soldering Iron

At one time it was hard to get a decent amount of straight trees for the aspens from a box of super tree material. Here is a technique that works remarkable well!! I have improved my yield dramatically. Now nearly 95 percent of the material yield acceptable trees. Trunk curve up. A simple touch of the iron tip (35w) along the trunk in about 3 spots while holding pressure on the tip of the tree on a table will cause it to move and straighten.



Step 3-C Straightening Crooked & Bent Trees

Tee Kettle & Steam

Pass the tree armature a few times over the spout of a tea kettle , with light pressure move the trunk to straighten.



Step 3-D Straightening Crooked & Bent Trees

Bend and Fracture

A radical but dependable way of getting them straight!!

Finish the flocking procedure and allow the tree to completely dry . Place the tree in the palm of your hand . Bend with force , fracturing the tree at the center of the curved trunk. Several fractures along the trunk may be needed. Attempt to break with a hairline fracture versus a compound !! Arrange the tree in a straightened position. Use super glue at each fracture point. Brace if required till dry.

Call the doctor !!!



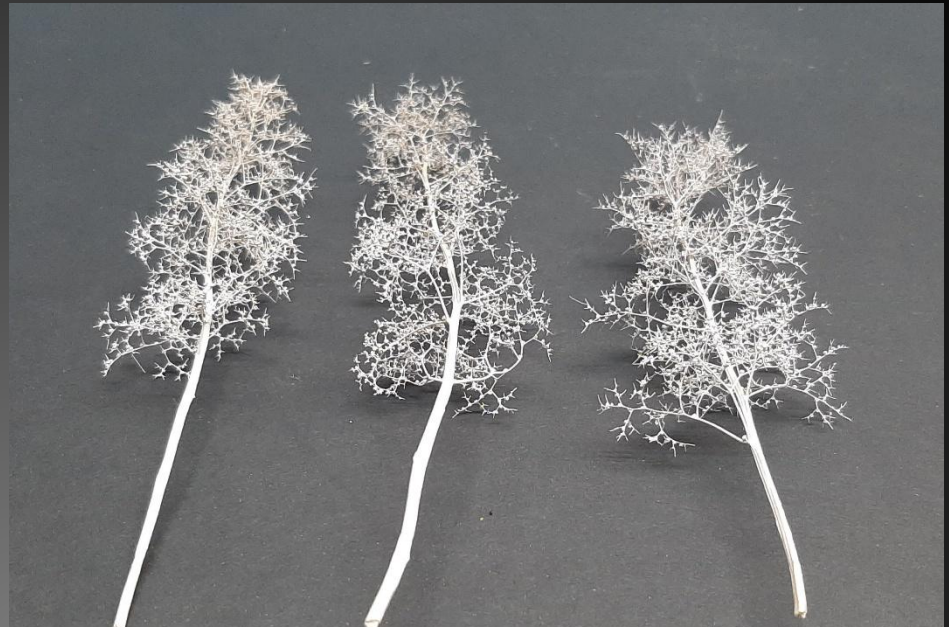
Step 4 SEALING

- Soak the armatures in diluted matte medium
- 1 part matte medium to 7 parts water
- Dried branched will eventually disintegrate unless they are sealed
- Use matte medium unlike white glue the matte medium will stay flexible
- Use a one quart container w/lid to save solution
- Soak for 30 to 60 seconds
- Hang on a drying line with a clothespin
- Clip a weight to the top branch to straighten
- Working outside speeds drying time.



Step 5 PAINTING

- Lay out the trees on a plank. I orient the trunks all the same way.
- Spray paint the trunks and branches flat white or the light sage green color.
- I paint the trunks with more paint than the branches.
- Allow the branch tips to remain the natural green of the Supertree material to show thru.
- Flip over and paint the other side .
- Add black paint with a $\frac{3}{4}$ " stiff brush for the blemishes, branch loss, and insect damage



FOLIAGE APPLICATION



Step 6 FOLIAGE

- Holding the tree by its trunk, dunk the armature into a 2 liter soda bottle filled with the Matte Medium and water solution.
- No glue on the lower trunk !
- Make sure there are no bubbles in the branches (makes the flock clump)
- Shake off excess glue
- Hold tree upright and start flock from the top down
- Leaves ONLY grow on the tops of the branches!
- Foliage NEVER grows under or inside the branches and rarely on the trunk
- Vary colors of flock with time of year.
- *Keep the foliage light and airy, you should see thru the tree!!*

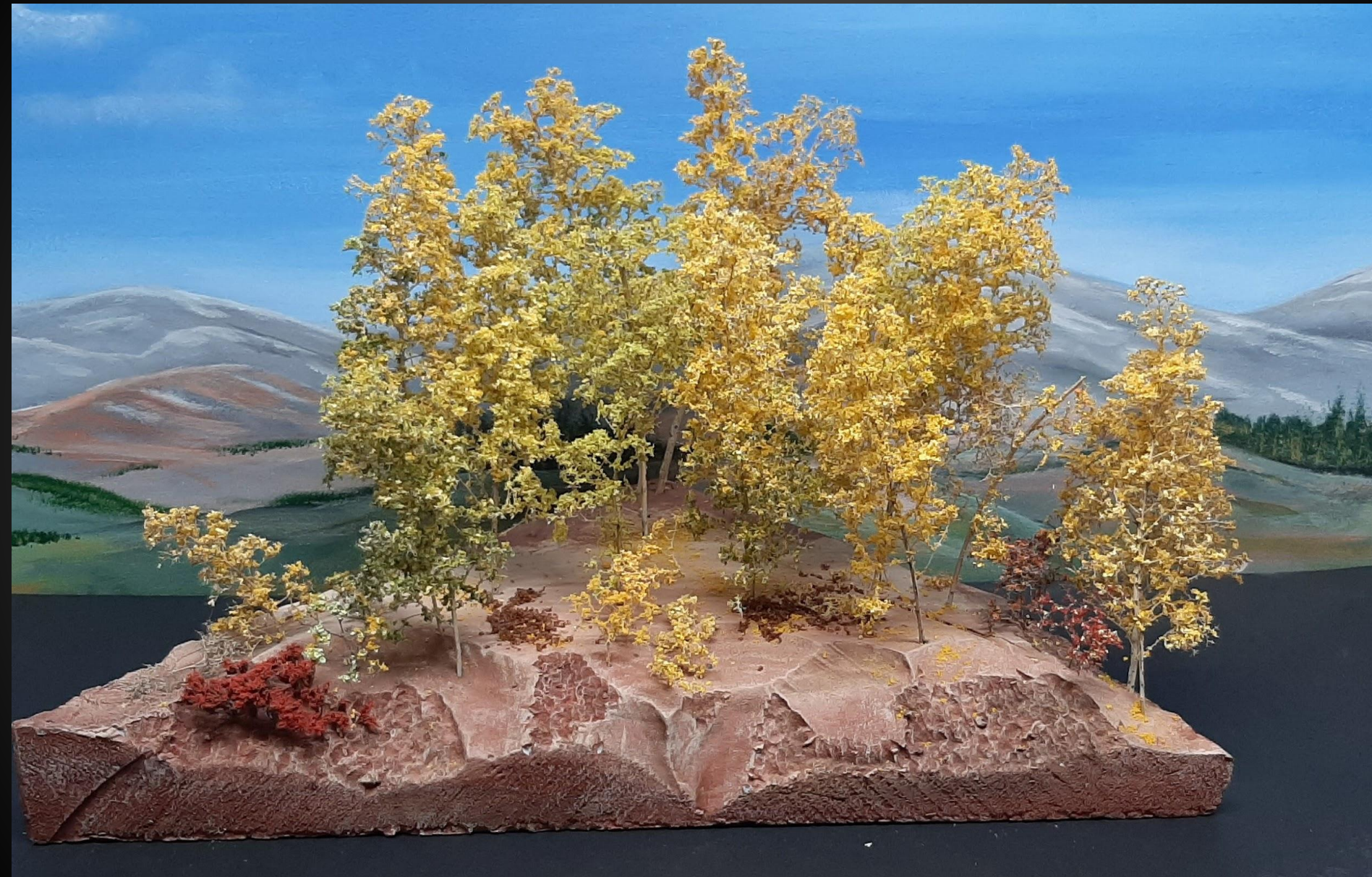


Step 6 DRYING

- Once flocked hang tree upside down from a clothes line or drying rack.
- Add weight to the top branches if needed and allow gravity to work.
- Mist on the matte mixture within 20 minutes to add more foliage or highlight colors if needed.
- Once dry remove from the drying rack and give them a spray of the diluted matte medium or cheap aerosol hair spray.
- This locks all the flock together, otherwise the flock would fall off.



The model Aspen in full fall color !



To be on the author's layout : The Silverton Railway

PLANTING INSTRUCTIONS

- Fill in areas about two trees deep to start with.
- Use your best trees in the foreground , so so's go to the back.
- Plant : 1 -3- 5 or groups of trees in areas .
- Use “baby trees” plucked branches for undergrowth trees without the scene does not look right.
- Paint backdrop dark behind trees, no sky showing at ground level. Use Yellow Ocher, brown, spruce green.
- Drill a pilot hole a little larger than the trunk, drop a small amount of Tak-e-Glue and insert. Brace or hold if needed.
- *Overlap rock castings, conifers, roof eaves or other scenery to bring realism to a scene.
- Season and month of the year for leaf color of your tree.
- Elevation changes for leaf color of your tree
- *Don't forget the leaves & limbs on the ground under the tree!!*



*One turning yellow
and one aspen still
green*

Small clump of aspens , with
underbrush



Silverton Railway



Silverton Railway

Fallen leaves on
ground, in spruce
tree and on roof.





*JIM GRAYS Denver & Rio Grande
Western HOn3*



*JIM GRAYS Denver & Rio Grande Western
HOn3*



Module Display at the 45 National Narrow Gauge Convention St. Louis , MO. 2025

Bob Lenz's



Placement of aspens and leaves on the ground

Tips



- *Climate, altitude, water, and sunlight source all have effects on the rate of progression of change in the colors.*
- *Aspen-Poplar trees do not all change at the same time.*
- *Another rule is that the leaves within the same tree never turn at the same rate. When a tree begins the dormant cycle, sap will stop flowing first at the top, causing the upper leaves to change ahead of those at the base.*
- *I suggest to hand sprinkle, blend and feather the foliage to maintain precise control over foliage tones, follow “Mother Nature”*
- *Questions ?????*

“ So long and thanks for watching”

I hope you enjoyed my clinic

**Have Fun
Now enjoy our great
outdoors inside!**

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*The Silverton Railway
Preserving the History of Red Mountain*

MAKING ASPEN TREES

Clinic –Demonstration

Materials for making the Aspen Trees

Trees Armatures:

- SuperTree Trunks & Branches : #EX0214 Scenic Express Model Landscaping Supplies , www.scenicexpress.com

Paints & Adhesives:

- Matte Medium : Golden, Liquitex, Mod Podge, Hobby Lobby, Michaels
- Rustoleum flat white spray paint (for trunks)
- Behr custom mix sampler paint (trunks limbs)
- Flat black craft paint (limbs)
- Tak-E-Glue Scenic Express
- Distilled water

Medium Mixture:

- Mix Ratio is 1:7 1 Part matte medium to 7 parts distilled water, mix well.
- Run used mixture thru a coffee filter and store in a sealable container for future use .

MAKING ASPEN TREES

Clinic –Demonstration

Foliage Colors Early Spring –Summer

- Super Leaf SE6212 Pale Green
- Super Leaf SE13 Light Green
- Super Leaf SE6123 Spring Green
- Super Leaf SE 6133 Medium Green
- AMSI 10401 Spring Green

Foliage Colors Fall-Late Fall

- Superleaf SE 6322 Aspen Yellow
- Superleaf SE6312 Maize Yellow
- Flock & Turf Aspen yellow fine EX8723
- AMSI Aspen Gold 10511
- Noch Leaf Aspen Yellow

Trunks , Limbs and Branches

- SuperTree SE EX021 (Scenic Express)
- Paint Colors : Pale Green Light Gray, Flat White, Flat black

ASPEN TREE MODEL SCALE

HO SCALE 1:87 = 1'-0"

TREE HEIGHT	1" INCH	= 7'-0"
	2" INCH	= 14'-0"
	3" INCH	= 21'-0"
	4" INCH	= 28'-0"
	5" INCH	= 35'-0"
	6" INCH	= 42'-0"

3 to 1 Ratio = a 3" tall tree would be about 1" wide at its lowest branches

FOR N SCALE TAKE $\frac{1}{2}$ OF HO SCALE FOR HEIGHT
FOR O SCALE DOUBLE HO SCALE HEIGHT

BACKGROUND, HILL, MOUNTAIN SIDE = 1" to 3"

FOREGROUND, BEHIND BUILDINGS = 3" to 6"