

Northern Virginia NTRAK "How-To" Article

SCENERY PLAN FOR TREES AND WOODS
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With the exception of Johnny Appleseed or city planners, most of us will only plan the locations of trees when we're building a module. So what should we consider while putting trees on our modules?

Do you want a real or "perfect" look for your trees? If you look at the trees around you, you will notice that with the exception of landscaped lawns and parks and maybe reforested areas, most wooded areas have a variety of trees, sizes, and health condition. For example, the woods behind my house primarily contain mature oaks, with a few old white pines (in the process of dying off), and hollies (at a substantially lower height than the oaks). Modeling such an area would obviously require a similar variety. On the other hand, the wooded areas I trooped around in at Fort Bragg tended to be almost exclusively pine trees in a scattered pattern. Other forests may have trees in almost perfect rows. Obviously, whatever look you are trying to achieve also depends on the area you are modeling. If you are modeling a prototypical location, you might want to go there and actually inventory the types and sizes of trees (don't forget to inventory the colors as well).

Consider scale versus size. For example, you can purchase a package of trees from a vendor labeled "N-scale" and probably get a number of trees that area the same size. On the other hand, you can purchase trees by size (2" – 4") and get a mix. If you make your own trees, you could measure the diameter and height of a tree and use a 1/160 scale to determine the scale diameter and height (probably to the delight of the rivet-counters among us), or you can use an N-scale figure to see if it is about the right size. For example, I have an oak in my backyard that is as wide as I am, but quite a bit taller. I could use a branch from my yard to model the trunk, but would need to make sure that it is just a little wider than the figure. As you are considering size, don't forget that the leafy portion of a tree varies in size and shape according to the type of tree. Not all trees are spherical-shaped balls stuck on top of a pole.



This shows three different types of trees on Kip's *Dew Corner* Module. Notice baby's breath added to the wooded area behind the truss to give the module some distinct color.

How thick are the woods that you are modeling? You could model one of the new housing developments in northern Virginia and not have a single tree on it, or try modeling the wooded areas on either side of the tracks in the western part of Virginia and need about 1-2 trees per inch on your module. Density obviously impacts the cost of your module significantly.

Don't forget that "real" woods may have large amounts of undergrowth and deadfall. Trees die or get blown down by high winds, or may be partially burnt by wildfires.

Fortunately, planting trees on your module is much easier than planting them in your yard. Some trees come with a base (complete with roots) that can be glued in place before applying ground cover. Others have no base and may require that you make a small hole for the trunk to fit into. Store-bought trees cost more than homemade and limit the variety or flexibility that you may want to achieve. There are a wide variety of

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vendors that offer varying qualities of trees. *Scenic Express*, a multi-vendor catalog, offers a wide variety. Since scale isn't as much an issue as is actual size, you might find gently used trees on *eBay* by not limiting yourself to just "N-Scale." I've even take some O-gauge birch trees a friend was trying to get rid of and cut the branches off to use on my home layout. Several vendors also offer kits to make your own trees. The kits come with bases, trunks and armatures (branches), and clump foliage.

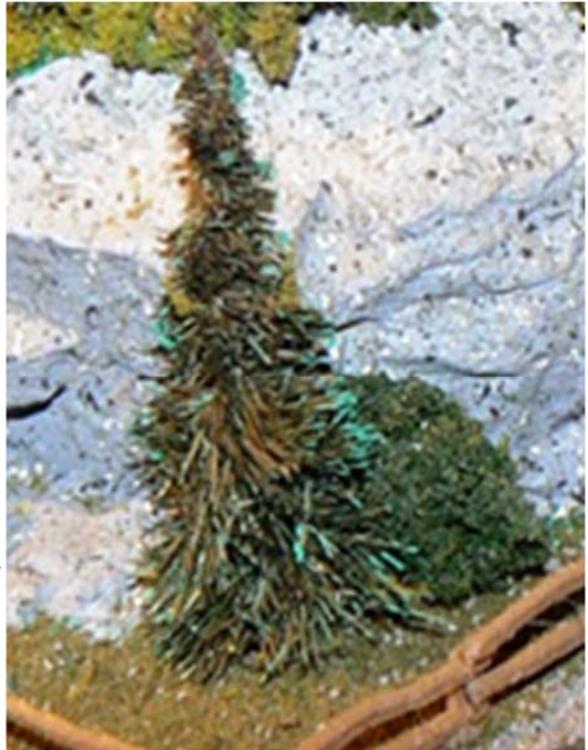
Relatively inexpensive homemade tree modeling techniques.

Purchasing trees, especially if you need a lot of them for a forested module, can be quite expensive. Here are inexpensive alternatives.

If you have access to old bottle brushes (the kind with nylon twisted together with thick wire strands) consider trimming them into cone shapes for conifers. After trimming, spray them with a dark green spray paint and then put them in a bag filled with fine or clump ground cover. Shake the bag so the ground cover sticks to the painted bristles and you have a passable conifer.

Take stiff wire (16-20 gauge three-strand household wiring works well) and tightly twist strands together to make a trunk. After getting the "trunk" the right length, bend the rest of the strands out at different angles to serve as main branches. If you don't like the look of the trunk, take some modeling compound or putty and fill in the twists. You can go back later and paint the trunk if you want. You can use smaller diameter wires to add smaller branches. Paint the trunk and branches before adding foliage.

Use polyfil to increase the diameter of the leafy portion of the tree. After attaching it to your trunk and/or branches, spray paint it a dark green and while the paint is still wet stick it in a bag filled with fine or clump ground cover to improve the texture of your tree. You can also paint the polyfil fall colors if you are going that route. If you want it a little fluffier, simply apply more paint and repeat.



During the summer and fall you can go "shopping" for natural armatures (otherwise known as branches). I try to find dead branches from azaleas, hollies, and junipers, as these have numerous small branches off a main branch. These can make pretty good looking "dead" trees or serve as the trunk and branches for living ones if you glue foliage on them. Obviously, it's a little hard to reposition the branches.

Another source of trunks and branches are "old model" trees. I had several old "HO scale" tree trunks leftover from when I was a kid that I recently came across. These originally had lichen attached to the wires that came out of the trunk. The lichen had dried and fallen apart, but I found that I could use the trunk and add polyfil. I also came across some plastic "dead" trees that were part of an old Army play set. These could also be adapted to use on the layout. I get some personal satisfaction from doing this, as some of those "trees" were some of the original ones I got when I was still a kid, so I'm still using things my folks first gave me.

There are essentially two options for adding foliage to trees. One is to use various sizes of fine or clump foliage and then attach them to the trunk and branches. The easiest way I've found to attach them is to spray

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the trunk/branches with a spray adhesive or paint and then “roll” the tree in the clump foliage until I get the desired result. The other option is to use colored foam. If you use the foam remember to tear the pieces into irregular shapes. You can use hot glue to attach the foam to almost anything.

You can accent wooded areas with floral type plants. I’ve found that Queen Anne’s Lace and Baby’s Breath make nice accents when stuck in the middle of a denser clump of trees, especially if you are going for variety. Most of the time, I pull a couple of these from a bouquet I got my wife and keep them until I need them, which allows them to dry out a bit before use. Floral moss also makes for some interesting effects. I’ve used it to replicate tangled undergrowth or kudzu.

If you have large wooded areas on your layout or modules, it can get pricey and time-consuming to make a large number of individual trees. Instead, glue down several thicknesses of the kind of foam used for the bases in the areas where you need the wooded area. Carve the foam into irregular shapes and paint a dark or medium green. You can then glue the green foliage foam directly on to that base. This gives you a thick, wooded area at a significantly lower cost than making or buying the number of trees necessary to achieve the same result. To make these wooded areas more realistic, extend the wooded areas out 1-2 inches from the foam base by using trunks and foliage with the same coloration as the green foam. From the viewer’s perspective, it will look like you have a really thick set of woods, as all they see are the tree tops and the trunks of the trees in the front.

