

Leafing Trees

A Clinic by Jeff Gerow

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This started when I was innocently purchasing new versions of “leaves” at the Scenic Express booth. Pete was standing next to me and asked how I used them. I gave him a short version of what follows. He asked if I would do a clinic and I knew I was stuck, I mean, he was right there... and if he thought people would be interested...

I’ve had some Noch Elm Leaves in my drawer for quite some time – it seemed like a neat idea, and they looked like leaves in the container. But using the normal ways of attaching foliage (matte medium, white glue, hair spray or even spray adhesive) only left clumps which looked more or less like ground foam, so no real benefit.

Parallel story, I got some Woodland Scenics (WS) Hob-e-Tac® adhesive, thinking it was what I actually wanted, Scenic Accents® Glue. That is -- the ability to hold a figure in place – but also be removable and movable. So I had this Hob-e-Tac® that “stays tacky forever” and happened to look at the label where it says “For Trees; Apply to armature ends (let dry)...” and I thought, maybe this would be good for my foreground SuperTree® full size trees. I tried it out on a couple of small trees near my new station, and it looked great. I need a couple of full size trees on my layout and I was going to make them, certainly after I had finished the rocks where they were to be “planted”, but now my schedule would be moved up a bit as I needed a couple to demonstrate.



These trees start as sage brush branch “armatures” with SuperTrees™® (from Scenic Express). You can purchase the sage armatures from several sources now, Scenic Express and Timberline Scenery among them. I got them the more fun way, while visiting the Southwest, I pulled off the side of the road and went out into an adjacent field and harvested some. I packed them into a box and sent them to me (they weigh practically nothing). I am getting near the end of my supply so I have an excuse to visit again soon. An alternative is to contact a fellow railroader in the Southwest and plead.



<http://www.timberlinescenery.com/product.php?productid=95&cat=0&page=1>

<http://www.sceneryexpress.com/SuperSage-Material/products/1012/>

SuperTrees™ are available widely. They are wonderful, natural-looking, scale trees and/or branches. I used most of the more bushy “trees” in a value pack (\$30 list) to make the two big trees I’m showing.

<http://www.sceneryexpress.com/SuperTree-Material/products/1007/>

First rinse off the chosen sage armature and let dry.

You will need a lot of SuperTrees® so pick out the “fattest” ones as they will have the best, most complicated branch structure and fill out the tree fastest.

Look closely at the SuperTrees® and remove all the pods you can find (the neat little “scale” branches seem to pop out of pods that sometimes fall off and sometimes don’t). The pods look like ½”- 3/4”long, narrow scoops and will be noticeable on your finished tree.

You will need to soak the SuperTrees® in matte medium so they will be more flexible and able to withstand being on a layout, and gluing. I soaked the ones I used for about 30 seconds, twice; with drying “upside down” in between. I rigged some clothespins over my basement work sink for the drip-drying. The matte medium was diluted at least 5:1, and perhaps as much as 8 or 10:1



Once the parts are ready, you can begin attaching branches – you may want to look at a real tree or a picture of one while you’re doing this. The intent is to use the “branches” of the sagebrush as the core of your tree and make the SuperTrees® into the smaller branches and twigs. Some good SuperTrees® “trees” can become whole branches, branching off the sage branch. Other more sparsely foliated SuperTrees® are ripped apart and the branches applied singly or in bunches (if they’re really sparse...).



To attach the branches, I use hot glue. I was using normal (high) temp glue, and some of what I say here may not be true with low temp hot glue. Grab the branch or group of branches with tweezers. Push out a little ball of hot glue and stick the end of the branch or branches into it. You would like to have a little ball of glue on the end of the branch with little on the sides (it’s possible, but requires attention). You also want to break the little thread that is following the drop of glue onto your branch. I found on my gun that passing the glue bubble over the tip again would often melt the thread. Anyway, once you have the hot glue happily on the branch move it quickly to the spot you’ve already chosen (yeah, that quickly) – but then you have to hold it for 15-20 seconds or so to make sure it’s cooled down enough and holds. This is very time consuming and literally a pain in the back, but well worth the effort.



What you end up with is a big tree with many smaller branches leading out to twigs. Unfortunately there are shiny clear threads from the hot glue. If you use back light (look through the tree at a light) you can see them well – they are easy to remove with fingers or tweezers. Make sure to remove them or you will have vines growing in your tree.



Hopefully you've been a bit random with your branch placement, so it looks like a real tree, but the wrong color!

SuperTrees® are generally too light to be used as is. I mix some twig color paint, starting with some craft store white to which I add black and brown in small blobs until I get a color that, when painted on an armature's thin branch, disappears. I thin it a bit for my airbrush and try to get every angle.



Now you get to use that Hob-e-Tak® that “stays tacky forever”. You want to paint a small glob at the end of each SuperTree® “twig” on the outside of the tree, or anywhere the sun would get to, if your armature is as split as mine was for this finished tree. Take your time and even go over some areas twice, you really don't want to miss any spots. You



now have to wait for the glue to dry to clear, the bottle says 15 minutes but it will actually be much longer – but it's OK – remember “stays tacky forever”

Finally, the really fun part. I loaded the color of leaves I choose for this (medium green) into a cinnamon shaker (that I had scarfed up earlier when it emptied). I shook and shook the shaker and leaves over the tree -- from every angle -- all over a plastic tub to save the unused leaves (the ratio seemed to be about 1:10, there was a lot to recover).



And that's it, a truly beautiful tree that will even stand up to close-up photography. This one's about 85 scale feet tall, perfect for the foreground rock face I plan for it.

