

Tips & Tech #1

Alternate Uses

Alternate Uses for Commercially Purchased Items -

Matt-Medium – Use Mod-Podge (Wal-Mart craft area) instead of Matt-Medium for gluing Ballast, same stuff and 1/3rd third the price.

Dish Soap (Wet Water) #1 - Use isopropyl alcohol instead of dish soap (wet water) in your white glue. The isopropyl alcohol will sink into the ballast a 100 times faster than dish soap and evaporate without leaving any discoloration or residue.

Dish Soap (Wet Water) #2 - Use Windshield Washer fluid w/antifreeze instead of isopropyl alcohol as a gallon costs less than a dollar.

Glycerin - To keep weeds preserved it is recommended to pickle them in glycerin, which can be purchased at drugstores and supermarkets. An alternate method is to use Ethylene Glycol (automotive antifreeze – straight from the jug).

Air Brush Cleaner - A very good brush and air brush cleaner for those using acrylic paints is Windshield Washer fluid. Basically it is water, alcohol, coloring and a wetting agent.

Solder Tips – Use #12 solid copper wire for soldering tips in the Weller solder guns. You can then form the tip to fit into tighter spots and not have to worry about ruining the tip.

Cable Clamps – To hold the wires up under the layout use ½” conduit clamps. They are about the most inexpensive clamp I have found, easy to install, just use a short drywall screw and mount it anywhere you need. Install the clamp with the round end pointed up. This way the wires will always stay in the clamp.

It is easy to add wires later as most times the one end of the clamp is not tight to the mounting surface and the additional wire can be slipped past the end of the clamp or unscrew the clamp a little if need be. If you need to be sure that the wires do not come out just use a pair of pliers and squeeze the clamp at the sharp bend. This bend will then make the clamp open end seat against the bench work.

Use COAX cable clamps to hold the Loconet cable to the bench work. These small clamps have a nail type fastener at one end of the clamp. I have removed these nails and replaced them with an appropriate screw for a more permanent installation.

Mixing Plaster – When mixing plaster for scenery using the paper strips the plaster needs to be rather thin. Getting the plaster and water mixed thoroughly has always been a problem. Use a kitchen Whisk (the type that is used to mix pancake mix) will easily mix all of the plaster.

Using a silicone Spatula, when mixing paint for the backdrop, does a very good job in cleaning out the mixing cups. The paint will not stick to the silicone and it will not dry out and crack.

Space Saving Storage:

I use the boxes that paper comes in (10 reams per box) and then I make trays from the brown cardboard soda pop cases (the ones that hold a case of 24 that the soda machines take) Cut down the sides of the soda pop brown trays to 1 ¾" high. This will allow an HO car to stand upright. Use cardboard strips that were cut off the sides as separators. The tray will hold about 10 to 15 cars per tray.

I can then stack 4 trays into the cardboard paper box with a cardboard separator between each tray. This larger separator is made to just fit into the box (11" x 17") I cut little corner pieces off the large separator so that I can easily pull the separator out. The separator holds the soda pop trays from touching the cars under them and also keeps the heavy trays from putting any pressure on the lower trays.

I stack paper boxes 3 high under the layout. If you watch where you put the legs holding the front of the layout you can stack 24 of them side by side in 25 ft of layout space (that's 72 boxes for cars, engines, scenery material, buildings, etc.) Number each box and make a list of the contents of each box and keep this in a 3 ring binder. You won't believe the time savings when you want a certain car or engine and just look in the notebook.

Yes it takes a little work in the beginning but the time saved later on will repay the time spent many times over!

Storage Containers:

If you want a very good and inexpensive storage container use the GLAD Containers. They come in a number of sizes and will seal tight. I had some paint mixed for my backdrop and the paint was still good one year later!

Painting:

Future floor polish can be used as a Gloss coat on models when decaling. It is really an Acrylic clear paint!

Permanent Magic marker – Use to stain wood ties for the creosote look. Also can be used to shade model building windows for that old dirty look (lightly sand the back of the glass and then cover with the Magic marker)

Craft store **Ceramic Kote** paints can be used on most plastic, card stock and wood buildings. It can also be sprayed through a hobby air brush. The paint can be also be used to color sand and saw dust for scenery (Just use the grays, browns, tans, greens and yellows where appropriate).

When painting backdrops and blending the colors use a worn-out (stiff) paint brush. I have found that it allows you to do dry brush technique much easier as the brush is stiff enough to be able to drag the paint out when feathering the colors.

Paint Strippers:

Isopropyl alcohol 90% solution works on most body shells. It works very well on new water based painted shells (like when you have a problem and need to remove the fresh paint quickly)

Commercial Floor Wax Stripper – will remove some of the factory baked on finishes (Lionel- K-Line)

The old stand by Brake Fluid and Fingernail Polish remover w/Acetone also work in varying degrees.