

Creating low cost road bed for your layout

In this series of do-it-yourself how-to's we'll talk about scenery materials you can create yourself.

When scenic-ing your layout, one of the things that often gets little attention, but can make the scene much more realistic is roadbed. Railroads usually use what is best for the area in which they are running their railines. Many times they'll use whatever is handy. Even smelter slag can be used quite effectively. Roadbed can get quite expensive when buying it from the hobby shop, but if you know where to look you can get it quite a bit cheaper. One of my favorite places to find hobby supplies is at the craft store. Places like JoAnne's, Hobby Lobby, Michaels, etc, can have quite a variety of materials for various uses. Another excellent place is the local hardware store. In this article we're going to discuss using ordinary sand as a roadbed modeling tool.



Russ Clowards mining module uses ordinary sand for roadbed.

Like many of us, when Russ looked at how much scenic materials cost, he decided to try and make his own. You have to kinda look at what the railroads do. They use natural materials, crushed gravel and the like to make the roadbed. Well why not use natural materials for model railroads? Sand is about as natural as you can get and it's **CHEAP!** A 50 lb. bag is usually less than 4 bucks and you can make enough roadbed to last a lifetime.



You can also use dirt from different locations if you don't mind doing a little traveling. The nice thing about living in Utah is that you don't have to look far to get the color you want. The big drawback is that the sand and dirt grains aren't uniform in size. In fact some of the grains are pretty huge! In n-scale they'd be as big as boulders. The trick is to use ordinary kitchen strainers to filter out the sand and dirt grains to the correct size. **WARNING!** Do not, I REPEAT, do not



use your wife's strainers. I know you're cheap, but strainers are inexpensive, and it's not worth having to shack up with the dog just to save a couple of bucks. Just go to Wally-world and fork out the dough.

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For those who've never set foot in a kitchen, here's what they look like:



You'll need several different screen sizes. The larger the hole in the screen the larger your grains will be. You can also use screen door material as well, but finding different sizes can be tricky. Don't use the plastic material, it won't hold up to continued use. You start out with the strainer with larger gaps and work your way down to the smallest one. The smallest one will strain out the tiny powder like grains. Don't throw anything away! You might find a use for each gravel size on other parts of your layout! Larger grains make good rocks along stream beds, while the tiny powder like grains can be used for dirt, rock colorations, or gravel roads. Once you've got you're roadbed grains the proper size, you can start laying it in the tracks. Don't be discouraged if the grain size is not perfect. Anyone who scrutinizes gravel road bed in N-scale is crazy (and has too much time on their hands!). You can try different sizes of ballast to see which one you like best and if it doesn't look right, you can always vacuum it up. In the next article, I'll discuss how to lay it in the tracks!

Dave Hansen

