

Sculptamold for Scenery

Sculptamold was recommended to me a couple of years ago by Julia Adams. We have used it to make the scenery on our Wickwar N Gauge layout at Farnham MRC, and I will definitely use it in future.

It is a mix of wood fibre, clay, and plaster that costs less than £10 for a 3 pound bag that will cover 5 – 10 square feet depending on how thickly you apply it. It is easy to find online, and most art shops and some model shops stock it (check around though, prices vary a lot). You mix it with water then spread it on whatever you have as a surface. It dries rock hard (but not brittle) within an hour, is light weight, and it sticks well to almost anything (including clean glass) and particularly well to foam.

It is ideal for forming a hard surface layer over a scenic base made from foam, and better than “Modroc” plaster bandages as it sticks better, weights less, is stronger, and the thickness can be varied. It can be sanded down and drilled.



Bag colours vary



Foam roughly carved

The base of our scenery was a hard foam, mostly Styrofoam or a slightly cheaper equivalent. If you have not come across it, Styrofoam is extruded polystyrene foam and a completely different material to expanded polystyrene. It is used for making partitions and exhibition display stands among other uses. Most larger builders merchants stock something of this kind, and some model and craft shops such as the 4D Model Shop also stock it. We stuck it together with “Insta Stick” foam adhesive (Screwfix), this expands when squirted from the can and can also be used to fill in small gaps. Gorilla glue would have worked as well. In some

places we used a cheaper insulation foam: it is much softer, it seems OK when covered with Sculptamold but is nothing like as strong when you drill through to mount things like trees and telegraph poles so I prefer the harder foam.

We shaped the foam using a combination of an “oscillating tool” with a vibrating saw blade (these are very handy as they will go through ply as well as foam), a sharp knife with a long flexible blade, and sand paper.

The foam was covered with a thin layer of Scultamold, it need only be a couple of millimetres thick. We mixed small quantities at a time in a mug (about ¼ to 1/3 of a large mug), kneading it well to get lumps out. This is quite messy, as it also sticks well to skin! You want the mix to be fairly dry else it takes much longer to set.

After applying with fingers to the foam, the surface can be smoothed out using a finger or artists palette knife dipped in clean water – it naturally has a lumpy finish which is fine for rough moorland, smoothed it is OK for most fields. A small decorators paint brush, damp, can also be used. If you want a very flat surface then sand it down after it has dried. Wash the mug out after each batch immediately after use, before mixing any more - you should not to mix any remains of the previous batch in with the next one as it will accelerate setting, and if you leave the mug very long it will already have started setting and have stuck to the mug. If not happy with the contours you can always go back and add another layer. I've seen recommendations to add PVA to the mix, but I find it fine with just water.



Scultamold added

And painted

After you have the surface as you want it, it is best to paint it in case it shows though the cover. You could use any paint, but we found a masonry paint particularly good for adhesion and coverage and it gives a tough waterproof finish. We used Sandtex ultra smooth "bitter chocolate" colour paint. You can buy a tester pot for about £3 in most large DIY shops and one was enough for 20 square feet of boards. The dark brown is the only suitable colour I found, in some places we painted it green afterwards. We allowed a few days before painting so it dried out fully. It is possible to mix powdered paint into the mix instead, but you need a lot and I decided painting it after was easier.



Finally add flock and static grass to taste to get the finish you want.

TIPS. The plaster tends to settle out at the bottom of the bag, so invert it and give it a good shake before use. After use fasten the bag tightly – if the contents get damp they will not set properly. You can embed rocks and similar by pressing them in while the Sculptamold is damp.

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