

# ROAST SCENERY

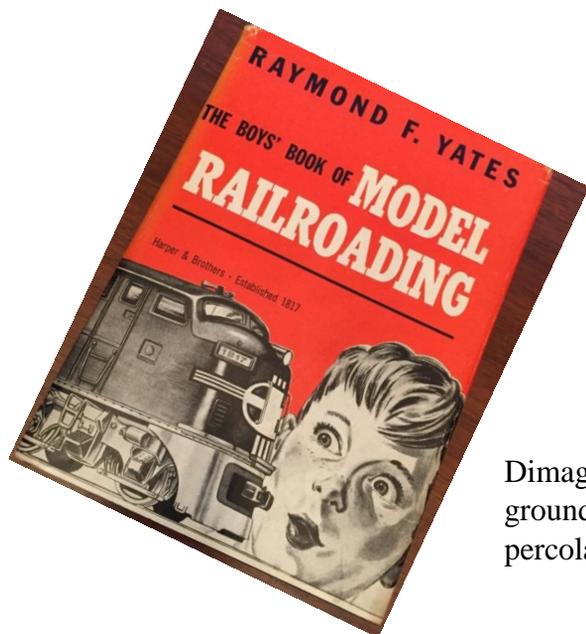


**Caffeinated Ground Cover**

*By Chip Meriam*

# Using Recycled Coffee Grounds as a Scenic Material

First of all, there is nothing new or innovative about this “technique”. I first learned of using spent coffee grounds for scenery by reading “The Boy’s Book of Model Railroading” in about 1963. The book, by Raymond F. Yates, described the process of sprinkling dried coffee grounds on a surface coated with an adhesive in order to simulate bare earth.



At the time I was building, and creating scenery for a Lionel O/O27 layout in my parents’ basement. This method fell right in line with my other scenery methods such as painting a blue spot on bare plywood and coating it with shellac to simulate a lake, and mixing parakeet gravel with wheat paste to use as ballast (I sprayed the ballast with water to hold everything in place). All very primitive, I’ll admit, but it looked good to a nine-year-old kid nonetheless.

This was about 10 years before Joe Dimaggio brought us the Mr. Coffee® machine, so the grounds I used came from the basket of my mother’s percolator.

Now, over 50 years later, I’ve returned to this method to simulate the dark, scorched earth around the base of my wigwam sawdust burner (see June 2014 [nmra magazine](#)). Rather than coffee grounds from a percolator basket, I chose to try the finely ground contents of a single-cup brewing pod such as might be used in a Keurig® coffee maker. This stuff is a coarse powder similar in consistency to ground pepper.





**Base of a Wigwam Sawdust Burner with Dried, Used Coffee  
Grounds to Simulate Scorched Earth**

The first step is obvious:

**Brew the coffee!!**

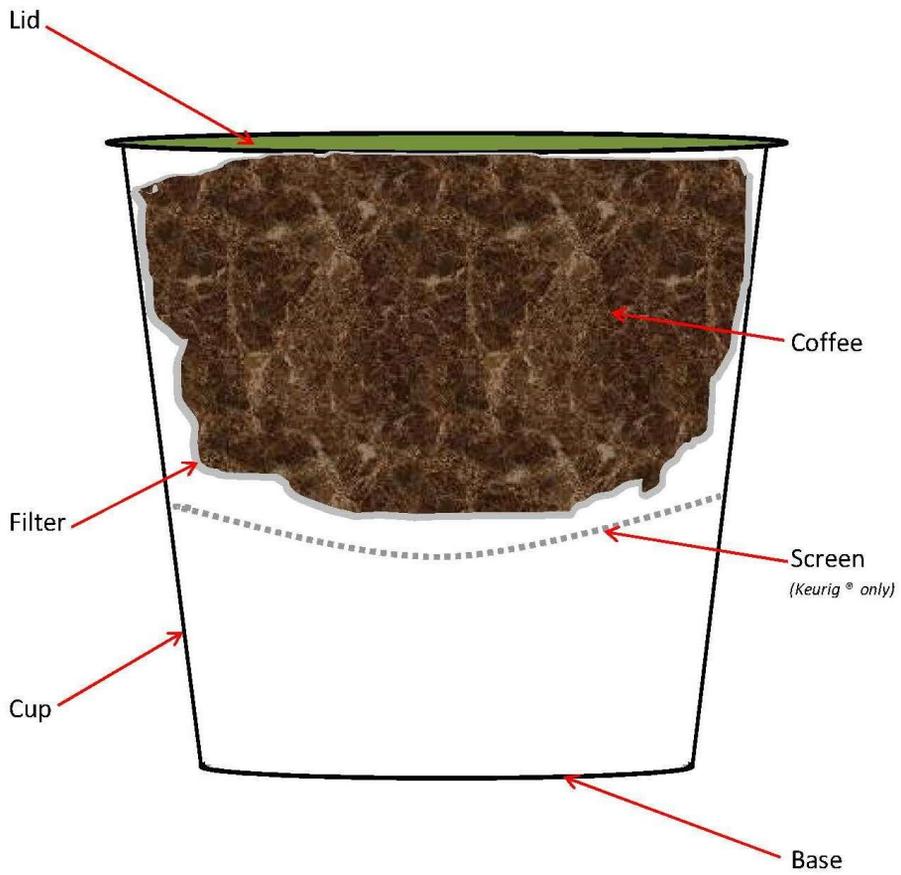


While you're enjoying your freshly brewed coffee, let's take a "pre-op" look at the coffee pod. We'll be dissecting the pod and salvaging its contents.





## ANATOMY OF A COFFEE POD



The expended pod usually cools quickly and, believe it or not, contains very little residual water. However, it is best to set it on a saucer for a few minutes before starting the dissection process.

Once we're satisfied that the pod has cooled and drained, we'll start by cutting around the inner circumference of the lid. An Exacto® knife works OK, but I prefer to use a cheap paring knife. The relatively dull paring knife, while not as adequate to carve off the lid, is much better suited for scraping out the coffee grounds.



With the lid out of the way, we can dump and scrape the grounds out of the pod on to a flat surface covered with a layer or two of paper towel.\*



Spread the grounds out in a thin layer and allow them to dry thoroughly.



\* One way to speed the drying process is to spread the grounds on a cookie sheet that has been lined with parchment paper. "Bake" the grounds in a warm (200° oven for 10 to 15 minutes.

While the grounds are drying (or baking) we can tear apart the rest of the pod. We can start by pulling and/or cutting out the filter.



There's no need to be too careful when removing the filter, but if you're a scavenger like me you may want to salvage it for some use such as curtain material for the interior of a structure. If not, toss it!

I've discovered that the genuine Keurig® pods have a round plastic screen below the filter. This should fall out easily - or it can be coaxed out with the tip of your knife. If you can come up with a use for this screen, hang on to it. Or, at best, try to figure out why Keurig® chose to put it in there in the first place. All the knock-offs work just as well without one!

Finally, we'll rinse the cup to remove any residual traces of coffee and save the cup.



If we dismantle multiple pods we'll end up with a collection of seemingly useless small plastic cups. After all, they have a hole punched through the bottom, so they're not good for holding anything – especially not liquids.....OR??????

Let's try sticking two of them together to see if they might collectively "hold water".

First, we'll make sure they're thoroughly dry. If they have a chance to sit around for awhile they should dry just fine. But if they're fresh off the dissection process, a trip or two under a blow dryer should do the trick.

Next, we'll apply some rubber cement to the under side of one of the cups and insert it all the way into the second cup. We'll give the cups a little twist to seat the rubber cement and seal the hole at the bottom of the inner cup.



There. We now have a "heavy duty" plastic cup that can be used for water, diluted white glue, acrylic paint, or.....used coffee grounds!

Applying this stuff is fairly straight forward, using techniques we've all seen or used before.

For mostly flat surfaces, spread a 50/50 mixture of white glue and water over the area to be covered and sprinkle the grounds in an even layer over the diluted glue. Next, lightly spray the sprinkled grounds with a wetting agent consisting of water, alcohol, and a drop or two of Lysol® Concentrate to prevent mildew. (This should be about 12 oz. water; 1 oz. 70% rubbing alcohol, and just a drop or two of Lysol®). This can be followed with a light application of white glue thinned with lots of water (about 90% water to 10% glue). This milky substance should be applied with a small dropper or a pipette. Once the whole thing dries, the glue will be virtually invisible.





Spread 50/50 white glue/water over the surface.



Sprinkle the grounds over the diluted glue.



Spray with a wetting agent.

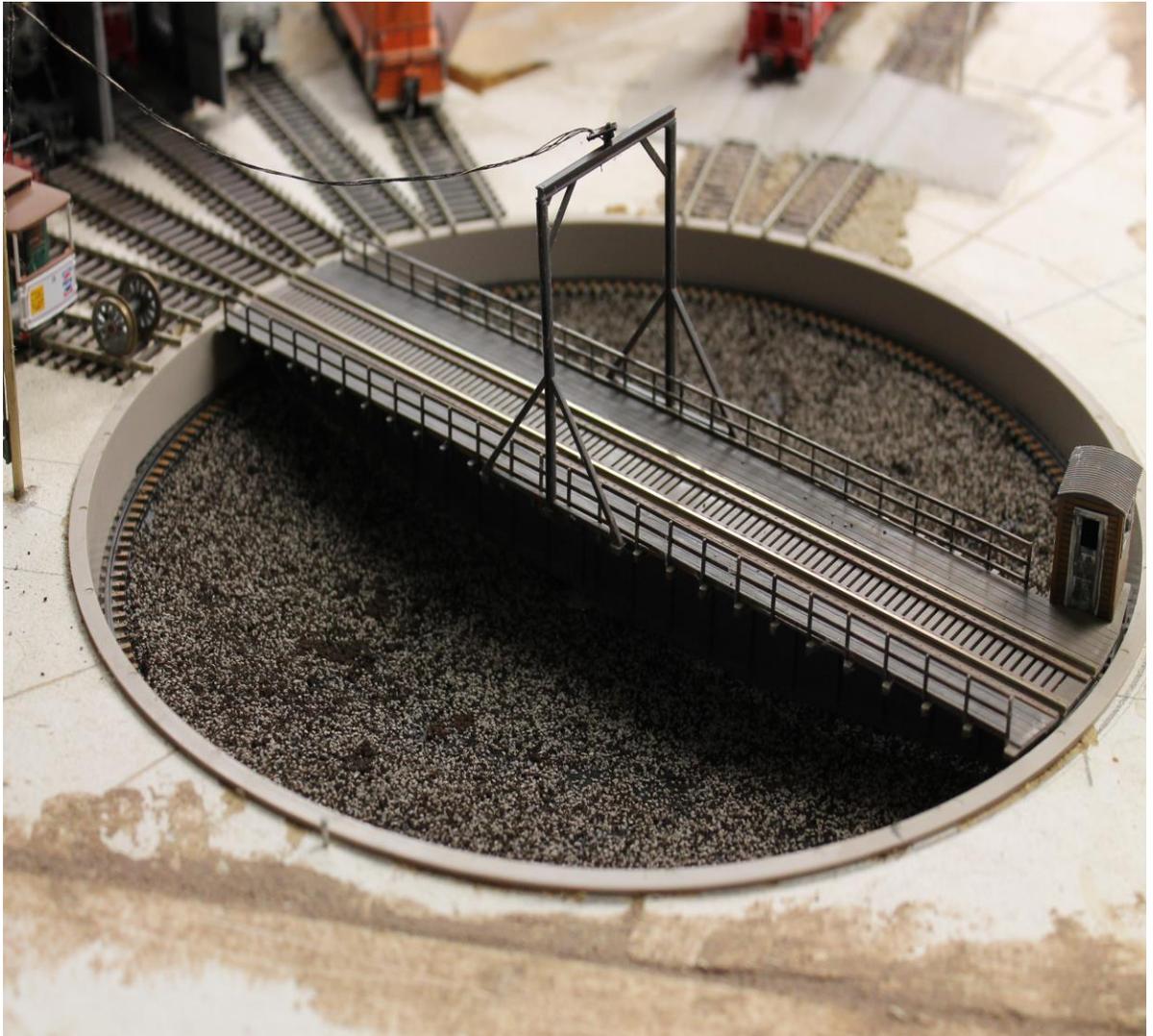


Lightly apply mixture of 90% water with 10% white glue.

Following are Two More Examples of Ground Roast Scenery



**Darkened Ballast from Oil Spills at Bulk Petroleum Spur**



**Mixed With Gray Ballast in Turntable Pit**

# Afterthoughts

As I read through this draft it occurred to me that we have used most of the spent coffee pod, but not all of it. Clearly, the contents of the pod (coffee) was our goal but, in the process of mining the primary material, we were able to salvage the filter for another use such as window covering and the plastic pod could be combined with a sister to create a useful cup. What about the decorative lid that we carved away in the first step? This material has a printed top side and a shiny foil backing – ideally suited for simulating scrap metal. Using several lids from different varieties and different brands could create a colorful display. Simply shred the lids with a knife or scissors and dump randomly into a pile or a gondola load.

Another application might be corrugated fencing or siding. In fact, the possibilities might be endless.



That leaves the round screen-thingy. If you're working in G scale, it might be a good start for a man hole cover.

Several of these might be banded together to create an interesting industrial load in O scale.

I may try a few of these as labels and organizers for layout wiring.

I want to know what you come up with. Give it some thought. When your screen-thingy epiphany hits you, drop me a line or shoot me an email. I

shall publish any and all ideas in a future edition of The Short Line. Just remember that we're a family publication! Please have fun with this and try thinking outside the ~~box~~ pod.