

Modelling Cane Railways

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Cane from Couch Grass

CaneSIG: <http://www.zelmeroz.com/canesig>

O Scale Cane Fields From Couch Grass by Ron Aubrey

Introduction

Representing sugar cane, particularly large cane fields, is one of the major challenges for a sugar cane railway modeller. Part 6 of this Handbook series provides a general introduction and the use of broom and whisk straws. Part 16 details the use of Yarra grass, She Oak needles, carpet-type mats and matching colours with cane on the backdrop.

Here Ron Aubrey reports on his use of couch grass (*Cynodon dactylon*) leaves to more realistically represent sugar cane in the larger scales.

Experience So Far

The first batch of (grass) sugar cane has been in situ for a few months. In this time there has been some minor shrinking and colour fade. The structure of the grass seems unaffected.



The whole process involves pickling in a mixture of alcohol and glycerine. There is a good article about this process in the book *Scenery for Model Railroads* by Bill McClannahan (Kalmbach). This is probably out of print and my own copy has been lost, so I have been working from memory.

The solution I use is cold and about 50/50. I immerse the grass completely for about 48+ hours and then dry off excess fluid. The theory is that the alcohol drives out the water content which is then replaced by the glycerine. Heating the mixture (MAY) improve the process.

Alcohol causes colour fade so one could tint the mixture I suppose, but I prefer to spray the planted cane with a water based colour. The effect appears real enough and in mass the grass looks more like sugar cane than anything I have seen used before. Everyone who has seen my 'sugar farm' agrees it looks real enough.

The minor shrinkage seems only to enhance the final look of the cane, and when sprayed with colour it seems to stabilise. Only time will tell how long it will last, but I believe, properly pickled, the grass should last as long as processed lichen.

Be particular about which grass you use. I like the small runners of couch with a number of small leaves on the stem. I then use randomly selected grass stems for the infill.

Planting large areas becomes very tedious but I approach this aspect in short periods and pretty soon one has the beginnings of a field of sugar cane. With some planning the areas needing to be planted could be reduced to a minimum in conjunction with backdrop scene painting.

For this exercise however, I have undertaken large areas of planting. By making a small hole in the base I dip the bottom of the grass stem into PVC glue and plant it in the small hole. If one 'plants' some strong stems in random places the rest can be infilled by just gluing grass on the 'ground'. This will certainly speed up the process.



Editor's Note

Also known as Devil's grass, Florida grass and Twitch grass, similar grasses are found worldwide and could be a reasonable modelling solution.

Couch grass is a low-growing perennial with grey-green leaves and runners which root readily... It is regarded as an Australian native and is widely planted as a lawn grass. [Source: Weeds Australia, <http://www.weeds.org.au/>]