

HAUNTSVILLE

A Tutorial to creating the forests
of Hauntsville or any or village

by
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Part 1 The Basic Tree

When I first started displaying the little lit houses that make up our villages I was told the secret to a successful village display was that “You can NEVER have enough trees.” As the years have gone by I have learned the truth of this advice.



There is much more to setting up a Village like Hauntsville (or any other village) than just lining up buildings and plugging in the lights. Of course we all add the little people to populate the village and a few street lights as well, but if you want the village to come to life it is the landscaping that really matters and the chief component of landscaping is the trees. Not just any old tree, but the right types of trees are what is needed. I have spent years shopping both the Department 56 and the Lemax catalogs and while they feature a few excellent trees I've found the trees that draw the greatest attention from those who view my villages are the ones I make myself. Each of my trees is unique and I can make it to the exact size, shape and color I want for the



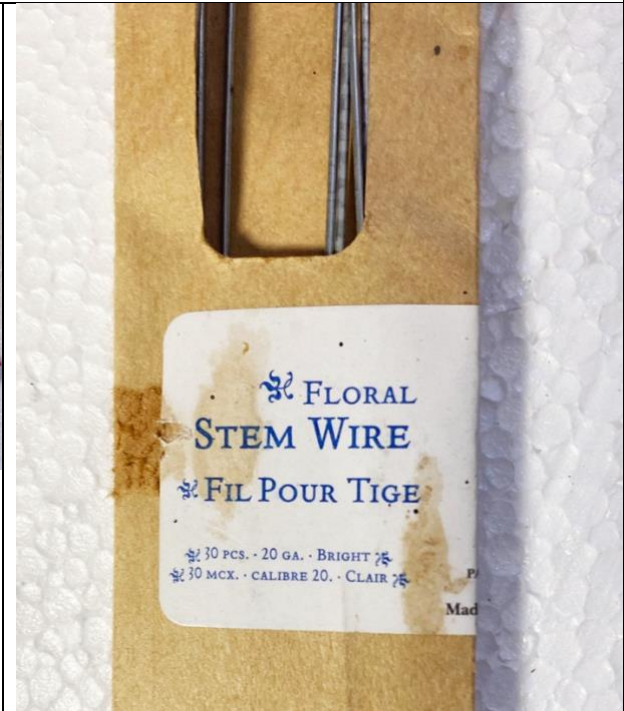
display. Additionally, the trees I make are much cheaper than their commercially made cousins. Over the years I have made well over 200 trees of all types to complete my various village landscapes. When I want a special “look” to tie things together it is to my trees that I always turn. Given a couple of hours I can create an entire grove of trees or perhaps a special tree to wrap around a house or turn several trees into an archway over a road or sidewalk. In this edition of Hauntsville I’m going to demonstrate how to create the “basic” tree as seen at the top of the column. From this humble beginning you can branch out and create speciality trees for that unique touch. In future editions Hauntsville I’ll showcase some of my special trees to give you some ideas as to the extremes to which you can aspire. The fall orange leafed tree to the left is one such example.

The basic tree will require about 20 minutes to make. The large tree shown above is composed of 6 basic trees and will naturally take a bit longer. OK, let’s get started and make your first tree.

STEP 1

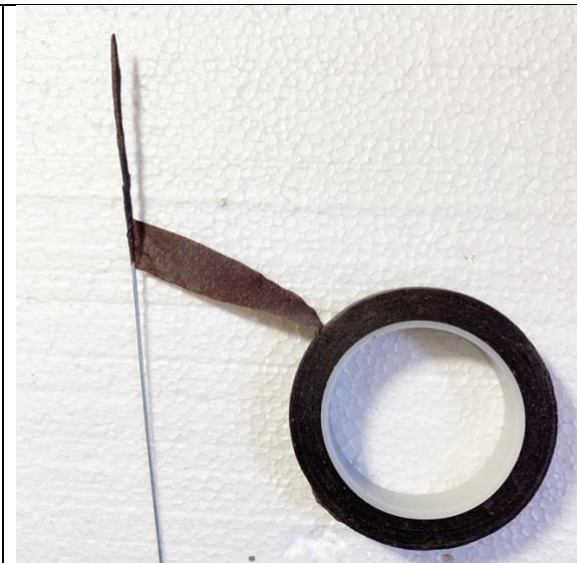
To begin you will need the following items. All the items were found in the floral department of Michael’s Crafts but I’m sure you can find them in any craft store. You will need a roll of Stem Wrap Tape. It comes in Black, White, Brown and Green. I usually use the Brown, but for special trees like birch or aspen I use white and for my spooky Halloween trees the black tape is used. On the left side of the image below is a roll of coiled wrapped wire. It is thick and heavy and I used it for making cypress and banyan trees and if I ever make a palm tree it will be used there as well. You will also need a package of Floral Stem Wire. This

wire is 18 inches long and comes in various weights. Shown here is 20 calibre wire and is what I use most often. You will also need a wire cutter. I usually use a pair of needle nose pliers that have a wire cutting feature but any wire cutter will work. The needle nose pliers are necessary when you begin to make the speciality trees.



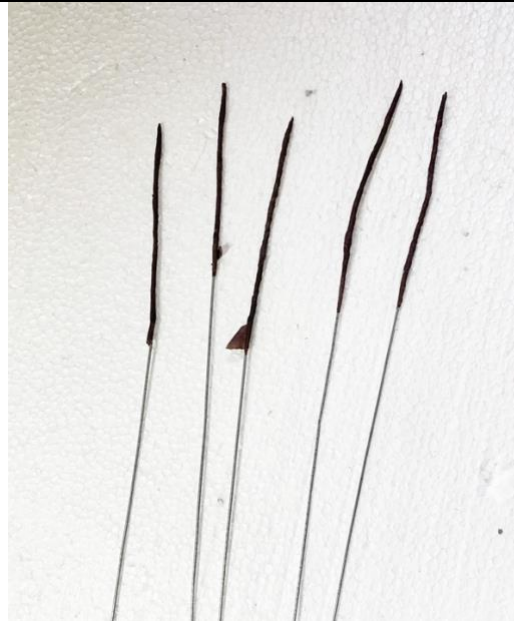
STEP 2

To make the basic tree you will need 25 pieces of 9 inch wire. Start by taking 13 pieces of 18 inch stem wire and cut each wire in half using the pliers. Next take a piece of the cut wire and wrap about 4 inches of the wire with the stem wrap tape. Start at one end and rotate the wire between your finger and thumb while pulling the tape diagonally down the wire. It does not have to be neat, you just have to cover the wire. Keep the tape tight and when you have covered about 4 inches of wire tear the tape to separate the roll from the wire. You have now completed your first twig.



STEP 3

You will need to wrap 5 of the 9 inch wires to make one tree branch and a total of 25 wires are required to make the entire tree. I suggest wrapping all 25 wires before moving on to the tree assembly phase. When you get all the wires wrapped you should separate them into groups of five as shown at the right. I refer to these single wires as twigs.



STEP 4

To assemble your first branch select 3 of the wires (twigs) and line them up roughly evenly with all the taped ends facing the same direction. Leaving an inch to an inch and a half of the taped section exposed, use the floral tape to tape the three pieces together as shown at the right. Consider each of the individually wrapped wire to be a twig. You have now combined 3 twigs to begin one branch.



STEP 5

Next select your fourth wrapped twig and place it about a half inch to an inch below the junction of the previous three twigs. Use the floral tape to secure it in place as shown at the right. When wrapping several twigs together I suggest using several layers of the tape to hold the wires securely together.



STEP 6

Now take the remaining twig and place it about a half inch to an inch below the junction of the 4th twig. Then using the floral tape wrap it securely to the stems of the previous four twigs as shown. Be sure to extend the tape at least one to one and a half inches below the junction of the fifth twig. You have now completed one branch. Extend the floral tape down the taped branch to a distance of about 4-5 inches or roughly half the length of the wire.



STEP 7

You should now have 20 taped wires (twigs) remaining. Repeat steps 4-6 so that you will end up with 5 branches as shown on the right each being made of 5 individual twigs. I suggest you slightly spread the taped twigs as shown. This will make it easier to see how the branches you are about to assemble will look. While I suggest using sets of 5 twigs to make each branch there is no rule that requires that each branch has 5 pieces. Do not use less than three, but you could use 5 to 7 if you desire. After all it is your tree. The more twigs you use the thicker your tree will look.



Step 8

Now select two of the 5 branches you just completed in step 7. Place one about an inch to an inch and a half below the other and then tape them together as shown. You should extend the tape at least 1.5 inches below the junction where the two branches meet. This will give you 1 completed limb made of 2 branches. Repeat this step so that you have two limbs.



STEP 9

Now take the two limbs made in the previous step and place them together. Make certain that one is at least an inch below the other and then tape them securely together as shown. This begins the formation of your tree trunk.



STEP 10

Finally, take the remaining single branch and place it about a half inch below the junction of the two limbs and along the tree trunk you just assembled and then tape the final branch securely to the limbs you have assembled. Be certain to wrap the tape all the way to the bottom of the wires. This will form the trunk of the tree. Your wires will not be even at the bottom and that is fine. Use multiple layers of the tape to secure the wires tightly together. Then use your wire cutter to trim the excess wire from the bottom leaving no bare wire exposed. Your tree is now completely assembled.



STEP 11

To add character to your tree take each of the 25 wrapped twigs and bend and twist them so that they are no longer straight. The more you bend and twist the more interesting the tree becomes. You can also bend and twist each of the branches and limbs as well.

To store your tree when you take the village down just squeeze all the limbs tightly together. The more times you open and set up your tree the better it will look.

Since my entire village is set up on a Styrofoam base all I have to do is stick the trunk of the tree into the foam and it will be “planted” into the display. In the next edition when I discuss how to make special trees I will explain how to make the tree self standing.



There are no rules to tree making. Go ahead and be creative. By combining several basic trees, such as what you just made, you will be able to make bigger and more complex trees. You can add extra limbs, branches, or single twigs as you please, no two trees are ever the same. In my next edition I will show how you can take the basics you learned here and with a few easy adjustments or additions you can create some stunning and unique trees that will add a great deal of interest to your village.

These trees are easy to make and I often make them while watching television. While watching a single movie I can easily make 4-5 trees. So get busy. What are you waiting for?

Until next time.

Pictured below on the left is a basic tree while on the right is a

Tree made of 2 basic trees combined to create a much fuller tree.

