

Tree-Making Basics



by Wendy Mollenhauer

Harvesting the Plants

- Thistle - Blooms purple or pink and is a noxious weed.

Thistles have tough fibrous stems that make great tree trunks. They also have prickly leaves with lobes, and round heads. Harvest when they are dried after flowering. The seed ball is what is harvested and used for tree making. Cut heads with pruner and let fall in large paper or plastic bag. Leave about 6 inches of stem, you can trim to size later. Thistles grow in pastures, fields, and along railroad tracks and roads. They scatter seeds and multiply rapidly. You will usually see them growing in large groups. They are becoming harder to find because chemicals do kill them. You will want to harvest all sizes.

IMPORTANT: Wear thick gloves and long pants when harvesting thistles.

- Yellow Yarrow and Purple Sedum. Harvest the seed bud clusters, or flowers, once they've dried.

To Make Trees :

- I stand at the sink and cut off bottom spikes. There are about 5 or 6 spikes per thistle, at the base of the seed pod or cone. Shake out the seeds in sink or dish pan. You can scrape off the thorns on the trunks if desired. Then stack the spiky seed heads in a container according to size.
- Prepare mat medium or use spray adhesive. Spray adhesive is less messy, it also dries faster but it smells worse and requires good ventilation. You need to ventilate the area you work in or you can get sick, or at least higher than the mountains on your layout.
- Sprinkle several colors of coarse or medium ground foam in several flat containers; I use old pie tins. Green tones work best for summer trees; oranges, reds, yellows and browns are great for fall trees.
- Dip the seed pod in the mat medium or spray with adhesive.
- Twirl the seed pod in the foam. It will stick to the outer areas of the pod spikes or sedum buds.
- Sprinkle in several colors for different effects, especially on fall trees. Stick them in a scrap piece of foam to dry.
- When the adhesive has dried, overspray with cheap hair spray to secure the foam. Aqua Net is a good one.
- This process also works for sedum and yellow yarrow after it has dried. I trim the trees to size as I use them. Remember trees can even be bigger than structures.