



Realistic Cedar Shingle Roofs

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Many model railroaders want their scale structures to have the most realistic roof covering that they can. Because of the high visibility of roofs on layouts they are a primary focal point. Many early structures had roofs covered with wooden shingles because they were inexpensive, easy to apply, and did a fairly good job. The two biggest enemies of wooden shingles were rot and fire. In our scale structures, we really don't have to worry about either. In about 99% of the available commercial kits, that range in price from almost nothing to several hundred dollars, the manufacturer supplies an old and, if installed without some special treatments, very unrealistic, roll of brown paper shingles. In other aspects, kit builders have made great strides in ultra-realism, from the quality of metal, plastic, and plaster castings, to finishes and laser cut woods. Yet, modelers are expected to allow the roofs on structures (that we spend weeks and sometimes months to build) to retain the color and texture of a brown paper grocery bag. Is that what you really want? If you are willing to put the time into a difficult and expensive kit, then you probably want the best looking roof available. After all, your roofs are perhaps the largest area that you and your friends see of your buildings after they are installed on your layout. Let's make some adjustments.

First let's look at a prototype-shingled roof. If the shingles are made of cedar wood, they are probably redwood, although that is pretty expensive these days. These shingles vary in color, width, length, and thickness. Above all, they have a wood grain texture. This is what we are trying to simulate. So what do we do to simulate all of this? Richard H. Christ wrote an article in the 1969 *Model Railroader Magazine*, which addressed the idea of using individual cedar shingles for roofs. In this article, Mr. Christ pointed out the source of these thin cedar sheets as wraps used around a 15-cent cigar. Well, the cigar has gone up in price and the wrap has pretty much disappeared from the market since then. Sierra Scale Models is one of a very few companies that can now provide you with the thin, .012 thick cedar sheets.



Now, let's talk about using this product. The first step is to cut the sheets, with the grain direction, into widths ranging from a scale six to twelve inches wide. Once you get all the strips cut, either on a paper cutter or with a straight edge and model knife, it's time to cut the shingles to length. Look at a scale rule and see what sixteen to eighteen inches, in your scale, looks like. Next, pick up a group of the strips and, with a pair of scissors, just start cutting off shingles, across the grain, to length. Don't worry if all the cuts are not perfectly square. That only adds to the realism during the application process. This job really isn't as hard as it sounds.

Once you have a pile of these scale mini-shingles it's time to prepare the roof for them. Most of us have already used the lined cardstock to put our paper shingles on. If not, these lines can be drawn on the brown card stock that comes on the back of most tablets of paper. The pencil lines are drawn horizontally across the roof about nine scale inches apart; this allows the proper overlap of the shingles when applied. After these lines are drawn, and the roof is installed on our structure, spread a thin film of white glue along the lowest two parallel lines. Using a sharp modeling knife, stick a mini-shingle, and place it so the grain runs vertical to the roof, starting at a corner of the roof with about a 30% overhang off of the roof. It helps if you have a dull pencil in your other hand to hold the shingle down as you retract the blade point from the shingle. Finish this row across the bottom of the roof by putting each shingle in place next to the previous one. Keep the top edge even, and don't worry about the unevenness of the bottom edge, as this will only add realism to the roof. Next, smear another film line of glue across and do the next row, only with the top edge about nine to twelve scale inches higher and overlapping the previous row. Keep your rows parallel, using the previously drawn lines, and finish all rows all the way to the top.

Finish all sides the same. When you get to the top you can do several things to top out the shingle roof. Three ideas include:

1. A cap of stripwood shingles glued, overlapping along the peak set 90% to the shingled roof.
2. Build a fire walk out of stripwood to hide the peak; be sure to add fir barrels.
3. To simulate a lead cap peak, use tin foil cut a scale 12 inches wide, the length of the roof, and glued in place.



If you want to get fancy, you can add a piece of mechanical pencil lead glued along the peak on top of the thin foil. Once this all dries you can paint the simulated lead cap with a color like Floquil Gun Metal. As far as the finishing on the shingles, you have several choices. You can hurry up the aging process with A-West Weather-It, which gives a soft weathered appearance associated with sun bleached shingles (see Figure 2).

If you desire a more northeastern look where the shingles pick up a little darkness from the mold, you can try the India ink and alcohol process. Mix it thin and allow it to dry between coats. Stop when it looks appealing to your eye. You can stain the shingles darker around the smoke stacks with shades of paint or chalks. You can even add small specks of white bird droppings to them near the peaks or where birds would congregate overhead. Be sure to weather some of the dropping with thinner, and dry brush others using small streaks of weathered white down the roof. After all they didn't get there all at once unless elephants learned to fly!

If you're putting shingles on cone type roofs, then you will start out with a normal size shingle and work progressively to the peak with smaller shingles. If you are puzzled about a particular application either go out and look at the real thing or get some of those expensive books and magazines you have been accumulating and check out old pictures of roofs.

Cedar shingles have been used on numerous prize-winning models at NMRA contests for years. Richard H. Christ, in 1968, won a Best of Show at the fall Sunshine Regional meet using them. I have done the same at similar contests. Remember nothing looks more like wood than wood itself. Now you have the knowledge on how to make contest winning roofs of wooden shingles.