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Digging in the dirt

Planting a garden in rich garden 'dirt'

BY AURALEA KRIEGER



MEET THE MAKER:
Auralea Krieger

"I live on the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland and work remotely for this wonderful magazine. I have been an artist my entire life and a miniaturist for 30+ years. I love this particular art form because of the challenges and the imagination has no limits!"

If you are planting a garden for your miniature scene then you will need lots of rich soil. I have finally got around to starting my Ophelia dollhouse garden and am very excited about discovering the Deluxe Materials product Ballast Magic. This product is popular with miniature train hobbyists because it is a great way to adhere scatter ballast (gravel or coarse stone used to form the bed of a railroad track or road).

Ballast Magic is an innovative powder adhesive that when mixed with other dry materials and then misted with water and left to dry it is solid to the touch.

Materials:

- Ballast Magic
- Steeped tea leaves
- Flowers
- Plastic mixing bowl
- Water

Optional items

- Painters spatula
- Floral foam
- White glue
- Thin cardboard

The directions for working with Ballast Magic for miniature railways may be different than how I have used it for this tutorial. But that is what our art form is all about—using materials and products in new ways.

I experimented with the amount needed for tea



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leaves to dry hard. The photo shown gives you an idea of the mixture I used. Do a few tests to see what works best for your project. I will go ahead and share what I did for mine.

1 First I cut the shape of my garden bed using thin cardboard. I already had some plants I made from years ago that were glued in floral foam. I glued those to the cardboard with white glue and let them dry.

2 You should already have been saving used tea bags after making hot tea or iced tea. Because my foam was thick I had to fill in with lots of tea leaves to build it up. For this I mixed the tea leaves with white

glue and spackled it on top of more white glue leaving the tops of the foam exposed. Then left it to dry over night.

3 You have to use A LOT of white glue with tea leaves for it to dry hard so this is where the Ballast Magic comes in handy. My 'dirt' base is now a little spongy to the touch and the tea leaves will flake off when touched. So I want to add a top layer that is hard and won't flake away.

Add the tea leaves and Ballast Magic in a plastic container as shown in the photo. Mix them together and then add a little water at a time. You don't want the mixture to be sloppy wet, only wet enough that you



TOPTIP:

After you squeeze in your powder, close the lid before setting the bottle on the table because a puff will come out! Or set it very gently on your table. You can also wipe down your station when you are finished working.

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can spackle it onto your garden bed. If you add too much water, no worries, just add more tea leaves and more Ballast Magic.

I like this product because I don't have to rush before it dries when applying the 'dirt'. If you have a collection of flower stems already made, you can use the mixture to fill a garden bed by packing in the 'dirt' tight and then insert your flower stems into the 'dirt' with a touch of glue on the stem. You could also apply



Right: The tea used above was regular Lipton brand mixed with Tazo brand Awake tea. **Left:** The tea used here was Tazo brand Baked Cinnamon Apple tea. It has more variation of colors.

the 'dirt' on a thin sheet of foam shaped like a garden bed so the stems have something more substantial to sink into. All of this will depend on the flowers you are adding.

4 I put the flower stems I made in the last issue of *AM* in a thin piece of floral foam and pressed the Ballast Magic tea leaves mixture all around it and it dried nice and hard. Now it is a mound that I can add or take away from a tiny bed in front of another house.

When working with

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railroad dirt/dust the idea is to mix the Ballast Magic with dirt/dust, lay on the surface and then spray with a light misting of water and let it dry. I couldn't do this because my flowers are made from paper.

5 After your mixture dries, you won't see any of the Ballast Magic white powder, just the illusion of rich dark top soil. Give it up to 3

hours to dry. It will depend on how thick you made it and how much water you added in the mixture.

I am very happy with the results. Bits of moss can be moved around the garden without the tea leaves moving everywhere. I also used the 'dirt' to fill some planters and pushed in some flowers with a spot of white glue on the wire

and left to dry. When turned upside down (or when knocked over) the tea leaves stay put!

Next issue I will share how I applied the static grass for Ophelia's lawn.

Deluxe Materials products are available in USA miniature stores and distributed by Aztec Imports. Or they can be purchased direct from: www.deluxematerialsus.com.