HOW TO Model Roads

Fast, Cheap, and Easy
For virtually any scale
Well that describes me and the roads I guess...

Simple materials and Tools
Shingle Roads have lots of Flexibility

Introduction

There are many different ways to model roads for war gaming. You can buy them ready made from latex, rubber, or cast urethane. You can make them yourself with latex caulk and fabric, felt, or card. Perhaps the best is to build them right into your base board—if you can store that many base boards! Over the years, I have bought them and made many different kinds using a wide variety of methods. One day I was in a model railway shop and a very old and frankly kind of smelly man kept staring at me while I pursued the building kits. “I make my own roads, you know”, he finally said. Not wanting to be impolite, I nodded and said something non-committal like “that’s nice” or something. “Yep” he said, “I make my own roads out of shingles”. Or he might have said “it gives me something to do because I have shingles”. He was distracted by another customer and I thought it best to make my purchases at the counter and run for it. I don’t really remember all of it that clearly, but for some reason the thought stuck in my head. Eventually, having come across some old asphalt shingles in my garage, I decided to give it a try without expecting too much. Much to my surprise, I really liked the result.

Regular old asphalt shingles have several things going for them (road wise) – they are cheap (I just bought some for this article for less than $3 each and just TWO did all you will see here), they store easily, they are relatively thin, they take paint well enough, they are soft enough to cut with a knife, and they are soft enough to carve a bit of detail in. The big advantage they have over most materials is that they are very “vertically” flexible allowing them to go up and down over uneven ground. What follows is the how to and so on. Do give this a try. I think you will be surprised at the result for such little time and effort. “I make my own roads out of shingles, you know”... (Thanks old timer wherever you may be, I’m going to be you real soon!)

General Steps
1. Determine the size of your roads
2. Cut to size and shape
3. Carve the surface (if desired)
4. Dry brush or paint
5. Add road markings (optional)
6. How to get them to lay down and stick together
7. Other Ideas

Materials
Regular, cheap, black asphalt shingles from the DIY Store
Sharp Knife (Utility Knife works best)
Wide masking or Duct tape
Some gravel or dirt
Paint and Primer
Maybe Super Glue
Determine the Size of your Roads

Roads can be any width. Here is a simple chart I made to give you some ideas. I think these sizes work well, but of course you can pick your own.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Simple Old Dirt Road</th>
<th>WW2 European Asphalt</th>
<th>Modern Asphalt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6mm</td>
<td>¾” wide</td>
<td>1” wide</td>
<td>1 ½” wide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-15mm</td>
<td>1” wide</td>
<td>1 1/2” wide</td>
<td>2” wide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28mm</td>
<td>2” wide</td>
<td>3” wide</td>
<td>4” wide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You may want to determine your road width by making it match a stand of figures that you commonly use in single column or base it on whether your vehicles are one or two across. These roads are so easy and cheap to make, don’t be afraid to make different sizes.

Cut to Size and Shape

Cutting these shingles is easily done with a sharp knife. You can use a hobby knife but it will dull the blade quickly. I use a utility knife like the kind you can buy for a few dollars at the hardware store where you bought the shingles. Lay the shingle on a broad flat surface that you can cut on. (NOT your grandma’s favorite dining room table!). Use a ruler to cut straight road “strips” out of the big part of the shingle. Curves can be cut in the smaller sections. Use a heavy knife and take your time. Use more than one pass and don’t try to cut it all in one go. If you hold the blade at an angle, the roads will come out pre-beveled if you desire. You can also use heavy grid sand paper to sand the edges if you want. Make sure all your road sections are the same width at the ends so they match up. You can cut wavy roads, Y-junctions, intersections, etc. For most applications, we will be using the smooth side and not the gravely side. Cut sizes that go across your table, down your table, etc. Do some with angles. Make some wavy. You want lots of variety.
Carve the Surface (Optional)

If you want to add more detail to the surface, you can carve in puddles, ruts, etc. with a hobby knife. This stuff cuts well so take your time. You can do a lot of special effects by cutting a hole completely through the road strip and then taping the back with duct tape (regular tape WON’T stick enough). Once you have done this, you can “fill’ the hole with plastic card cobblestone sheet to represent an old road repaved. I made a cratered asphalt road by using two craters from the Architects of War Portable Minefield set. I cut holes in the roadway, taped them from behind, and then stuck a crater in. I used gap filling super glue liberally around the edge (I always use Satellite City Super T for this). Before the glue set, I sprinkled sand in it to fill it in and give it some texture. I then glued on some pieces of the cut out section to represent broken road bits and painted it.

For dirt roads, use a knife to carve in wheel ruts and puddles. Paint the bottom of your puddles a darker shade than the road and use my favorite “water” material-cheap clear nail polish- to represent standing water. Give the puddles a couple of heavy coats for best effect. For hoof marks, I simply took a piece of metal tubing and hammered in indentations at an angle.
Dry Brush or Paint

For asphalt roads, the raw asphalt shingle color actually works well for newly laid roads. Asphalt turns grey with time, so dry brush them with grey. The texture of the smooth side of the shingle really looks great this way. Dirt roads are easy to do by giving them a base color and then several dry brush coats. Add weed flock and fine sand or dirt to give them more texture when the paint is wet.

These roads were painted with brown latex and then dry brushed. The grass flock was added when the paint was still wet.

Add Road Markings (Optional)

These Lines were simply masked and sprayed

It’s easy to add road markings by covering the top of the road with tape and then cutting out the areas where you want the markings. A light spray with white or yellow and you are done.
How to Get Them to Lay Down and Stay Together

It’s easy to get the roads to stay down well. They are “vertically” flexible and follow contours fairly well. If you have a stubborn spot up a steep slope, try heating with a hair dryer. The asphalt shingle material will soften. Hold it down for a minute or so until it cools. It will even go back to flat (usually) if you store the roads flat when you are done with them. The picture below shows an “extreme” slope example of what can be done. I used a hair dryer on this one.

A road on a steep hill. Note: It stays in place even on a smooth surface like the table top.

Getting them to stay put is very easy too. The “rough” side of the shingle has a lot of grit and sticks to a flocked table almost like Velcro (but harmlessly). I add a piece of duct tape to the backs at set up to keep things aligned. It comes off harmlessly.

Taped on the back so Miles doesn’t bump them out of alignment
Other Ideas

You don’t just have to make roads. Perhaps you need a parking lot or an aircraft landing stip. I made a very rough gravel path using the course side of the shingle, some paint, and some flock. I haven’t tried it yet, but you could cut the shingle material into strips and glue (using latex caulk) some Woodland Scenic’s Clump foliage to it to make hedgerows that can go up and down hills too.

If you don’t have any dirt roads, you at least have to give them a try with this method. They are very handy for:

Ancients

Napoleonic

World War 2 and everything in Between
I hope this article was helpful to you. We carry Satellite City Super Glue, a wide variety of scenic flock, and the *Architects of War Portable Minefield* in our web store.

If you make some of these roads this way, we’d love to hear your thoughts and see some pictures. You can reach us at customerservice@architectsofwar.com.

For more *How To* Hobby PDFs and much, much more, visit our web site at [http://www.architectsofwar.com](http://www.architectsofwar.com).

Please be safe with cutting tools, Super Glue and Paint. Always cut AWAY from you and work in a well ventilated area. This is a hobby project recommended for those aged 14 and older.