

Making Snow for Gaming Miniatures

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Making durable and convincing snow coverage for simple displays and wargaming miniature bases has been a long-standing difficulty for many modelers. This how-to article outlines the way I make mine. Certainly there are better methods to achieve a higher level of realism but I have gotten many compliments on the appearance of my snow bases and have yet to have any “yellow” with age, or degrade in effect with handling.

MATERIALS:



Above are the materials I will use to illustrate my methods:

- white glue
- blue ink
- baking soda
- liquitex texture medium

One could omit the texture medium if it is too expensive or hard to come by in your area. This will make your snow covering more smooth but still convincing. One can also substitute blue acrylic paint for the ink, but as the ink is a more concentrated pigment and has some nice qualities to it, I would not recommend the switch unless you have no other option.

STEP 1: Mixing the Ingredients

While I don't follow any hard and fast measurements for this mixture, I do roughly recommend equal portions of white glue and texture medium, with an amount of baking soda equal to both glue and medium combined. This can be a rough “to the eye” assessment as you can always add a little water or baking soda if the mix is too thick or thin.



Slowly start to mix all the ingredients together with a stirring stick or a small bit of plastic. An old brush will work well in a pinch if you have nothing else suitable. When the parts are thoroughly mixed you should have a bubbly, thick goo the consistency of toothpaste. It is at this point that I add a tiny amount of blue ink. I cannot stress enough that a little ink goes a long way. Wet a brush completely in water then dip the tip into your ink bottle. Let any excess drip off. Then very lightly touch the tip of the brush in the center of your snow mixture. A small amount of dilute ink should be left over. Mix the color into the snow and judge if it is too dark or too light. If too light, add a bit more glue and a bit of clean water. If too dark repeat the step above for adding the ink. It is far better to be too light than too dark as the color will become more apparent as the mixture dries. Below is an example of the snow mixture with blue ink added.



STEP 2: Applying the Snow

Now that our mix is complete we need to apply it to our base. When applying a lot of snow I use the spatula I mixed with, but if the mixture is just for a miniature base, an old brush will do just fine. Very carefully pile on the mixture in your base making sure to keep it off the sides and off any models. Apply it thickly and in mounds to provide a little variation in coverage. The mixture reduces in size quite a bit when it is fully dried and thin areas of coverage will appear slightly translucent. This can work to your advantage, or disadvantage depending on the effect you are after.



As you can see above, the mixture is applied smoothly in slight humps to provide a bit more visual interest than a plain even surface.

When this is done take a small handful of baking soda and sprinkle it liberally over anywhere coated with the mixture. This will add a needed level of surface texture as well as a slight bit of sparkle on the finished product.



Allow the whole pile to dry 24 hours before removing the baking soda. Do not rush this step as I have ruined many bases by being impatient. The baking soda on top of the mixture creates a crust on the mixture that may lend the appearance of hardness, but when manipulated, or dry-brushed, crumbles apart.

STEP 3: Finishing the Base

When 24 hours have passed, remove all the baking soda with a soft brush. What you are left with should resemble the base below:



As you can see there is a slight blue cast and sparkle to the snow. You can leave the snow as is at this point if you are satisfied with the results, but I prefer to give it a quick dry-brushing with some pure white paint to bring out the texture and small mounds a bit more.



Simply clean up any of the base edges that got hit with the dry-brushing with a little black paint and there you have your finished icy, snowy gaming base.

