

Rouse Umbrella Trees

These are basic instructions for a form of balloon tree which Graham Rouse first introduced to the balloon industry in the early and mid 1980's. The trees may be easily reproduced or modified to suit a multitude of themes.

Flowers and Fruit

Balloon flowers are discussed in other hand outs and may be used on the trees for color and to support a theme. Fruit trees may contain apples, oranges, bananas or other appropriate fruits made with balloons. Added interest and support of special themes may be created by using play money, family or team photos, candy, cheer leader pom poms, jack-o-lanterns or other objects instead of or in addition to balloon fruits and flowers.

Foliage

We most commonly use clusters of four latex round balloons wrapped around the ends of green balloon straws for foliage. Groups of balloon filled balloon straws are then stuffed into the ends of pvc branches to hold them in place.

We normally make up the bunches and bind them together with tape ahead of time. These bunches are bagged to protect them and make them easier for transport.

Aluminum wire and wooden dowels may also be used as the small branches to hold clusters of balloons for foliage. We sometimes pick up coils of wire covered in green plastic at a hardware store. Just cut it to the lengths you need and cover the balloon end of the wire with floral tape or other material to protect the balloons.

Foil balloons may also be used for foliage alone or mixed with latex. Geo balloons can make great foliage for a candy tree. Number 260, 350, apple balloons, bee bodies and other specialty balloons may also be used for foliage to vary the character, texture and general look of your trees.

Limbs and Branches

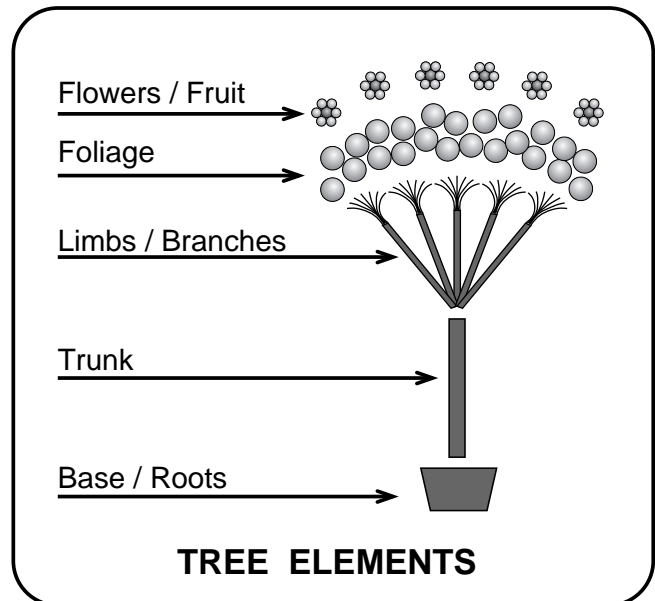
Depending on the size of your tree there may be several changes in size from the trunk to the branches that directly support your foliage.

We commonly use either 1/2", thin wall pvc (200 psi) or 3/4" thin wall pvc as the limbs that receive the bunches of balloon clusters. You may also use metal pipes, tubes, or rods or even clear acrylic tubes for a more sophisticated, abstract look.

You may heat and bend plastic for limbs, use specialty joints (as in pvc) or force bend metal to desired shapes. If you choose solid limbs rather than hollow ones, you may attach foliage branches around the end of the limb rather than forcing branches inside.

Trunks

We often start with seven pvc pipes growing vertically out of a tight cluster at the base of the tree, then allow six of them to bend outward about 5 or six feet up. The cluster of



seven serves as the trunk and the scattered sections of pvc above serve as the limbs.

In another pattern we use 6" diameter pvc as the trunk and have the branches take off about head height out of the top of the trunk.

Yet another pattern has a single strong, narrow vertical rod as the trunk and then wrap it with balloon clusters to give it dimension and texture.

Base / Roots

A steel plate with a solid vertical element in the center can work effectively for a base.

A wooden base with flange and threaded, galvanized pipe can also serve well. This is not as strong but since you can unscrew the pipe, the base stores and ships more easily.

Pvc or metal pipe embedded in a planter with plaster or concrete is one of my favorites. It is more awkward to store and to move but has a finished look and therefore requires less last minute work to make it presentable.

Slide trunk sections down over or into the vertical elements of your base.

Assembly

Attach flowers to foliage. Insert foliage clusters into limbs. Insert limbs into the trunk. Slide the trunk onto the base. **Simple!** (But be sure to test the fit of all elements ahead of time.!)

Tips

Try stringing miniature Christmas lights in your trees. Use clear acrylic tubes for your branches and insert chemical lights at the last minute. Wrap trunk, limbs and larger branches with wood grain contact (shelving) plastic.