

How to Build Your Float

Where to Begin

The first step in planning any float is to thoroughly read all of the information concerning entry fees, deadlines, transporting the float, parade rules and regulations and most importantly, safety requirements. If your float is for a specific event, check with the Parade Chairman for the theme so that you can decide on an appropriate design for your float. Other restrictions that must be considered are height and width; height as related to how high you can build while remaining a safe distance from overhead wires, and height from lowest point of structural materials and the surface of the road (remember to allow for weight of riders and curb heights).

Designing Your Float

The next step is to build or borrow a float trailer (see sketches below) which will determine the size of your float. Floats have been built on trailers, jeeps, cars, even boats and barges. However, most floats are built on trailers that are 8 feet or less in width to allow for ease of travel to and from the parade route.

Have a meeting with your float builders so that everyone can agree on a design. You can then split up the work: one group can be in charge of props or costumes that will be used on the float. Another group can be in charge of the lettering or signage that will be displayed on the float for your organization. Another group can be in charge of the frame-work used underneath the decorating materials. Building a float is a team effort, so make sure everyone understands their part in building the float.

A great way to decide on a theme for your float is to start with the theme of the parade and use symbols associated with the theme. For example, if your parade has a Christmas theme, start with basic ideas of what Christmas is best associated with:

- 1) Christmas trees (you could have a Christmas tree with flame-retardant flocking on your float as a prop)
- 2) Christmas gifts (large presents on your float make great props and are easy to create!)
- 3) Colors of red, green, white (helps with choosing the colors of your float)
- 4) Winter time/snow (you can use flame resistant white cotton-like materials, such as upholstery stuffing, to simulate snow. These are available at your local fabric store.
- 5) Family dinner (a table on the float portraying a family gathered at Christmas dinner)
- 6) Santa's workshop (Children can be dressed as elves)
- 7) Bible related scenes related to first Christmas.

Get everyone involved who is building the floats' input on how the float should look. Creativity is at its best when everyone has a say at what the float should look like. Write down all of the ideas on a chalk-board or large presentation paper and agree to a design. **Creativity is sometimes the most difficult part of building the float, but it is also the most fun!**

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Materials

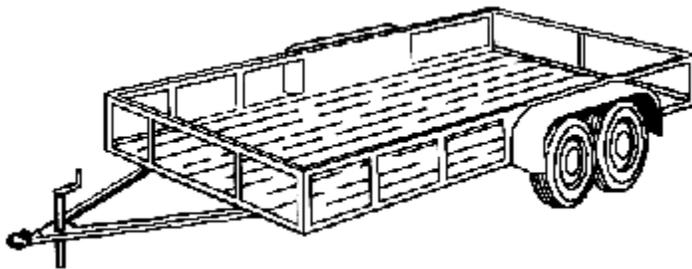
Once you have determined the “vehicle” for the project to “ride on” (be it flat deck truck and trailer to car trailer) you can begin to accumulate you materials. We have found that low grade 1x4 and 2x4 work really well for sub framing. If your sub frame will need to carry any weight such as rooted trees/people etc. you will need to use 2x4 construction to bear the weight. Lighter framing to be used for chicken wire support etc. can be 1x4 and 1x2. Scrap wood can be used to fill in where ever possible.

Remember that all of this work will be covered and unseen so do not spend huge amounts of time here. **Do however remember** that you are going to be taking it apart following the parade so keep an eye on those helpers who get carried away with the nails/nail guns and cordless screw drivers. Also, you can check out your local hardware store to get paint, indoor/outdoor coverings lattice, etc., and other raw materials to use as decorating goods. We have also found a lot of success in buying discounted material at fabric land and second hand stores and just painting it.

- Remember that black becomes neutral to the eye so anything that you don't want noticed make it black.
- Cover anything paper with plastic unless you know that the weather will hold
- Fire extinguishers on board along with someone who knows how to use it.
- Ventilate you power generator really well and leave a space around it.
- We have found that enclosing a generator in an insulated box (with lots of space inside it.. particularly in the exhaust area) and leaving the top open greatly assisted in controlling engine noise as it deflected the sound upward.
- Use a proper sound system if you have something to say or play. Lousey sound is Well, ... lousey so try to steer clear of household stereos.

Building your float

If you have a low-boy trailer,



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Build a Parade Float Using a Low-Boy Trailer

After you choose your float size, try to determine what message you want to convey, staying within the parameters of the parade theme. If your theme is humorous, make sure that no one will be offended by it. Always use good taste and remember that no one likes a blatant advertisement so try to keep your message subtle and positive.

Another important design consideration is the capabilities of your float builders. If you're planning on having elaborate props or woodwork, make sure that you have access to someone who is a capable technician, with proper tools and equipment. If you have electrical requirements, consult a qualified electrician*. Animations and prop movements can also be human-powered. Simple pulleys and rope can be used to make props rotate and move.

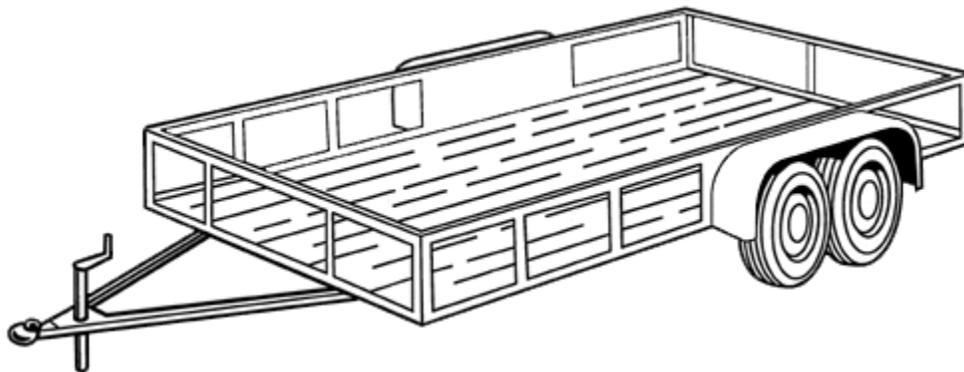
Remember: Your float is the “show” and the viewers are the audience however, in this situation your audience will only be engaged in your “show”/float for about 2-3 minutes as it rolls by. Because it rolls by and is dark, the many things that you see as incomplete or “rough” about your project will never be seen by the audience. **Make sure that you police your team during construction to make sure that they are not driving in 3 -4 screws where one will do, and don't worry about covering all of the staples with snow or ? They crowd will never see it.**

Beginning Construction

There are a few items you will want to have on hand before building your float. A staple gun, nails, wire, chicken-wire, 1" X 1", 1" X 2", and 1"x4" (for lighter work) and 2"x4" construction grade wood and plywood can be purchased at your local hardware store. 2" wood screws and a cordless drill are a real time saver.

Once you have an approved* float design and all of the necessary materials you are ready to begin construction.

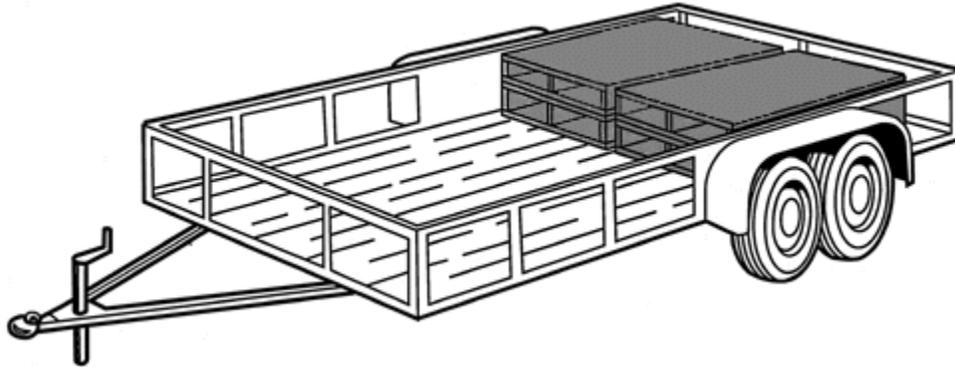
*Float entries often must be approved by the Parade Chairman before allowed into the parade.



Low-boy trailers are great for float building!

Low-boy type trailers usually have rails around the perimeter. The instructions below will show you how you can create a great looking basic float for your next parade!

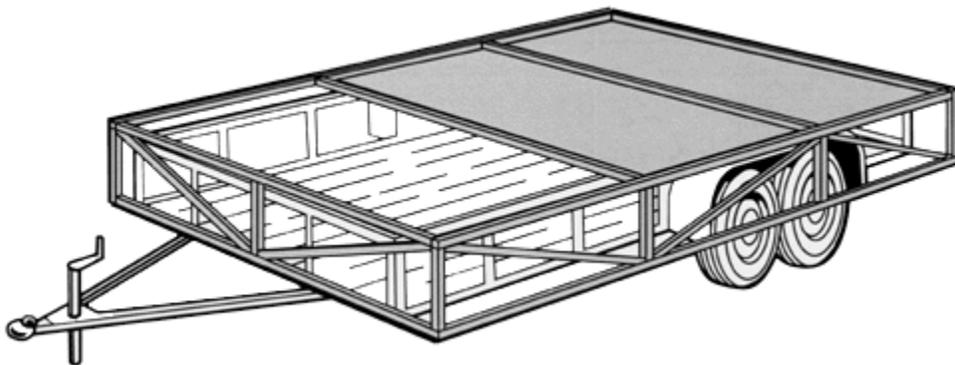
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Pallets can be used to build a partial or full sub-structure to elevate the platform of the float.

It is a good idea to build a partial deck that will be even with the top rails of the float. You can use good quality pallets to make a platform. Make sure the pallets are firmly fastened to the bed of the float.

Next, lay sheet plywood over the pallets. Now you will have a platform for your props and an area in the bed where float riders can stand or sit. If your float riders will be standing, make a stanchion and secure it to the trailer bed so that they have something to hold onto while traveling the parade route. Remember...*Safety first!*



Attachment of skirt frame and sheet plywood.

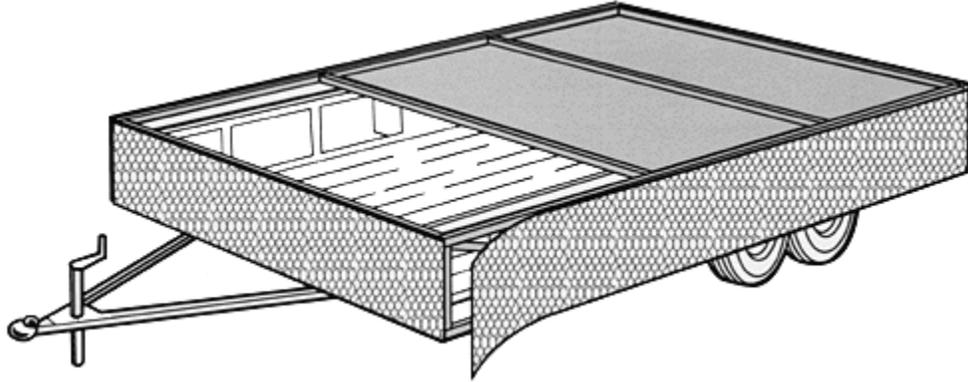
After the plywood is laid over the pallets, build a skirt frame using 1" X 2" or 1" X 4" pieces of wood and fasten the frame to the trailer rails and the plywood. The skirt frame is used to hide the wheels and undercarriage. Any number of items can be used to fasten the skirt frame to the rails: plumbers tape or construction U-shaped brackets are ideal for attachment of the skirt frame to the trailer bed rails. Be sure to terminate the skirt frame approximately 16" from the ground and allow for tongue movement at the front of the float.

Decorating the Float

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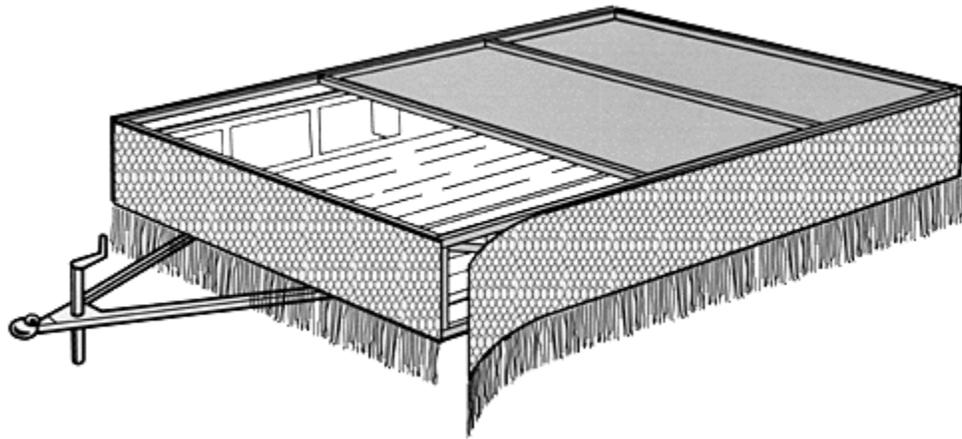
Deck and side skirts: Calculate the floral sheeting or material requirements in square yards by multiplying the length times the width of each differently colored area, (floral Sheeting comes 36" wide by 10 or 25 yard lengths, cloth in metres)

Cut the floral sheeting as needed and attach to the bottom of the skirt and staple to the deck of the trailer.



Attachment of floral sheeting to the skirt frame

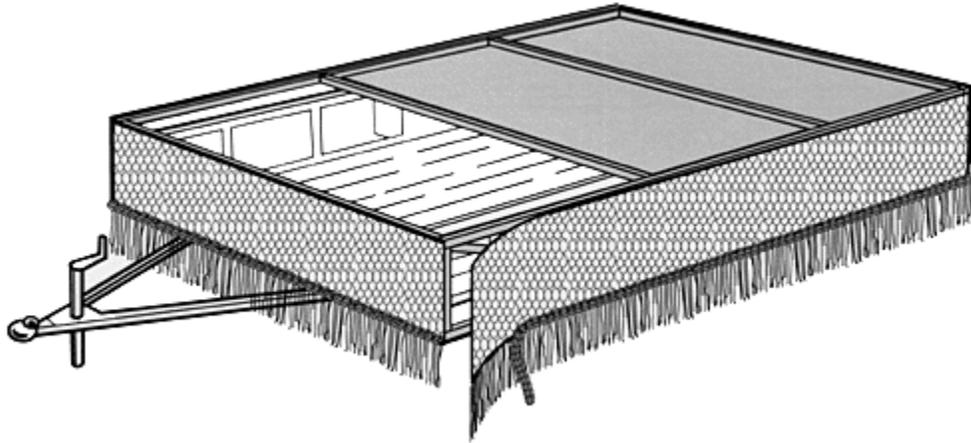
Next, apply sheeting by stapling it to the wood skirt frame as shown above. Additionally, you can use sheeting to cover the deck-platform as well as on the bed of the float



Attachment of fringe to the floral sheeting and wood skirt frame

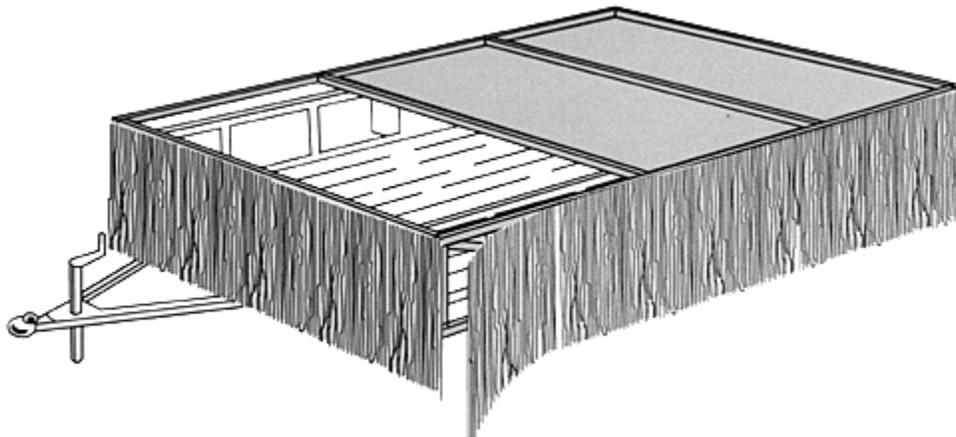
Next, staple "float away fringe" into the wood skirt frame at the bottom of the frame. It is ok to staple through the decorating material and into the wood frame. **This will give your float the "floating" appearance.**

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Using Festooning to hide the seam between the floral sheeting and fringe

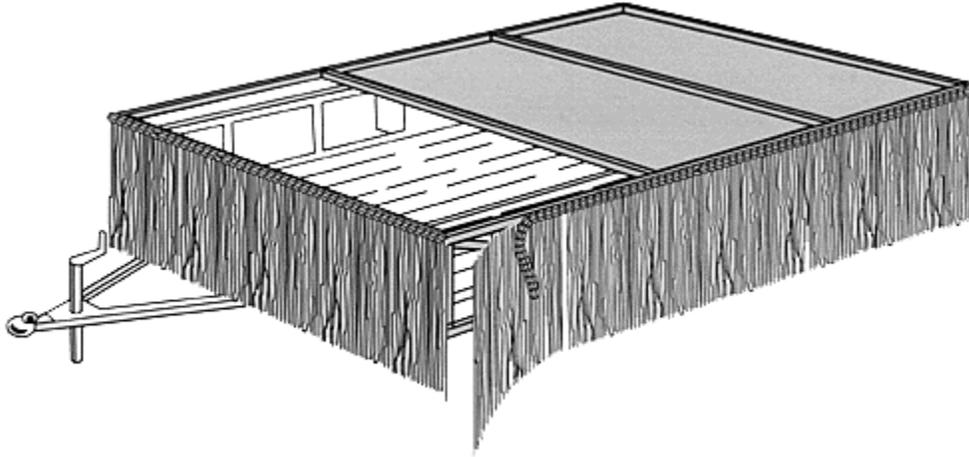
To hide the seam between the float fringe and floral sheeting, use a garland or similar substitute. The festooning color you choose allows you to add even more color to your float! Festooning can be stapled through the fringe and floral sheeting materials and into the wood frame.



An alternative to using floral sheeting, you can also use "fringe panels" or tinsel sheeting

The above sketch uses a longer fringe-skirt instead of a floral sheeting product. This skirt is approximately 30" tall and is designed to give the float a taller "floating" appearance. Many float builders like to use fringe-panels because of the ease of decorating. The best effect will be to have this material over black.

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Attachment of festooning to top of fringe panels.

Whether you use floral sheeting or fringe-panels on the sides of your float, it is a good idea to use festooning to finish the edges of the float. You can use festooning in a color other than your fringe panels to add more color to your float!

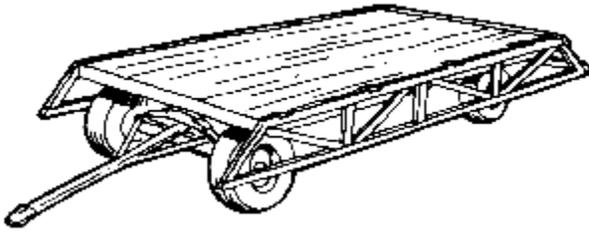


Here it is! The Finished Product!

This float concept uses the longer fringe panels and pallets across the entire trailer bed to create a level deck area.

If you have a hay-trailer,

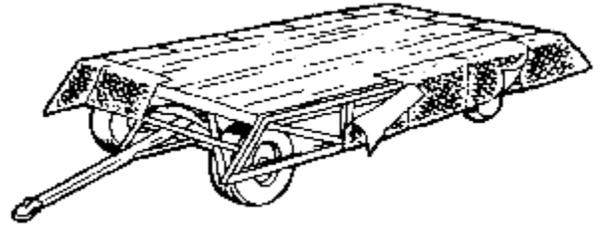
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Build a skirt frame and attach with hinges to the deck of the float

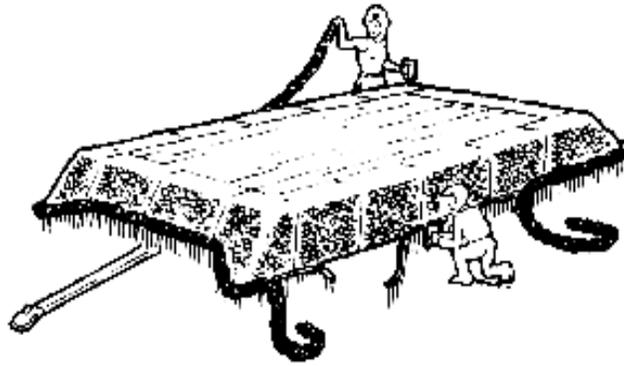


After you choose your float size, try to determine what



Attaching floral sheeting strips to the skirts and deck

parameters of the your theme is sure that no one by it. Always use remember that no advertisement so your message



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Beginning Construction

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Attachment of fringe and festooning.

Topside: The amount of floral sheeting needed for covering curved areas and props is determined by visualizing these areas as if they were boxes. Make sure you order enough material to cover the box. Valley's floral sheeting can be attached to the props by using nails, staples, hog-rings, twist-ties etc.

