



How to Build a Parade Float¹

Where to Begin

The first step in planning any float is to thoroughly read all of the information concerning: parade rules and regulations, entry fees, deadlines, storing and transporting the float, and most importantly, community and Girl Guides of Canada safety regulations and requirements. Be sure that you adhere to any and all of these regulations.

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. 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.

To help celebrate 95 years of Guiding in Canada, start with the themes of Guiding, birthdays and celebrations, and use the common symbols associated with those themes. For example:

Guiding: the branches of Guiding and their colours, trefoils, uniforms and hats, camping equipment, banners with various activities on them, girls and women of all ages, smiling faces, maps, World Centres, your District's banner, etc.

Birthday Parties: large presents on your float make great props and are easy to create, posters of cakes and party favours, balloons, streamers, noise-makers, etc. You may wish to include a banner or poster with "2005: Celebrating 95 years of Guiding in Canada."

Celebrating 95 Years: posters, banners, "95" written in balloons, etc.

Get everyone involved who is building the floats to provide their 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! Be sure to get your girls involved, as they are sure to have many exciting ideas.

¹ The majority of the information contained within this article and all of its imagery are from "How to Build a Float", published on-line by the Valley Decorating Company of Fresno, California (www.valleydecorating.com) who have graciously allowed us their permission to use this article for the 95 Years of Girl Guides in Canada "Birthday On Parade" handbook.



Materials

Colourful float decorating materials can be purchased (tassels, skirt sheeting, fringes, grass mats, etc.). 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. Because we are holding a Guiding 'birthday party', party stores or dollar stores are sure to have many of the materials you'll need, including balloons, foil banners, streamers, etc. You may wish to include recycled or reused materials as well, such as using the tubes from inside wrapping paper or paper towels for candles on your cake, and artwork created by your girls. Use your imagination and have fun!

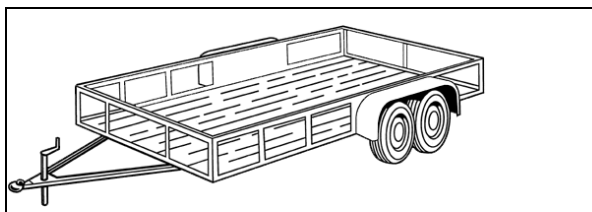
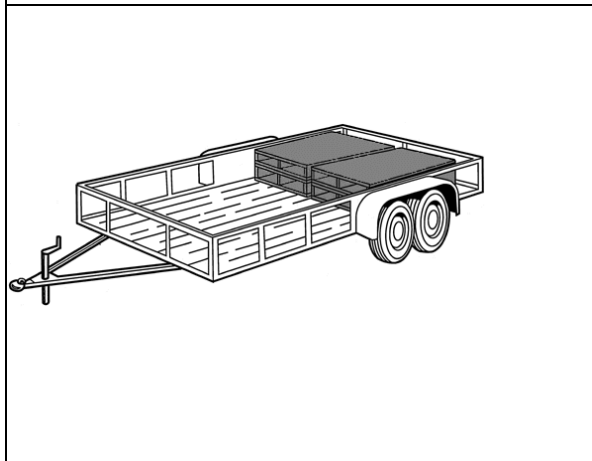
Building Your Float

After you choose your float size and have worked out your Guiding and birthday themes, materials, time limitations, weather considerations, storage capacity and so forth, another important design consideration is the capabilities of your float builders. Be sure your plans are 'realistic' and, if you do have elaborate props, woodworking, electrical requirements, etc., ensure that you have access to capable, licensed technicians and that you have any necessary permissions from parade organizers or chairpersons, and are following all safety measures and precautions, both locally in your community and from the new *Safe Guide*. Remember... *safety first!*

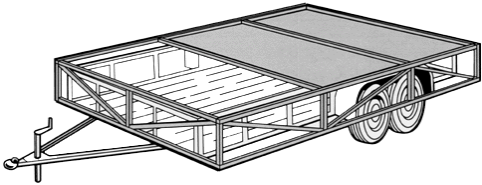
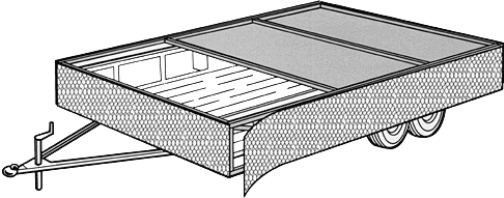
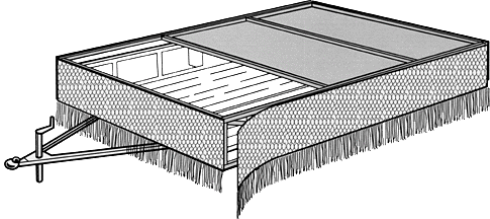
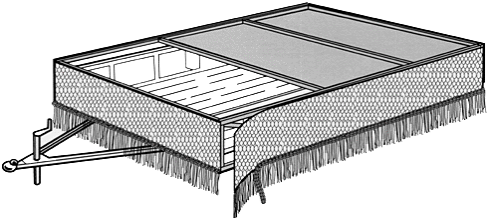
Below are two examples of how to build a traditional parade float using either a low-boy trailer or hay trailer, but there are many, many other ideas. Just remember to follow all safety measures and precautions, support and promote Guiding and the celebration of 95 years of Guiding in Canada, and of course, have fun.

Beginning Construction Using a Low-Boy Trailer

There are a few items you may want to have on hand before building your Low-Boy Trailer float. A staple gun, nails, wire, chicken-wire, 1" X 1" and 2" X 2" construction grade wood and plywood can be purchased at your local hardware store.

	<p><i>Low-boy trailers are great for float building!</i></p> <p>Low-boy type trailers usually have rails around the perimeter.</p>
	<p>Pallets can be used to build a partial or full sub-structure to elevate the platform of the float. It can be 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...<i>safety first!</i></p>



	<p><i>Attachment of Skirt Frame and Sheet Plywood</i></p> <p>After the plywood is laid over the pallets, build a skirt frame using 1" X 1" or 2" X 2" 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.</p>
	<p><i>Decorating the Float</i></p> <p>Deck and side skirts: calculate the sheeting requirements in square yards by multiplying the length times the width of each differently coloured area. Cut the sheeting as needed and attach to the bottom of the skirt and staple to the deck of the trailer.</p> <p><i>Attachment of Sheeting to the Skirt Frame</i></p> <p>Next, apply sheeting by stapling it to the wood skirt frame as shown. Additionally, you can use sheeting to cover the deck-platform as well as on the bed of the float.</p>
	<p><i>Attachment of Fringe to the Sheeting and Wood Skirt Frame</i></p> <p>Next, staple "float away fringe" into the wood skirt frame at the bottom of the frame. It's ok to staple through the decorating material and into the wood frame. This will give your float the "floating" appearance.</p>
	<p><i>Using Festooning to Hide the Seam Between the Sheeting and Fringe</i></p> <p>To hide the seam between the float fringe and sheeting, use festooning (a stiff-wire garland). The festooning colour you choose allows you to add even more colour to your float! Festooning can be stapled through the fringe and sheeting materials and into the wood frame.</p>



	<p>As an alternative to using sheeting, you can also use “fringe panels”. The sketch uses a longer fringe-skirt instead of a 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.</p>
	<p><i>Attachment of Festooning to Top of Fringe Panels</i></p> <p>Whether you use 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 colour other than your fringe-panels to add more colour to your float!</p>
	<p>This float concept uses the longer fringe panels and pallets across the entire trailer bed to create a level deck area. Lettering can be made from Styrofoam, poster board, etc., and a birthday cake can be made out of cardboard, upside-down garbage cans, etc. But this is just one example—there are many others! You will build your float with your materials, float-builders, weather, timing, safety issues, etc., in mind.</p>

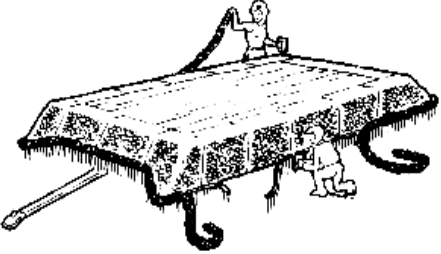
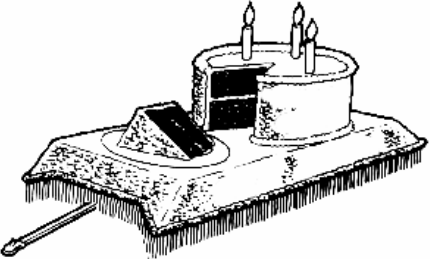


Beginning Construction Using a Hay Trailer

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" and 2" X 2" construction grade wood and plywood can be purchased at your local hardware store.

	<p>First, build a skirt frame from 2" X 2" pieces of wood and fasten the frame to the trailer bed with hinges, (so that the sides can be folded onto the bed of the trailer for ease of transportation to and from the parade). The skirt frame is used to hide the wheels and undercarriage. Be sure to terminate the skirt frame approximately 16" from the ground and allow for tongue movement at the front of the float.</p>
	<p>Build a skirt frame and attach with hinges to the deck of the float.</p>
	<p><i>Decorating the Float</i></p> <p>Deck and side skirts: Calculate the sheeting requirements in square yards by multiplying the length times the width of each differently colored area, (sheeting comes 36" wide by 10 or 25 yard lengths). Cut the sheeting as needed and attach to the bottom of the skirt and staple to the deck of the trailer.</p>
	<p><i>Attaching Sheeting Strips to the Skirts and Deck</i></p> <p>After attachment of the sheeting, use a staple-gun to attach our decorative fringe to the bottom of the 2" X 2" frame. Then use festooning to hide the seam line between the floral sheeting and fringe. You can calculate the amount of fringe and festooning you will need by adding the total running length of the perimeter of the float.</p>



	<p><i>Attachment of Fringe and Festooning</i></p> <p>Topside: The amount of sheeting needed for covering curved areas and props is determined by visualizing these areas as if they were boxes. Make sure you have enough material to cover the box. Sheeting can be attached to the props by using nails, staples, hog-rings, twist-ties etc.</p>
	<p>This is just one more example—there are many others! You will build your float with your materials, float-builders, weather, timing, safety issues, etc., in mind.</p>

Other Ideas

There are lots of parade and float ideas which can be created on a much smaller scale. Here are just a few:

Floats Using a Child’s Wagon or a Shopping Cart: girls will have so much fun decorating a wagon or shopping cart and will be proud to pull it in celebration of 95 years of Guiding in Canada. Decorate these with pom poms, streamers, balloons, a birthday cake made out of an old hat box, even dolls or stuffed animals dressed in Guiding colours. Be sure to follow all safety rules and precautions so that girls do not harm themselves or others with their wagon or carts. Please remember to thank the store when you obtain permission to borrow shopping carts, and give them cookies and a card signed by your Unit upon returning the carts to the store.

Shoebox Floats: This is a great idea for a unit craft to celebrate Guiding’s 95th birthday party. Supplies could include: a shoebox with lid, scissors, a Barbie doll or stuffed animal, decorations, glue and tape. You can cut a hole in the lid of the box so that the doll is sitting in the box and sticking out of the top, or have the doll sitting on the top of the box. Decorate like a parade float. You may wish to attach a cord so that the girls can ‘pull’ the floats.

Crafted Birthday Cakes: a birthday cake can be crafted either as a single level or with a number of levels as in wedding-cake fashion, and there are large to small scale versions. An inverted clean plastic tub, an old hat box, old margarine tubs, even slices of a paper towel tube can be used for the cake layers. Decorate with coloured paper, pom poms, streamers, balloons, flowers, beads, foam stickers, paint, markers, etc.

