

Railroading in the Great Outdoors

DO YOU ENJOY GARDENING? GREAT! You can combine that interest with large trains. It's called garden railroading. The lush greens of the trees, graceful curves of the track, and the persistent rumbling of a train work in harmony to form a slice of everyday life in miniature.

The difference between a traditional indoor model railroad and a garden railway is the difference between realism and reality. An indoor layout creates the illusion of reality by using artificial materials – mountains are made of plaster or foam, and rivers

are created using plastic resin. A garden railroad brings everything outdoors. Mountains are made of dirt, rivers are real water, and rocks are actual stone.

While this hobby may be new to you, it has been around for more than a century, primarily in Great Britain. In the United States, garden railroading achieved some popularity in the 1920s and '30s, but nearly died out by the end of World War II. Its resurgence was due in large part to the advent of colorful LGB trains from Germany in the late 1960s. As the company introduced

more American-style trains, people took notice and garden railways began to spring up all over the country. Since then, numerous other manufacturers of large-scale trains have entered the market.

Fun in the sun

Part of the fun in this hobby is following the practices of a full-size railroad and

▼ A garden railroad is a fascinating addition to any landscape and is a great way for the whole family to enjoy model railroading.



GARDEN RR TERMS

Battery power: Onboard batteries that provide power to a locomotive that's controlled by radio.

Flextrack: Longer sections of track that are flexible enough to bend to any desired curvature.

Gauge 1: 45 mm (just over 1¾") between the rails. Although a garden railroad can be built to run on any gauge of track, gauge 1 is most commonly used.

Groundcovers: Low-growing plants that spread to cover the ground, useful for filling in areas and preventing weeds and erosion.

Large scale: A generic term that includes all trains running on gauge 1 track.

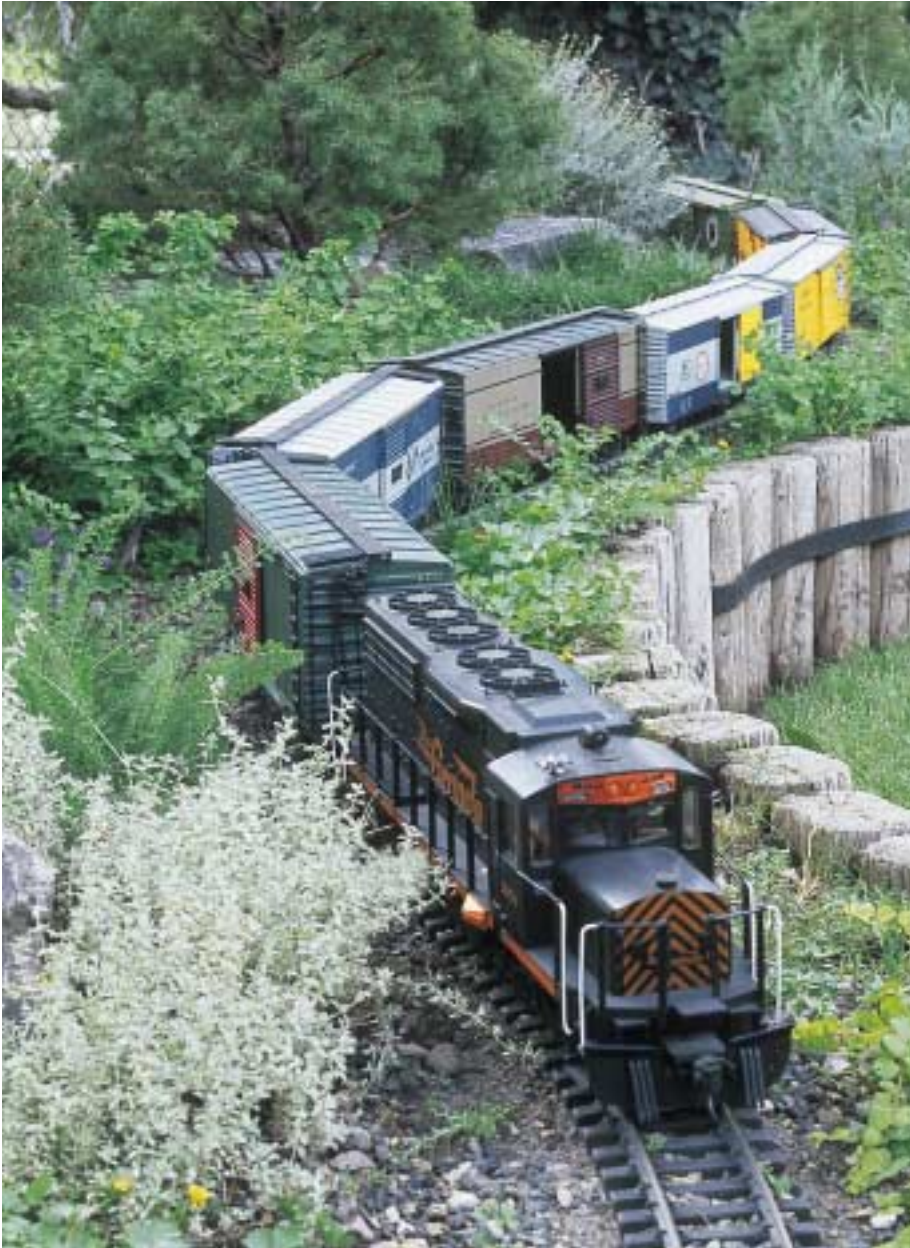
Live steam: Miniature locomotives that run on steam, just like real locomotives. They have fire in their fire-boxes and boil water in their boilers.

Railway garden: Garden planted with dwarf and miniature plants to be in scale with the trains.

Roadbed: The material that supports the track and provides drainage. In garden railways, this is most often ballast (crushed rock and rock dust).

Sectional track: Commercially made track that comes in predetermined straight lengths and curved sections with a set radius.

Water feature: A pond, river, or waterfall on your railway, often incorporating fish and water plants.



▲ Notice how the train looks natural in its surroundings. Garden railroaders are adept at using the dwarf varieties of plants to accent the trains without dominating them.

working with the landscape. You need to consider the topography of your land and any existing gardens, trees, or other obstacles when planning your railway. If your backyard is sloped, you might build wood or metal trestles or raise the line on earthworks and use timber or stone retaining walls. The choice is strictly up to you. After all, it's your railroad!

You may think that garden railroading is a hobby strictly for gardeners or people who like trains. The truth is that anyone

who loves being outdoors can be a garden railroader. Your railroad can reflect those interests. If you enjoy electrical challenges, for instance, you can build a line with a complex track plan. If you have some carpentry skills, you can make buildings from scratch and model a city. And if you like to work with machines, try building and operating a live-steam locomotive.

The railway garden

The "garden" part of garden railroading is another fascinating aspect of this hobby. Many nurseries and specialty plant growers sell dwarf and miniature versions of all types of plants. These specimens are ideal for garden railroads since they fit with

the scale of the trains by having smaller features and a slower growth rate than their full-size cousins.

Don't think you have a green thumb? Many beautiful railway gardens have been created by people who claim not to be gardeners. There are plenty of resources available to help get you started. You can start by visiting a local nursery or landscaping center. Employees there will be happy to answer your questions.

Garden railroading is a deep and exceptionally rewarding hobby anyone can enjoy. It might be the best hobby for your family, because increasing numbers of women, children, and families are enjoying it together. Give it a try. 