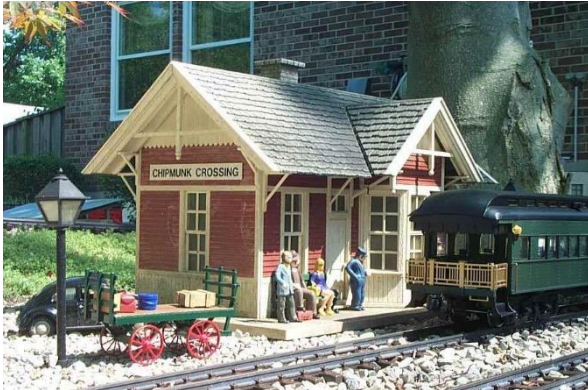


## What is Garden Railroading?

Most simply, garden railroading means running model trains outside, using special weather-resistant equipment.

Most trains made for garden railroading run on the same kind of weather-resistant track, with rails that are 45mm apart (about 1¾"). So you can choose trains from several manufacturers, though you're probably better off sticking with one supplier at first.



RR: Wil and Jeanne Davis. Photo: Wil Davis

## How hard is it to build a Garden Railroad?

A garden railroad can be as simple or complex as you want it to be, as long as the track is well-supported and smooth. Lots of folks start with a loop of track on a gravel-filled trench and go from there.

Of course, larger railroads with lots of plants and landscaping are more fun to own and to visit. But even if you want to

end up with something big, consider starting small, then working your way up.

One thing to remember is that a garden railroad includes plants and landscaping. The best garden railroads have a balance between "nature" and "engineering."

## Do I have to use special equipment?

Trains designed for garden railroading are big, rugged, and reliable. Unlike "indoor" trains, they're also moisture- and UV-resistant, though they'll last longer if you store them out of the weather when you're not running them.

Garden trains from PIKO, LGB, USA Trains, and other manufacturers let you choose trains from different periods, and even different continents. But all will give you good service.

## How much room do I need?

The "minimum" circle of Large Scale track is about 4' in diameter, so you could theoretically build a garden railroad in a 5' square. With a reversing mechanism, you can even build one in a straight line—if you don't mind your train backing up half the time.

That said, trains look better and run better on wider curves, so use the largest diameter curves and turnouts (switches) that fit the space you have.

Most folks use pre-formed curve pieces. These make circles in diameters of 4', 5', 8', 10', or more. So if you have a 14' by 20' space for your railroad, consider using 10'-

diameter curves for your main line. (Keep the 4' circles to use indoors at the holidays.)

If you have experience using flexible track, you may prefer to use it, but for most beginners, pre-formed curves give better results.

## How do I plan a Garden Railroad?

The best first step is to see some garden railroads in your area, to learn what people near you have tried with success, and to borrow their best ideas.

On the other hand, some people just took a bunch of track out into the yard and kept putting pieces together different ways until they found a combination they liked. This approach is also helpful for designing around preexisting features like ponds or terraces.

If you plan to use a large water feature, such as a pond, consider installing that first—it's a lot easier to build a railroad around a pond than it is to build a pond underneath a railroad.

You should also consider getting your trains off the ground to make them easier to work on and more interesting to view from a sitting position. You can do this with dirt and retaining walls, or with a "raised platform" approach using a deck-like structure.

## What Should I Buy?

You may not want to buy too much railroad stuff right at first, anyway. When you are installing a test loop, you can get by with a starter set you like and an oval

of larger-radius track (purchased separately) to use outside. Get some track down, gain experience, and learn about the products and brands before you start making other folks rich.

Good sources of product information include:

- The Garden Train Store page (<http://www.garden-train-store.com>) focuses on products that are especially helpful to beginning garden railroaders.
- Catalogs from the major manufacturers—You may have to pay for these, but the product lines don't change that much from year to year, so most catalogs are useful for years.

You can also see products by visiting area garden railroads and attending trains shows and conventions.

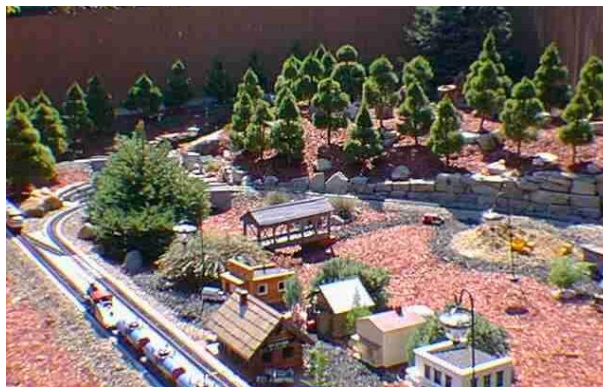
“Starting small” works for accessories, too. Pick up a building or two at a time, a “pack” or two of people at a time, and so on. You may even decide to build most or all of your own buildings; many folks do. But you don't need a lot of *stuff* to have a charming garden railroad. Attention to detail and thoughtful use of what you have can make a “one-horse town” more pleasing than a city full of generic-looking kits.

## Where should I shop for plants?

Again, you're better off if you start out small and learn as you go. Use a lot of mulch at first, until you learn what works

for you. You can get usable plants at ordinary garden stores, if you know what to look for. In the US Midwest, for example, we often use the following commonly available plants:

- Drought-resistant miniature Sedums.
- Miniature Thymes
- Dwarf Alberta Spruce (used to represent upright trees)
- Other dwarf conifers.



RR: Robert Mengelkoch & Roberta Shiverdecker.

## Where do I learn more?

- Join your local garden railroad club.
- Attend garden railroading conventions.
- Visit the Primer articles on the “Family Garden Trains” web site ([familygardentrains.com](http://familygardentrains.com))

## Most important of all, have fun. Big fun outside.

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RR: Wil and Jeanne Davis Photo: Wil Davis

## What is Garden Railroading?

Answers to Frequently-Asked Questions about Garden Railroads

By Paul D. Race

For [FamilyGardenTrains.com](http://FamilyGardenTrains.com)

and

**Miami Valley Garden Railway Society**



<http://www.mvgrs.com>