

Garden Trains

From A to Z

C is for Children



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Garden Trains - A to Z

What you will find in this document.

Discussion groups are a great way to share information. One thing that is unique to LSOL.com is our Tuesday Topic. Each week, for almost six years, we have discussed a specific group topic. It could be about bridges, or maybe you like steam vs. diesel engines. Many times it is about how people solved a problem, or what they think about a current issue or product. My favorite was several years ago. "If your railroad was a candy bar, what would it be." (Good and Plenty, Milk Dud, etc.) We have fun at LSOL.com as well as help each other with serious issues on our railroads.

Now with almost 300 different weekly discussions online we wanted to make it easier for you to use this vast knowledge base of topics. We are taking the time to edit the best answers on a specific Tuesday topic into PDF documents. We have also added photos as available so you can see just what was being talked about from each of the users.

This paper is different than one written by just one author on a topic. You are getting dozens and dozens of years of combined experience from some of the smartest people running Large Scale Trains today. Save this document and start building your own personal reference library on your computer today.

What is LSOL.com? (Large Scale Online)

Large Scale Online has been providing information for Large Scale Garden Train enthusiasts for almost 15 years. We are the oldest, largest, and most professional web site on the Internet that is exclusive to Large Scale Garden Trains.

LSOL.com provides information in many different ways. We have online articles, videos for you to watch and photos for you to see how it is done. We also have organized and secure online discussion groups. We are the only site that requires people to use their real name. No hiding behind your keyboard making anonymous posts. Join Us.

This document is intended for members of LSOL.com. If you have received this document and are not a member of LSOL.com we ask that you please delete it, or come to our site and use the code [AtoZ](#) to join and get a discount on your membership subscription. You will be able to access even more information like this.

Children

Do you let children run trains on your railroad?

Do you have special trains just for them to run? (i.e. Thomas, Circus train, some other theme.) If you do let them run, how do you let them run? What instructions do you provide? How young is too young? What has been your best and worst experience in letting a child run your trains?

Ron Hill – “I only let children that I know run my trains”

I only let children that I know run my trains and I only run the trains on 12V when in their hands to insure that it is not running fast enough to derail. I do not walk far from the child when the control is in their hands and do not turn my back on them. I explain the controls before I give it to them. To see their eyes light up when they press the button and the train moves is a priceless moment.

Todd Brody - “We don't let kids run the trains.”

However, I had considered getting an LGB exploding dynamite car and let the kids shoot at it with catapults (available with the Spanish Mission stuff at Michaels Craft stores).

Unfortunately, the car explodes when bumped from fore/aft and not when struck from the side so I don't think this will work. If anyone knows of such an exploding rail car, I'd love to hear about it!

Rick Henderson - “I would with supervision...”

None around actually, problem solved. I would with supervision however none that visited with their parents were even interested in even going down to see the trains.

Brian Donovan - "... kids are frequently over to run trains."

The nephews, niece, and neighborhood kids are frequently over to run trains. The problems don't arise from running the trains but when they start milling about not paying attention to where they're walking!

Richard W. (Ric) Golding - "We enjoy letting kids of all ages play..."

We enjoy letting kids of all ages play with the trains. People younger than 10 usually are not shy about asking if they can run a train. And the two year olds get excited just to blow the whistle.

James O'Connor - "Kids and trains go together!"

Kids and trains go together! My 4 year old granddaughter loves to come over and run trains and her 1 year old brother is very interested. Like Dave said, "the future of our hobby lies with kids of today."

Dave Marecek - "They are always invited in..."

The Lone Firr RR backs onto a Community Recreation Center that has lots of large swim meets, so most weekends there are many parents with young ones who wander by and stick their nose over the fence. They are always invited in and if the kids show interest, I let them run the train that is on the track. Also all the grandparents in the community stop by, with or without grandchildren as we spend a fair amount of time discussing gardening.

Since I use Aristo TE and batteries and the mainline is a flat dogbone, it is easy to let them run as long as I set the speed limit. I don't have a special train, but most trains are old steam and the 0-4-0 with a short train of 6 cars seems to be best for kids as it is non temperamental.

With games these days and everything else electronic, kids get the hang of the controllers a lot faster than adults at our last club meet. Last year, a couple from work brought their kids by and the 3 year old was so excited, they bought him a small G scale train set for xmas, so this is the result I always hope for.

Jon D. Miller - "Any child that stops by the CD&StL..."

Any child that stops by the CD&StL that shows an interest in the trains is allowed to operate them.

Just about all the trains are battery power using the Aristo TE. So operation is simple for the kids. I have several RCS systems, but have yet to bring them out for the kids to operate.



This is a picture taken at the same time as the picture that is printed on the last page of the 2006 LSOL calendar. My nephew's son Jaden started running trains when he was just about three years old. Here Jaden is getting one of his first lessons on using the TE.

I've had folks from around the development see the trains running and then bring their children or grandchildren to watch the trains. If any child is interested in running a train they are given the controller and away they go. There has never been a problem with any child or group of children visiting and running trains.

Set a few simple ground rules, stick with them, and the kids will do just fine. I'm now teaching a little three year old girl that moved in back of us how to run the trains. She's a quick study.

I enjoy having the children come to run trains. I can set back, give minimum supervision, and just enjoy watching the trains run and the kids having a good time. When we do switching operations that keeps me involved and the time just flies by as we get involved moving cars and making up trains.

Dave Clarke - "If the crowds are not too big..."

I believe the future of our hobby lies with the kids of today.

If the crowds are not too big, I have made sure that the kids have had a go at running the trains. I first ask them what rules are needed when they walk around and they invariably arrive at the same rules as I do. The good part about letting them think the rules were their idea is, they will observe them more closely.



They are also told that if they misbehave, they will not be able to drive the trains.

Only once have I had to enforce this and explained why he could not have a go. I then set a challenge for him to behave himself for a week and if mum and dad said he was behaving, then he could come back and have his shot. This he did and every time he does visit he behaves himself really well.

Robert Johnson - "For the younger ones I use my battery setup."

I have let grandkids and a couple of the neighbor kids run mine. For the younger ones I use my battery setup. After they get the hang of it, I put a track powered loco on the track and tell them that as long as they don't let one catch up to the other, they can run it. Older kids can run what they want after they show some proficiency. Grandson that is now 17 has pulled 250' of train on my 300' loop!

David Park - "They love it."

I have let kids run several of my trains. The most being at a yearly church train show. The only exhibitor to allow kids such an opportunity. They love it. I do restrict the voltage as most kids only know full speed. They also like to constantly go from forward to reverse, but momentum helps that, or the Aristo controller that makes it harder. The greatest problem is the adults, who are much less polite than their kids, and treat the trains with less care.

Paul Bottino - "...grandson Wade; run my trains all the time."

I let my little 4 1/2 year old grandson Wade; run my trains all the time. He operates the train engineer, and really likes stopping a train in the tunnel. He also can help me roll long lines of cars out of the storage shed. He loves trains, and has several battery run toy trains at home. Hopefully his interest in trains will continue throughout his life.



Ed Frey - "We invite the kids to take the controller..."

Well-behaved kids are always welcome to run my trains. They pick up on the TE controls quickly. A few minutes of coaching is all it usually takes.

Our club periodically sets up public displays, usually with "Thomas, the Tank engine" as a star. We invite the kids to take the controller and control the train for a few laps around the layouts. It's a great hit with the kids, and the parents are pretty excited about the opportunity. We've made a lot of "points" with the community when we do this. We have more requests to bring our trains to special events than we can possibly handle, but we can always be found at the county fair, the local horticultural center's "Spring Fling", and a couple of other venues.

These are usually a lot of work to coordinate and set up, but the smiles we bring to kids' faces make it all worthwhile.

John Perez - "... since he was 3 to 4 years old."

I have let my son run my trains since he was 3 to 4 years old. He is now 8 years old and he is even helping me mortar in some concrete for the new layout.

Dean Mead - "Absolutely!"

Do I let kids run my trains? Absolutely! Even unruly children seem well behaved with a throttle in their hand. Of course, always with adult supervision. I have one rule: "your turn is over if your train goes off the track". I even hedge on that one- One little guy thought the world had ended because he backed up too far on a siding.

I give them something to do with their trains- "Take the logs to the sawmill". "Pick up the tank cars at the refinery"; "Pick up passengers at each town", etc. They get involved at a deeper level, and the trains even outrank computer games!

Our club always sets up a kid's train (Usually Thomas) at our "Railroad Days" train show (July 19 & 20 this year, at Ilwaco, WA.), and children usually head for this first.

I believe anyone with a model railroad is really a child at heart.

Mike O'Malley - "... but I stay on them like stink on fish."

I always do, but I stay on them like stink on fish. They tend to forget what's going on and as Brian said, they tend to kick them more than crash them. I made a Thomas the Tank Engine for my daughter, age 3, out of a wooden pull toy and an old Big Hauler, and she likes to run that although she likes to run the Bachmann "bumblebee" Annie more.

Phill Lowe - "There have been a few enjoyable exceptions."

Kid experiences are probably as varied as layouts. My experience has not been pleasant - which I primarily blame on parents who don't exercise control. I've rarely had kids under 8 or so leave without having derailments and repairs to trampled or grabbed items. And older kids have shown little to no interest barely taking their eyes off their permanently attached video games or cell phones! There have been a few enjoyable exceptions.

Paul Roberts - "It's a blast..."

It's a blast to have kids run the trains! They get the hang of it a lot faster than I did! To see their eyes light up and the excitement along with "I don't want to leave yet!" really does make it all worthwhile. After all, who are we going to leave our trains to?

Geoffrey Cullison - "Occasionally "things" happen"



Yes, we let the grands run the trains when they visit. Occasionally "things" happen as below.

The look on grandson Nathan's face says it all.

Joe Fotschky - "One piled up a heap of ballast..."

Like Rick, we don't seem to have kids around. There are so few in the garden railway club. The ones that do come by are usually really young and only seem to be concerned with running around jumping and pointing and yelling at the tops of their lungs that I don't think running the trains ever really cross their minds.

I have had a few incidents with kids but they were not running the trains. One piled up a heap of ballast on the track just to see the Southern Railway Pacific hit it and roll over.

I really don't have a problem with kids but I would like to post a sign on the railroad during open houses that says 'Unattended children will be sold to the local gypsies to help pay for more trains'. Have not done it yet, sort of afraid I will go out the back door one day and see a bunch of kids in my yard. Disclaimer: I have never sold any kids for trains.

George Wolotyka - "It is great watching kids..."

When I started my garden railroad we had our granddaughter living with us. So our railroad is J&GW Jerika & George Wolotka. Her engine is a Hartland Mack switcher; all of her rolling stock are gondolas. She owns a lot of stuffed animals which she gives rides to. She also invites her friends to help her run trains. The only damage to ours is when the kids get excited and get a little careless, but it is all minor damage. I have broken stuff myself. It is great watching kids enjoy something that I also love.

Elaine Haggbottom - "I never had a problem..."

When I had my layout up and running for 10 years, it was the children who made a beeline to see it first... Many parents said "they had been waiting all year to come and see them"... I never had a problem with them "operating" as we had the sound box in front and an Aristo hand held as well. AND I was always right there anyway...

Since most of the kids were strangers, I played it by ear on "who" would have the honor... IF they were fresh and demanded anything, it was a real "NO", but if they were calm and abided by my wishes, no problem. My problem was always "touching everything", so I found a big (over-scale) calf made of cement, that I always kept readily available for them to touch... And a large bench designed to sit on and SEE better sometimes allowed some children a closer touch.

If they touched the moving train OR a house, they were banned... My grand-daughter of 3 to 6 range operated it for a short time, but discovered she would rather play with the other kids! (No train inspired here!!) The last child in the neighborhood came along just as I was finishing and HE is a true "Thomas fan", too late for me to help along. YES, the children loved Thomas, and also Disney, and would complain IF they came every night and I had changed the engine... I believe Thomas the Tank Train inspired a whole new generation of children to come back to trains!

David Maynard - "I would love to show kids my trains..."

I only have one kid that used to come over, a real know it all kind. Once when my back was turned he cranked up the throttle to see my Pacific climb the summit faster with her 4 streamline cars in tow. Needless to say there came a curve she couldn't handle at that speed. Took a few nights of fiddling to get the Pacific to run again.

Another time this kid put an action figure on the tracks to see the train hit it; I snatched it off the tracks and said "we don't do that here". Problem is no parental supervision, and an upbringing that didn't teach that you don't touch what isn't yours without permission. I would love to show kids my trains, just not Michael, the neighbor kid.

I do believe that we need to reach out to kids of all ages to spread our affliction. I would love to be able to do that but I don't see that happening with my railroad and my situation. Maybe if the model railroad club I am involved in gets off the ground someday I will have that opportunity.

Dick Chapple Sr - "... all has been good and well..."

My first granddaughter Kelly was operating her Aristo Teddy Bear Express at 3 yrs of age. From watching Papa, she knew to check rail joints, check for dirty track, and run using a tether hand held Hogger pack. She also knew not to step on the track, never step over a train, and use caution to step in the middle of the oval if need be for a stall or derailment.

My second granddaughter Rachel seems more genuinely interested in trains and has run her Sesame Red Ball Express, but she has not had the opportunity as much as Kelly to be here at Papas house. A big hit has been the MRC sound system; they can push buttons to their hearts delight without any problems arising. They watch to blow the whistle/horn at crossings. Toot to start up and back up, and try to match the engine revs/steam chuffs to the speed of the train while I run the train.

The public display I had up this year for 2 1/2 months, while I only had one or two children run the trains, most of them used the MRC sound while trains ran. They really enjoyed that. They all liked to blow the horn/whistle for grade crossings. And all of the children, including myself and many adult kids, loved to watch Thomas and James race each other around the circuit. Because the MRC sound is interactive, it has been a greater hit than my engines with built in sound.

I have not had any problems with kids that have run trains, but on two occasions I had unruly kids that were not dealt with by their parents which is too bad. One set of kids thought it was fun to continually jump over the running trains. So that session came to a quick end, and the parents couldn't figure it out!! No discipline.

The other was a Boy Scout group I had invited over to see if there was any interest in model railroad merit badges. It was a total waste of time, as they were silly, inattentive, and reckless. The scout leader was not the kind of person to teach them how to act, or to respect others property. Too bad!! Now that that leader has moved on I hope to try it again soon.

Other than those two times, all has been good and well, I keep looking for ways to expose kids and families to model railroading. Interactive play is powerful with good guidance of course.

Barbara Karkutt - "I allow two of my grandsons to run the trains..."

I allow two of my grandsons to run the trains on the holiday layout (They are never here when I am running trains on my outdoor layout...too many other summer things to do). The other grandkids are 'too old' for trains (they usually have their girls with them). They have derailed a few times but no harm done as it is level and indoors...they are told if they derail they must re-rail though if they derail on the far side of the layout I get the cars as it necessary to walk through the scenery to get there. When they were younger I had a train around the tree as well and they ran that all they wanted.

Kevin Lepel - "I plan to allow kids to operate..."

My nephews got a kick out of seeing the train run. At this time it is not a permanent setup and it has not run very often, so they weren't allowed to run it. As things become more involved I plan to allow kids to operate the layout. There are a lot of great ideas here to setup ground rules. Dave had a good idea, have the kids tell you what the rules are.

The entire time I was running the train they kept finding "freight" for the train to haul. When I saw them again a few months after they were still talking about what "freight" I could put in the train. So some day they might be interested in switching operations.

Wesley Drummond - "I love to see the kids run the trains!"

I love to see the kids run the trains! Their little eyes really light up to see the trains move out under their control.

Yes, we teach them about the TE and monitor the speed. The kids are never satisfied to just watch the trains run...they have to follow it all around the track.

My two "constant" companions are my 6 year old grandson and my 4 year old granddaughter. This year my grandson discovered the "real" joy of switching cars and making up trains in the yard. Now he would rather do that than just watch them run around the mainline.

Sometimes, like has been mentioned above, we get the child that seems to have no discipline and that child, once the rules are broken, gets relegated to the sidelines. But it sure has a positive effect when they are permitted back to run trains once again.

MEMBERS ONLINE STORIES ON CHILDREN AND THE FUTURE OF LARGE SCALE GARDEN TRAINS

Here is a small sample of the articles that are online for members of LSOL.com

[The Future of Large Scale Trains](#)

One of the leading questions in all areas of our hobby today is, "What is the future of model railroading?" It is a question found in all of the model railroading magazines and modelers in all scales are asking it. Come read what the leaders of our industry think. Aristo-Craft, USA Trains, MTH, LGB, Bachmann, Accucraft and Marc Horovitz.

[Video: Ric Golding's Time Saver](#)

Ric Golding is single handedly, one kid at a time growing our hobby. Any show that he can get to he sets up his Time Saver track and lets kids run the trains. It is fun to watch their interest grow as they learn to switch trains on this just for fun railroad. See it in action and hear Ric tell us all about it. **Another LSOL.com exclusive!**

[Timesaver with Ric Golding](#)

Whenever I attend the East Coast Large Scale Train Show (ECLSTS) one of the pleasures that I look forward to is visiting with Ric Golding of Carlyle, Illinois. He and his wife, Jan, model in 1/20.3 and 1/22.5 on his Kaskaskia Valley Railway

[Ann's Open House](#)

Would you be willing to show your trains for the Children's Museum's summer series in July? The theme is transportation and there will be morning and afternoon groups of twenty children each.