

Garden Trains

From A to Z

N is for Nail Gun



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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.

Nail Guns

I am getting started on my trestle project and I know that I am going to need a nail gun to make it easier to put it all together. I don't want to over spend. I do want to make sure I get something that is versatile enough to complete this and other projects. The question is what do I need it to do?

Is a brad nailer the same as a nail gun? What do I use for a compressor? If I get an electric one do I need to worry about a compressor? What are the best sizes of nails or brads to use for projects? Many of you have done it before. What is the answer?

So... What are the top 5 things I need to look for when I buy a nail gun or brad nailer?

Rick Henderson - Nail guns are for heavier work

Size matters...

A brad nailer and nail gun are different. Brad nails and nailers are for small woodworking projects or adding detail and trim to larger projects. Nail guns are for heavier work such as building construction.

A quick net search came up with a good explanation on air vs. elec.:

"For speed, power, and dependability, the pneumatic brad nailer is the superior tool. The compressed air ensures a clean shot, and you can shoot out several nails in a row. There are cords attached to this model, however, which can be somewhat limiting. A cordless electric model doesn't have the same amount of power and doesn't work as fast, but this nailer will get into high or difficult spots much more easily."

I use an air brad nailer for my railroad building projects.

Andrew Simpson - A great, simple addition

I bought a brad nailer about 3 years ago to make my trestles. It was electric power and a great unit that also used staples as well as 15 mm (5/8") brads. I was shocked to find out that when the initial brads that came with the unit were used up, a packet of replacement brads were dearer than the cost of a new unit!

Also I would look at buying a unit that can take slightly longer brads (say 20mm - 3/4"). I don't have a compressor so the electric unit is fine for my needs. Don't place your hand behind the object to be nailed because there is enough power to nail through the timber and also I have missed at times and have shot the brad across the shed. A great, simple addition to the equipment needed and quick to use.

David Bodnar - I started out with a Stanley/Bostich

I have a number of pin, brad and finish nail guns as well as two staple guns. I started out with a Stanley/Bostich package that included two guns and a nice compressor. It was around \$300. Since then I have added nail guns from Harbor Freight. On sale it is not unusual to find brad and finish nail guns for less than \$20.00. I was quite skeptical about the quality and reliability of their nail guns but have used them extensively and find them to be a good value.

We used two of their finish / staple guns to construct the new layout at Phipps Conservatory and find that they worked very well especially when exposed to all kinds of weather and hands covered with concrete! All we had to do was clean them off and oil them at the end of the day and they kept on working! We went through 1 1/2 boxes of staples - 5000 staples in each box - not bad duty for a pair of \$20.00 staple guns.

Get a small to medium sized compressor. Mine is 2 HP / 6 gallons. In addition buy a 10 gallon external air tank. When working on the railroad use the compressor (big heavy thing) to fill the 10 gallon tank. Take the tank to the railroad, do your work there and refill it as needed. I rarely have to fill the tank more than once or twice in a given day and find it much easier to carry around than the compressor. It is also easier to maneuver than a 50 foot hose!

It goes without saying that you need to keep your wits about you when using these things - take inventory of your fingers and other body parts before pulling the trigger! You don't want to find out how easily they can nail through flesh and bone!

I didn't count but that might make five things!

Kenneth Allen - I got a brad nailer from Lowes

I kind of went overboard when I bought my compressor, but I first got it to spray my house with, what a waste, ending up buying a sprayer that goes straight into the bucket like the professionals use, but not quite as expensive. I have used the compressor for lots of other uses so it has not gone to waste. When I built my trestle I got a brad nailer from Lowes, which was on sale for 29.00, thank God, it will fire 1/4 inch to 2 inch brads. I got a 50ft hose at the same time. It was a great time saver and I had no trouble with the extra length of hose.

Just make sure you have what you want going together before pulling the trigger, mine has a pressure of 80lbs, but I found that 60lbs worked better for me. Oh yes I used 1 inch brads to fastening the bents together and 5/8 inch brads for the rest. Made a strong trestle, you have probably seen me standing on it sideways. I have used it to fasten a building together and hold it while the glue dries.

Daniel List - Senco pin nailer which is a super tool

Here's my two cents worth. I've used both brad guns and pin nailers. The pin nailers are far, far superior to the brad guns. They hold well and don't split the wood. I've got a Senco pin nailer which is a super tool, and I use it as my first choice. I also have a Harbor Freight 23 Gauge pin nailer which I purchased for \$20.00.

I use polyurethane glue with the pin nailers when building trestles, etc for outside use. The glue expands and fills the pores of the wood and makes a very strong weatherproof joint.

One caution with the pin nailers - if you are pinning hard wood, don't hold the wood on the sides as you pin the top - the pins can follow curved wood grains, and come out the side, into your finger. I learned this the hard way.

Paul Bottino - works like a dream

Capt. Bob Johnson and I went in together on the Grex pinner at ECLSTS last year. It was \$200. I have used it so far to make a plywood building and it works like a dream. The funny thing is that it was my wife who decided that we needed it. So what could we do, but pony up the money?

Joe Fotschky - I would like to get a pin nailer

A great tool to have!

I started out with this Arrow electric nailer/stapler. And built this with it.



I then bought this 2 gallon compressor to use in the garage.



So I graduated to this Central Pneumatic air nailer/stapler from Harbor Tool.

It shoots nails from 5/8 inch long to 2 inches long and staples from 1/2 inch long to 1 1/2 inch long. They can also be used around the house to do things to so you can sell the idea to your wife as a dual purpose item.

I would like to get a pin nailer. I have a model I got at a club Christmas gift swap put together with one and I like the very small hole it leaves over a typical brad nail hole.

I will hold off on buying one until I get heavy in to scratch building.

Glenn Habrial - barely put a nail into an apple

I received this Arrow nailer / stapler it can barely put a nail into an apple



However, I already had a 110 volt oilless compressor. It is raised up out of the way on a shelf.



WARNING: When using any nailer, ALWAYS wear safety goggles.

Dean Sleeper - has been a great tool for me

I have a Porter Cable pin nailer and it has been a great tool for me with this hobby. I also have a brad nailer which is nice but I was splitting too much wood with it, especially when working with smaller sizes of wood so the pin nailer gets my nod. If I had to make my purchase over again I probably would go with Harbor Freight for 25 bucks.

John B Pedersen - I have a small belt drive compressor

I have 3 Air operated units; one is for 1 1/2" heavy gauge brads by Senco for large projects. I have a smaller Senco clone that uses 5/8 to 1 1/2" that was \$100.00. I also have a \$19.95 brad nailer from Menards that uses 5/8" to 1 1/4 brads. I much prefer the cheaper unit to the \$100 unit. I have 2 compressors, one in the garage which is a medium size unit for misc uses. For my brad nailer that I use for my building project, I have a small belt drive compressor that suffices well in my work room. These both get an extensive work out and I have been well satisfied with their performance. All the last bridge and trestle works were built with those units.

Bob Urquhart - Haven't stopped building since!

Saw a great wooden model at the 2007 ESLSTS. Didn't know about pin nailers until the gentleman told me how he built the model. So I bought a Stanley pin nailer; use 1/2" up to 1 1/4 inch pins. Haven't stopped building since! I make wooden structures during the winter; I leave the compressor in the garage. I soldered quick disconnects to a 1/2 copper pipe that runs thru the garage wall to the basement. Hook up the hoses and I'm ready to build in the nice warm basement - with the compressor noise in the garage! Works like a charm....

Robert Charles - I also use a brad nailer

I use primarily a pneumatic 'pinner'; this shoots 23 gauge pins instead of the 18 gauge brads. The thinner pins almost guarantee no splits when pinning thin material or working near edges. Porter-Cable makes a pinner. There are other manufacturers. The brad nailer or pinner are both powered by a one gallon compressor with a pressure regulator and gauge. You do not need anything larger for this task. This makes the operation very portable when fixing things in yard! Yes, I also use a brad nailer.

Dusty Suit - The Grex has a double action trigger

I got the Grex Model P635 pinner at last year's ECLSTS and love it. It fires 23 gauge pins that are from 3/8 to 1 3/8". I use primarily 5/8" pins for repair of plastic structures (fires nicely through the plastic). I have a 1 HP compressor that is piped into the workshop so can also use a larger brad nailer when needed for trestle work, etc. I typically use about 50-60 psi for the Grex. I understand it will do a nice job on fingers too; so use care and glasses. The Grex has a double action trigger that reduces the chance of an accidental firing.

Mike Evans - for most of us, cheaper is better

Don't spend a bunch of money on either a brad nailer or pin nailer. The Harbor Freight model has worked for me. I also bought a cheap pin nailer for \$20 that works swell. If you are in a production facility, maybe you need something fancier or more durable, but for most of us, cheaper is better. If it fails, just buy another one.

Roy Powers - rebuilt all the kitchen cabinets

A friend of mine has a Black & Decker battery powered nailer. At his wife's request, he and I completely rebuilt all the kitchen cabinets and drawers in their house. We worked for about six hours without a problem from the nailer. (Can't say the same thing about the supervision.) And the kitchen looked great!!

Richard Fried - repaired other items with it

I have a Sears compressor and a Craftsman brad nailer. It will shoot 3/8 to 1.25 inch pins or brads. I've built bridge parts, underground vaults, and repaired other items with it, including some non railroad stuff.

Paul Roberts - years of service

I got the Porter brad nailer and a 3/4 Campbell compressor and have been totally happy with both for years of service. I could not have built my trestles or bridges without them. Plus works well for cove moldings around the new wooden flooring and the new doors on the kitchen cupboards. Hey! You gotta give a little to get a little garden railroading in!

Stephen Auslender - To me an entirely new concept

Astounding! I had never considered using a powered nailer. I always thought they were for use by professional carpenters. My mind is still working in the past - I thought one would use hammer and nails and wood screws if one was not a professional.

My background is machinery design and I always think in terms of bolting metal together. Even when working with wood I think of joining in terms of nuts and bolts. A powered pin driver or nailer. To me an entirely new concept. I'll have to think about that.

Jim Sweeney - built an 18' trestle for my GMC RR

The BIG tool company! SEARS.

I'm not putting in a plug for them but if you don't want to spend shipping charges you can go to your local Sears. I have their electric brad nailer that I have had for about 15 years now. I don't remember how much it cost, but I'm sure I didn't pay over \$35 for it then. They also sell the nails for it. And the nails are colored on the head for paneling so they come in different colors.

For my 12" to the foot projects there is the Paslode nailers in 2 sizes. One for framing and one for trim. The beauty of these guns is that they don't need cords or hoses to operate. But you don't need either one of these for your RR projects. I built an 18' trestle for my GMC RR around 1995 with my Sears brad nailer and it is still going strong today.

Bill Hartwig - and over 3,000 brads

When I finally figured out what I was going to use for materials that's when I checked out the different types of guns. I used had cut rough sawn CEDAR to build my trestle. The STANLEY ELECTRIC BRAD NAILER worked out the best for me. I was able to use 1/2-5/8-3/4-and 1 inch brads. The heads on these brads are SQUARE and look realistic. I used Elmer's exterior wood glue and over 3,000 brads. The gun still works great. My trestle gets hauled to most of our clubs events. It's holding up great.

Ray Turner - I'm leaning toward the battery operated

I have an electric brad nailer (5/8" - 1") by Arrow and a Grex pin nailer (air). The electric nailer has enough power for redwood (soft wood) but won't drive nails all the way into hard woods. The pin nailer is strong and very reliable (more \$\$\$, of course). The nice thing about air powered (if you have a compressor - or want an excuse to buy one) is you can adjust the pressure if you want to reduce the force. As others have said, pins are ideal for the small wood we work with. They are unlikely to split the wood and they are nearly invisible. Glue the joints too.

I wouldn't have thought that Harbor Freight Tools would be as reliable as others have said. I see they have a pin nailer for \$25 on their web site, so I would try that.

I do not own any of the nailers or pinner that have been mentioned. Come to think of it, I don't own one at all.

With that said, when I do buy one (or some) I will follow the advice from those that have used them. Here's my thought for the day; I own a compressor that will handle any of the tasks that I might wish to do when I finally get around to building my set (It's like -20 outside right now! And up here in Alaska, summer is for fishing.). Pneumatic vs. electric/battery powered is the real question. So when I'm outside working on the layout I don't want a hose dragging around knocking into things (I know, I should be more careful). So I'm leaning toward the battery operated.

Anthony Petuskey - The pin nails look like scale nails

I use a Porter Cable 23 gauge pin nailer for assembling buildings I build out of wood and laser engraved and cut plywood. The pin nails look like scale nails and work well in most woods even oak and maple. For glue I use either Titebond II or III and pin nail the joints.

The cost of the pin nailer from Tyler Tool was about \$125 and any of the small gallon to 2 gallon diaphragm compressors with a regulator will work. Any nailer, stapler, pin nailer, crown stapler works best at a pressure of about 75 psi, higher pressures usually cause problems with bent pins, nails, etc. The better pin nailers will have fewer problems with jams and a longer service life.

Shane Jones - These tools can be very dangerous

Word of warning from a professional that uses them a lot. These tools can be very dangerous. Pretty much the same as carrying around a loaded gun. Always point the head away from you toward the ground. Always take your time moving around with it and watch your step. That way if you fall, the head lands down in the dirt and not in your face or chest. Just in case the unit goes off. Which I have seen happen. Lucky it was pointed at the ground. Follow the safety instructions. That includes using the safety on the unit. Even electric brad nailers can cause serious injury if you're not careful.

Don't want to turn anybody off to using them. But the safety warning is needed. These are great tools as long as you have the right size for the job. Too big or too powerful and you would be shooting nails right through the wood. Also make sure you don't accidentally get one that requires a license.

Follow the instructions and get the right one; it will make the job go much faster. Makes it easier too. For those that don't want a hose, there is also the gas cartridge version as well from Porter Cable and Dewalt

Dave Marecek - I build all my own buildings

The great thing about G Scale is being able to build wooden buildings and structures in a size that make using a brad gun feasible. I build all my own buildings and structures from cedar as they are designed to stay outside permanently. Every joint gets Polyurethane glue and a brad.

I have a low cost electric brad gun that can handle 1/4" to 2" brads. However most of the time I use 1/2" or 3/4" as I am usually mating 1/4" or 1/2" wood together. Rule of thumb I use is, Brad length is 1.5 * wood thickness.

Biggest complaint is the size of the unit as sometimes it is difficult to get inside a building to brad from the inside.

Harry Halbert - sorry I didn't get one four years ago

About five months ago I bought a SENCO 23 gauge Headless Pinner with an Air Compressor, also SENCO, for \$205.00. The local hardware store ran this combo sale, which I am sure was sponsored by the manufacturer.

This is the best tool for building structures, trestle bents, bridges, etc. that I have ever owned. I'm just sorry I didn't get one four years ago.

MEMBERS ONLINE STORIES ON BUILDING HOW-TO'S

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

[How to Build Windows for Your Buildings](#)

As a builder I have a need for windows for my buildings. Now I could buy commercially made windows from various suppliers to use in my buildings, but there are 2 problems with that. One, after looking at several suppliers I still can't come up with the sizes I want and two, they cost money not only for the windows but for the shipping to get them to my workshop.

[DOUBLE ARTICLE: Scratch Built Sagged Box Cars](#)

Instead of removing the existing switch and lifting that track, I will leave most of it in place creating an abandoned siding. Well, instead of just having abandoned track I decided that I would put a pair of abandoned boxcars on the track for some added interest. And this decision has lead to my next major scratchbuilding project.

[Train Toter: Get your trains on the move.](#)

I put together a quick & dirty "Train Toter" that provides a place to store much of the rolling stock and a convenient means of moving it around. The latest version of the toter can transport eight cars at one time. An easily adjusted nylon cord on the sides and ends secures the cars within the toter.

[Award Wining Model - What does it take?](#)

I had entered a scratchbuilt logging crummy in the 2001 contest (my first ever contest entry), and learned from the results.