

PROJECT IDEA STARTER

Model Railroading

by Bob Horton, Extension Specialist, 4-H Youth Development, Ohio State University Extension



Model railroading is actually several hobbies tied together by the objective of creating a miniature railroad. It involves woodworking, model building, electronics, artwork and photography. The hobby is unique in that you can start with a minimum amount of skill, resources and knowledge of the subject and continue to learn and enjoy for a lifetime.



After determining the gauge in which to work (HO, O, O27, G, N, Z, etc.), a beginning model railroader often starts with a simple oval layout. However, model railroaders soon discover ways to build a more realistic layout. There are three basic ways to arrive at a track plan: find one in a book, modify one that you find or create one of your own. No matter how you obtain your plan, you should have a good idea of what your modeling goals are and how much space, time and money you plan to devote.

Once your layout is planned, it's time to think about setting it up. The way you frame a model railroad must allow for such changes as adding on, modeling and remodeling. Therefore, your benchwork should allow for disassembly and expansion. Most model railroaders recommend the L-girder method of benchwork. With this type of benchwork, the joists lie across the inverted L-shaped girders, providing ample support for the tabletop. The simplest tabletop is a plywood or wood slat surface. However, track nailed directly to any wood surface amplifies the sound from an operating layout. Consider adding Homasote, cork, foam core or foam insulation to your tabletop to deaden the sound.

After assembling your benchwork and tabletop, it's time to begin laying track and switches. As you begin, you will soon see ways to modify your original track plan. Take this opportunity to test new ideas and try to imagine how the changes will add excitement to your layout while staying within your budget. Be sure your layout includes a few turnouts called "switches." Without switches, operation of a model railroad would be rather limited. Beginners might prefer to start with only a few switches and add more later.

Another aspect that requires forethought is wiring. When operating a model train, you control the speed and direction of the motor inside the locomotive. To accomplish this, electric current travels from the transformer, through the rails, to the motor and back again. The farther the current travels along the track, the greater the resistance and thus the slower the train. To counter this, care must be taken in choosing the correct gauge wire to deliver current to and from the transformer and the best locations for adding feeder wires along the various sections of track.

The final consideration for completing your model railroad is scenery and structures. This time-

PLAN YOUR PROJECT

Use this idea starter AND publication 4-H 365 *Self-Determined Project Guide* as the starting place for your 4-H self-determined project. The *Self-Determined Project Guide* is available from your county OSU Extension office or on the Web at ohio4h.org/selfdetermined. You may choose to do a little or a lot depending on your level of interest. Be sure to register your project with your county OSU Extension office.

consuming step is considered by many to be the highlight of the hobby. Model railroaders use a combination of skills to create a “slice” of the world. Some considerations for modeling include terrain, topography, geological features, industries, residential areas, forests and farms. This work in progress may never have an ending, only brief stopping points along the way. Most beginning modelers turn to their local hobby store for sources of landscape materials and premanufactured buildings.

AREAS OF INTEREST AND THINGS TO DO

Every self-determined 4-H project can be broken down into areas of interest. These are the specific things members want to address during their project adventures. Using *4-H 365 Self-Determined Project Guide*, identify at least three areas of interest with at least three activities per area to explore. Take your ideas from the list below or make up your own.

Plan a Layout

- Locate a reference book on model railroading to use during your project.
- Determine the scale in which to model.
- Create a track plan for a model railroad.
- Talk with your parent(s) about where to put a layout.

- Identify a knowledgeable person who is willing to help.
- Attend a model railroad show.
- Join a model railroad organization.

Construct Benchwork and Tabletop

- Determine the size, shape and location for the benchwork.
- Get help constructing the benchwork.
- Build the benchwork with as much recycled lumber as possible.
- Select a tabletop that is sturdy and absorbs sound.
- Paint or finish the tabletop before laying track.

Lay Track and Switches

- Lay out track and switches on the tabletop as planned.
- Think about ways to change or modify the basic plan.
- Discuss track plans with your adult helper.
- Fasten track and switches to the tabletop.
- Plan ways to expand your layout after you reach your immediate goals.

Address Electrical Needs

- Discuss electrical needs with your adult helper.
- Determine what gauge wire to use.
- Establish where to place the transformer, power and switch controls.

- Locate the best places to connect wires to track.
- Find ways to conceal wires from view.
- Employ soldering techniques to attach wires to track.

Create Scenery and Structures

- Visit an operating model railroad display to study how it was constructed.
- Discuss scenery and structure ideas with your adult helper.
- Include a lake, pond, cliffs, pasture, woodland, meadow or mountain in your layout.
- Include a coaling station, water tower, passenger station, village, freight terminal, freight yard or other manmade feature in your layout.

RELATED RESOURCES

Classic Toy Trains Magazine, ctt.trains.com

Model Railroader Magazine, mrr.trains.com

Publications about toy trains and model railroading, kalmbach.com