

Five easy ways to get started in



Nothing says Christmas like a toy-train layout. Many holiday buildings and accessories are widely available to help you get started.



Dick Christianson and his grandson, Elliott, enjoy this simple toy train layout on Christmas morning. You can easily build a version of this 4- by 6-foot O-27 gauge layout for your family. Dick added cabinet handles so Elliott can easily roll the layout under his bed.

You might already have a starter set in the attic or tucked away in a closet, but aren't sure what to do with it. Maybe your son or grandson enjoys Thomas the Tank Engine or Brio toys. Here, we'll help you make the transition from thinking about model railroading to actively participating in it. It's easier than you might think.

1. Train under the Christmas tree

For some folks, it just wouldn't be Christmas without a toy train running around the tree. With the availability of starter sets and snap-together track, it's never been easier to set up a holiday-themed train layout.

A basic oval, perhaps with one pair of switches to provide interest with an alternate route, is all that's needed. If you want to run two trains, set up another oval inside the first.

Tie the tree and the train layout together in some way. A winter scene works well, even in warm climates. Accentuate the whimsical: cute buildings, oversized accessories, and blinking lights. Many discount stores sell holiday-themed accessories that work great for toy-train layouts.

You should also do something to set the layout apart from the rest of the room and protect the carpet. Little accidents happen—lubricating oil sometimes splatters, fake snow gets out of hand, artificial coal spills—and you'll want something to contain or absorb these mishaps. If you're doing a winter motif, a white bed sheet will work well.

Set up your train and accompanying scene, sit back, and enjoy. You might find that you'll want to keep the trains out all year!

2. A layout for kids

Many stores now sell "play mats" for kids; basically, they're a piece of carpeting with roads and a city scene imprinted onto the fabric. Dick Christianson, retired Managing editor of *Model Railroader*, used a play mat as a basis for a simple toy-train layout. He attached the carpeting to a piece of plywood to form a train table, and screwed 3-rail track on top of the carpet.

model railroading



A wooden railway system, such as this one by Learning Curve, exposes kids to trains at a young age.

3. Wooden railroad systems


Wooden railroad systems are a great way to introduce the excitement of railroading to children as young as age three. Popular wooden railroad sets, such as those made by Brio, or those featuring the popular Thomas the Tank Engine & Friends characters, offer plenty of hands-on fun right out of the box. Best of all, a kid (along with his/her family) equipped with a train and plenty of track will soon start to experiment with building new track arrangements and thinking up stories to go along with the action.

That's the kind of creative play that really fires a kid's imagination and boosts problem-solving skills. You can't beat a quality wooden train set for years of railroad fun!

4. Simple outdoor set up

Perhaps you received a large-scale starter set as a gift and aren't sure what to do with it. You don't need to build a complex garden railway to enjoy your trains outdoors. Set up the track in a corner of your yard or on a deck and watch the trains run. The best part is, you can leave the track outdoors if you wish (but bring the transformer and train inside after an operating session).

5. Attend a train show

There's no better way to get started in the hobby than by attending a train show. Shows in all scales are held across the country year round (to find one near you, see the events database list at trains.com). Many train shows feature operating layouts and displays, so you can experience the hobby first-hand. Often, club members and hobby representatives are available to offer assistance and answer your questions. 



KEVIN STRONG

A grape arbor provides a pleasant backdrop for the beginnings of a garden railway. If you choose to expand the railroad, the dry rock garden can become part of the landscape.



There's no better way to experience the hobby than by attending a train show. Many shows feature operating layouts, like the one above.