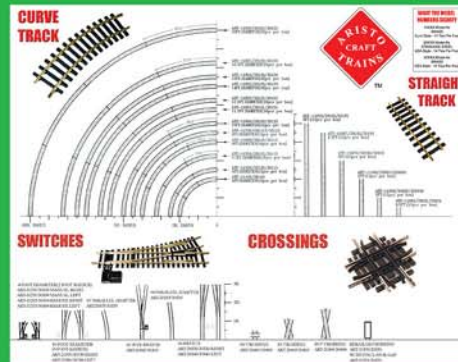


Garden Trains

From A to Z

T is for Track

Sectional or Flex



Better Information - Better Railroad
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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.

Track

Flex or Sectional; What do you use?

When I first got started in Large Scale I did not know about flex track. As I have told you in the past I started out with Lionel track. Once I headed outside I switched to Aristo-Craft brass track. I used Aristo sectional track and designed my railroad based on the limits that this type of track with its sectional diameters and lengths placed on me.

As my railroad grew, my knowledge on track grew and we tried using some flex track. It really is just a box of ties and a tube of rails. We tried it with the old "one at a time" rail bender and found that it worked, but it was a lot of work. I still think there are some brass slivers in my right hand.

We moved houses and needed to start over. Now I had my dual rail bender and the world was a wonderful place. We just put our track out and did not care what it was, or whose it was, or what direction it was headed. We just bent it in the direction we wanted it to go and we were up and running. Sectional Track? Sectional Track? We don't need no stinking sectional track.

So what is your take on sectional vs. flex track? Is sectional track just for beginners? Is sectional track too limiting on planning your garden railroad? Is the cost of a rail bender at over \$250 keeping you from bending your own? What do you use? Why do you use it? Do you wish you had used something else?

Bob Gentile - "I used a belly bender"

I started out with Sectional track and then tried flex track. Love it; less rail joints. The rail bender, well I used a belly bender and got a perfect 10 diameter curve, so much for rail benders.

Joe Fotschky - "My railroad is all sectional track"

My railroad is all sectional track but if you have ever worked with the five foot stuff you may consider it flex track. I used a single rail bender to curve my inside loop to 15 foot diameter on center. They may make that diameter now, I don't know, but they did not back then.

Kenneth Allen - "Have a single rail bender which is a pain to use"

My first G scale layout was inside and just starting I only knew of sectional track and built the layout using that. Had to move it outside and then found out about flex track, now that was what I used to finish the outside layout with, had so much of the sectional track it has a lot of it in it too. Have a single rail bender which is a pain to use but have bend quite a bit of rail with it.

William Parthe - "Flex track sounds like the way to go"

Have the dual rail bender and have used it some on sectional track. Don't have a stick of flex track, but think I might consider going to it. Anticipating getting a piece of property soon - where I can finally setup a layout. Flex track sounds like the way to go for a lot of reasons - versatility in ease of design being probably the most obvious. Terrain (or other objects-moveable or not) changes won't have to create bad bends, etc. As I recall, was it American Flyer that marketed a flex track in S gauge or another manufacturer, but it was fully assembled and you just bent the track to suit-with no need for a rail bender. Showing my age I guess.

Rick Henderson - "I use Llagas Creek code-215"

I use Llagas Creek code-215, it only comes in flex. This allows me to lay the track where needed without having to buy lots of short sections to get it to fit properly.

Glenn Habrial - "I am using both sectional and flex track"

I am using both sectional and flex track (aristocraft). Sectional track is faster to install but there are less joints with flex track. Also I used the sectional track as a prototype to get the same radius with the flex track. Also I have custom bent some sections to get increasing radius curves for smoother operations.

Jon D. Miller - "The CD&StL uses sectional track."

The CD&StL uses sectional track. That's about all the challenge we can handle.

Years ago helped a fellow club member put in a layout using flex track. He had a single rail bender. After that experience decided that was all the "fun" I needed. Flex track gives more flexibility when laying track. Must be why it's called flex track! But for the simple minded folks at the CD&StL we'll stick with sectional track.

Noel Widdifield - "Sure wish I had owned the double one."

I have sectional track on my indoor railroad and both on my outdoor railroad. I used Llagas Creek track for my interurban track outside and used the single rail bender. Sure wish I had owned the double one when I laid that track.

Don Sweet - "...should use the best materials you can afford."

In 1986 I started with sectional and then re-laid the railroad as 5' lengths became available. Eliminating many rail joints improved reliability and stability of the track structure.

Over the years I would buy cases of 5' or 6' straights and remove the ties to bend the rail and then lay the track. This was the most economical method I found. Recently I tried the new Accucraft flex track and this is great. Also have a dual railbender. Both of these products save a lot of time and extra work. I use an \$8 hand saw, with a new blade, to cut the rail and connect to switches or the next section.

I believe you should use the best materials you can afford when installing your track. No cutting corners here. The track system is the heart of the layout. If the track system is not perfect, then your best running Loco and train just might fall off.

Mike Evans - "Just bought the dual bender."

Just bought the dual bender. What a difference it makes! Now I can do curve easements, make things fit better, custom bend to any desired radius and make much better use of all the 4.5 ft aristo straight pieces. Just have to remember to remove the little screws holding the tie strip on.

Todd Brody - "I just used a hack saw to get what I wanted."

I started with sectional track (~525 feet), but later additions have been both sectional and flex. When I wanted a different size piece than provided (e.g., 1/2 of a 10' diameter curve), I just used a hack saw to get what I wanted. I primarily use AristoCraft track and when I did cut a piece, I always drilled and tapped it for the screws in the rail joiner.

John Perez - "I purchased one of those wonderful rail benders"

I have sectional and flex on my front yard small oval layout. The straights are H&R stainless. (That was expensive) and then I did sectional on the curves because I did not know of the dual rail bender. I purchased one of those wonderful rail benders here on LSOL a while ago but actually laid my first flex track with curves in July 08. I love it.

I now need more track and just got the money for track. I need to go shopping now for more flex track. I had old LGB flex track from years back that I used so my dilemma is to find the closest matching color ties in another brand.

James O'Connor - "Not sure the....crew could handle a dual bender."

I have found track is track as long as you put it down right and take care of it on a regular basis. The C&S (VA Div) has about 85% LGB flex outside and 100% LGB sectional inside. Built the indoor lay out years ago, but if I had to do it over again, think I would use flex for the whole thing. I have a single rail bender that does a great job. Not sure the C&S Section crew could handle a dual bender.

John Pletcher - "...cost of the dual bender towards more track."

We used 5 foot brass sections from Aristocraft. As far as curves go I used the single railbender from Aristocraft because that is the only type available at the time. Now with the dual bender available, it sure would have sped the process up. When we do go to expand our empire I will probably go the same route using 5 foot sections and the single railbender. The dual bender looks nice, but I would rather put the cost of the dual bender towards more track. Just my 2 cents.

Jim Grimes - "I'll never look back to sectional track."

I just finished the track on my deck layout. I used 6' flex track and a Train Li bender. I was against spending so much on the bender but got this one as a birthday gift. The layout consists of two loops and a figure eight over and under. It is built on a PVC ladder system track bed. The flex track bent perfectly to match the curves established by the PVC. I was running trains in just one day. I'm looking forward to expanding to the garden next spring. I'll never look back to sectional track.

Dean Mead - "I made one...three brass curtain rope pulley wheels"

I use mostly flex track, with sectionals around some curves. My first bends were by hand, and rather sloppy. Not being able to afford a bender, I made one with three brass curtain rope pulley wheels, on a board about 18 inches long. The center wheel was bolted in a slot with a wing nut, so I could control the curve. It cost about \$15 and works well. There's a very small chop saw offered by different precision tool outlets, and it works well to cut brass track.

Richard Friedman - "...important thing... get track on the ground."

When I started, I used only Llagas Creek code 250 aluminum flex. Fewer joiners made for more reliable operation, it seemed to me. And it did, 'til I began installing switches, the bane of my garden railroading life! Joined a garden RR club to use their rail bender. A good and cost effective way to use a thing you'll probably never need after the first burst of enthusiasm!

I've acquired several hundred pounds of code 332 brass rail in several different lengths and radii. For my whimsy section, I used it to wind in and out of the bushes and trees. Spent last Saturday laying track at a club member's home. We used almost 100% recycled rail, so we use a (borrowed) rail bender to get the curves correct. It's a two rail no remove ties type and it worked really well. I'll bet we laid over 300 feet of track and switches in less than half a day. Course, there were five of us! In short, use what you got. The most important thing is to get track on the ground. BTW, you can straighten curved track with a rail bender.

Kevin Lepel - "maybe I will get ambitious and try to make my own."

At the moment all the track I own is sectional. Bought before the last price increase, and when I had misconceptions about bending rail. (The video on this site about the Duo is great BTW, in the Video section under Products)

After watching the video the cost of the Duo is the only concern - but as Dave said once the track is down you could use it to fix kinks, minor imperfections or to replace damaged curves - there are more uses than just to bend the track initially. Also, like Dave, I prefer to own my own tools so this is an item for the tool box, maybe I will get ambitious and try to make my own.

Since my initial layout will be track powered flex track, with its longer sections, seems like the way to go. I may try another idea I picked up from another TTT to notch the track every so many inches for a more natural clickity-clack sound.

I don't think that sectional track is the limiting factor - it is the locomotives. I was planning to have a small layout - that was until I was at ECLSTS for the first time in 2007. My whole world opened up and I had to have a Dash-9. Now that I own one its 8 ft minimum curves, at least on the parts I want bigger loco's to run

Jim Pehrs - "I am using all 5 ft sectional track with a Duo."

I am using all 5 ft sectional track with a Duo. After a little experimenting, I can easily bend sectional track with the Duo. I remove the tie screws on the "inside" rail on curves. That turns sectional track into a modified flex track. It also makes it easy to connect sections. I use a Dremel to cut off the excess on the rail without tie screws, and then use rail clamps. By using rail clamps, you can run the Duo right over the connections.

I have on different occasions, had both a left and a right curve in one piece of 5 foot section. Easy way to put a "jog" in your track. If the left and right curves are exactly the same, the ends of the section will extend the same amount from the end ties and your "jog" will be parallel with the rest of the section. If you make a mistake, it is easy to "re-straighten" a piece of track.

If you are using mostly straight sections, the Duo may seem expensive. I will be laying about 900 feet of track and most of it will be curved. Without the Duo, it would be a long tedious job... I consider it a very good investment.

Daryll Smith - "Try it, you'll like it."

It's been enlightening to read the many posts and opinions on single vs. dual rail benders and their associated costs. Let's face it, Garden railroading is not a cheap hobby - you have to have some money to build and operate your railroad. That said, IMHO, once you've tried a dual track bender (yes, \$250 is a lot of money but what's your time worth?) you'll wonder why anyone would use a single-rail bender. I use both sectional and flex track on my layout; however, mostly flex and the time savings alone in being able to bend both rails at the same time, at the right ratio to each other, and not have to reassemble ties on to the rails...its great!

If you still can't force yourself to part with the money perhaps you can borrow one from a fellow railroader / club member. As the old saying goes "Try it, you'll like it."

John Damkier - "too lazy"

I did flex in N scale, but been too lazy to bother in G.

David Maynard - "... recommend the Duo rail-bender to anyone."

I bent the rails when I built the railroad with a home brew system, it worked well. When the Duo bender came out I bought one because it is so easy to use. First time I used it I took some minor kinks and misalignments out of my track. Last time I used it was to make a replacement section for some track that had been damaged, it's so easy to make a matching piece for a non-standard section of track. The Duo rail-bender makes it almost as easy to lay G track as the flex-track is to lay in HO and N. So I would recommend the Duo rail-bender to anyone. Having a club owned one that the members could use is the best idea for those in a club, but I like owning my own tools.

MEMBERS ONLINE STORIES ON LARGE SCALE TRACK

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

[Dremel: How to Fix Broken Track.](#)

We were going to need to cut out and replace a section of track and there were also some gaps in the track that needed to be touched up as well. Our problem was our old battery power Dremel tool had died.

[Using Code 332 Track on your Railroad?](#)

[I doubt it. \(Article/Video\)](#)

When I started off in the world of Large Scale Trains 15 years ago I learned that I had many decisions to make. The scale of trains was not all the same. The couplers were not all the same. The track was not all the same. Come read how the Code 332 track on your railroad may not be Code 332.

[Track Prices: A Different Perspective](#)

Track price is THE big topic of discussion since Aristo-Craft and USA Trains announced the dramatic increase of their Brass and Stainless Steel Track.

[Making Wooden Track](#)

I don't know if you're like me, but I built 225 plus feet of shelf space for storage for my engines and rolling stock. And of course you have to have track to set them on.

[PVC Piping for Winter Time Protection](#)

After the second bout I got to thinking how can I prevent or get rid of this annoying freezing rain.

[VIDEO: How to: Use a Railbender](#)

Want to know how easy it is to bend rail? Find out online in the LSOL Video Gallery.

[Railbending Track: Is it really as hard as they all say?](#)

I think one of the things I did wrong with my Garden Railway was to do too much reading and not enough doing.

[Hand MadeTrack -- Faster!](#)

After reading the current material on spiking rail it seems that the most common tool is the inimitable needle-nose pliers. The problem, the way it seems to me, in using them is twofold: