

A railroad at Gardens? They think they can

The sound of a locomotive coming through a tunnel in a large jojoba bush is somewhat unusual at the Gardens. The annual reading of the Gardens for Luminaria Nights has included the chuffing of engines, whistles, and assorted sounds from a miniature town developing under the shrubbery. About 25 volunteers from the Tucson Garden Railway Society have been hauling materials, sculpting the track-bed, building trestles, and laying track for "Holiday on Rails" a miniature railway in the heart of Tucson Botanical Gardens.

The scale used for the garden railroad is called G-Gauge. It is roughly one-half-inch to a foot – an engine might fit in a shoebox. Garden railroads stand up to outdoor conditions and only the size of the property limits the space allowed for their design. A transformer, plugged into an ordinary outlet, supplies low-voltage power to the track – safe enough to touch.

With 300 feet of donated track, club members have built the railway like the real thing, utilizing rocks, dirt, and gravel available; and "blasting" through obstacles as needed. Tightly assembled rocks were

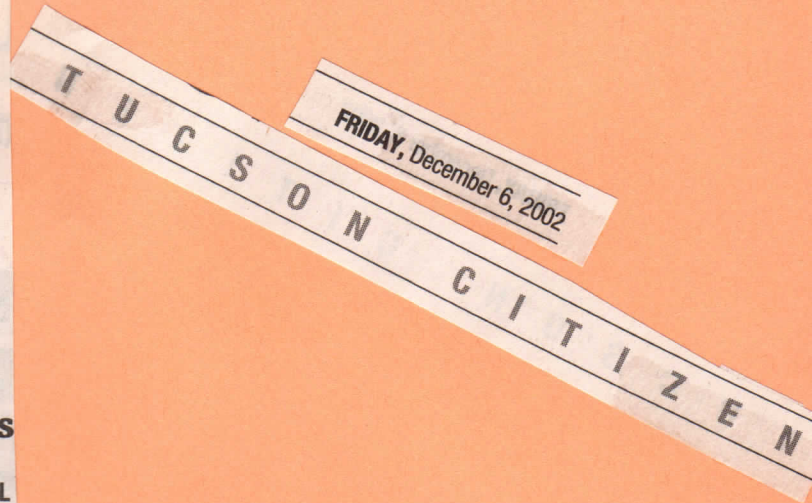


At the Gardens

By CECILY GILL

used to build the waterfall, and reinforce steeper grades and approaches to tunnels and trestles. The track-bed was smoothed and sculpted before a layer of fine gravel was spread over it. Handmade redwood trestles were installed to carry trains over ravines. A finish layer of gravel was sealed with a glue/water mixture before the track was laid down. Now the railway is weatherproof – track components are made of rust-free materials.

The Society installed the railway within an established garden at TBG. Gary Martin, current president, says if you're going to do it at home, start with an open space and install plants after the railway is in. He suggests using plants that don't need a lot of pruning, don't attract animals, and are slow





VAL CAÑEZ/Tucson Citizen

Little choo-choos will make a big impact at "Holiday on Rails" at Tucson Botanical Gardens.

growing. Some members are meticulous about scale and choose plants accordingly. Gary says he prunes small plants up into tree shapes, and severely prunes bigger plants, like pines, to keep them under two feet tall. Some members prefer desert or cactus gardens and some enjoy whimsy and don't worry about scale at all.

Garden railways are maintained just as real railways are. They suffer from washouts, animal damage, subsidence, and heat expansion. Aside from natural disasters, tracks and towns need careful maintenance.

Engines need regular oiling, too. At the Gardens each morning volunteers will clean the track, hook in the electronics, get the trains on the track, and take charge of switching.

"Holiday on Rails" a Garden Railway will be running daily through Dec. 31, from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and can be viewed at your leisure with regular garden admission.

Tucson Botanical Gardens' Luminaria Nights, three evenings of candle-lit pathways, holiday musical groups, Santa, and the lighted Garden Railway will be Dec. 6, 7, 8 from 5:30 to 8

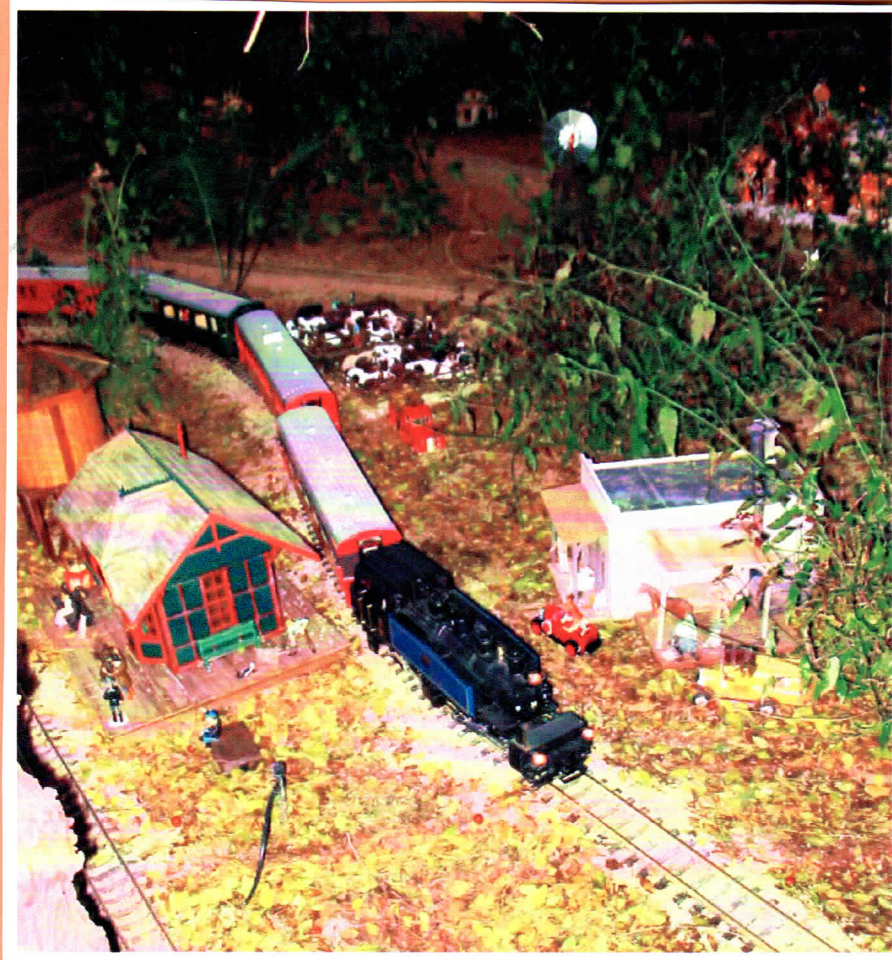
p.m. Admission to Luminaria Nights is \$5 Adults, \$3 TBG members, \$2 Children 3-11, free for children under 3 years.

The Tucson Garden Railway Society is a non-profit organization that educates about trains and garden railroads. It has 140 members (about 70 families). You can get information about the club by calling Gary Martin at 299-7428.

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SANTA'S WORKSHOP



The Tucson Botanical Gardens and the Tucson Garden Railway Society have teamed up to bring "Trains in the Garden." Come and see over 300 feet of rails, steam engines, boxcars, a western town, a sawmill and more! Weather and train operator permitting; the exhibit is open daily from 10:00 am – 3:00 pm (please call ahead to make sure the train is running!)