

# Railway gardening is rated 'G' scale

BY MARTY FIGLEY  
SPECIAL WRITER

George and Julie Cromer of Southfield are in the railroad business — on a small scale, G-scale, that is. Since railway gardening is a popular hobby, they have lots of company.

Their home garden contains dozens of miniature and dwarf conifers, which make up the base of an area that can easily be turned into a landscape railway garden. George has had the tracks in different parts of the garden several times.

Although he enjoys this aspect of railroading, he said, "Building is more fun than running." He builds and buys cars and structures for the layouts. He built a "garden railroad inspection car," painted it pink and set a little lady in it with a tiny camera on her lap. This depicts Julie, because she likes to see

other people's railway gardens and she always carries a camera.

G-scale train tracks are 1 1/4 inches wide for cars that are scaled to fit. For instance, a real railroad boxcar is 40 feet long, so a car for this scale would be 40-by-12 inches divided by 22.5, which would be about 21 inches long. (22.5 is the G-scale factor.)

Trains are run by electricity or steam (for those who prefer the live steam, which is closer to the reality of steam locomotives).

"There are railway gardens with the emphasis on the plants as is often seen in England, or garden railroads in which the owners try to reconstruct different times in history such as the old West (rock gardening)," George said.

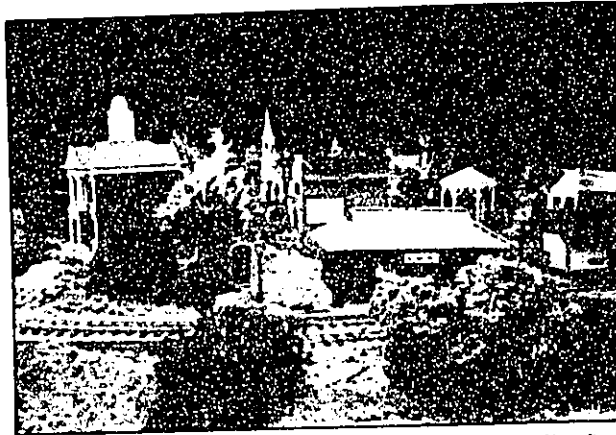
The Cromers' interest is narrow gauge Maine railroads in the 1930s. Other gardens feature special regions such as Switzerland, Germany or Alaska.

George has been railroad gardening for 10 years and designs and installs railroad gardens for interested people. Julie chooses the appropriate plants to suit the designs. Some of her choices are ground covers such as thymes, Scotch and Irish mosses, dwarf or miniature conifers, and smaller perennials such as dianthus and various rock garden plants, herbs and grasses. Sedums are also used and adapt well to these gardens. Cromer Services can be reached by calling (810) 352-3707.

George became interested in this hobby because he had been a model railroader in smaller gauges.

"This size appeals because I can SEE it."

This couple especially enjoy going to the National Garden Railway conventions all over the country. They thought California was the nearest place to visit railway gardens because "They have a full calendar to play and sufficient affluence to support the vice." This year the convention will be in Cincinnati and they will tour 50 or so different gardens, including some in Columbus and Dayton. They expect more than 1,000 people will attend.



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Village view: Realistic villages are an integral part of railway gardening.

When they went to their first convention they were the only ones from Michigan; now a group of 30 to 40 people will go.

The Cromers have been involved in the popular railway garden at the Metropolitan Detroit Landscape Association/Meadow Brook Garden Show each year and spend countless hours installing, running the trains and answering questions.

Many people are finding this hobby fascinating and also participated in the Meadow Brook railroad garden. Duane and Shirley of Rochester Hills have railway garden layouts that run both inside and outside their home. The trains come in at night by running through a basement window.

"We both have a lot of fun with this hobby," they said.

Dr. Joseph Honet of Franklin has a garden with railroads that contains fox-

glove, lupines and rhododendrons in a shady area. He likes the operation best and can be found out at 10 p.m. just watching his locomotives' headlights winding through the hosta beds.

Jim and Shirley of Farmington Hills prove that you don't have to be big to be beautiful. Their simple garden design with a railroad running through is outside the family room window. It is a source of pleasure for both of them.

Dave and Shella Mohr of Bloomfield Hills are in the throes of designing and constructing their railway garden. The pond is in, the tracks are down and Dave says, "Full steam ahead."

All are members of the Lakeshore Garden Railway Club. Meetings take place monthly at members' homes throughout the Detroit area. If you would like to become a part of this growing hobby, call Robert Greening of Grosse Pointe Woods at (313) 636-6502.



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Railway gardeners: George and Julie Cromer of Southfield have been railway gardening for many years.

# When lightning strikes it can be devastating

As the weather warms up and thunderstorms become more frequent, homeowners beware! These storms are often accompanied by dangerous lightning that can harm both people and property.

While your chances of being struck by lightning are relatively slim, the consequences can be devastating. More than 40 people in the United States are killed by lightning annually and another 300 are injured, according to the National Climatic Data Center. State Farm Insurance Co. estimates that 18,000 homes and 12,000 buildings are damaged or destroyed annually by lightning.

Besides causing fires, lightning frequently produces huge voltage surges that may damage electronic equipment in your home.

Experts recommend moving indoors at the first hint of a storm to protect yourself from a lightning strike. But

safeguarding your home and possessions requires some advance palling. Fortunately, it's not a difficult process.

"The best first line of defense is a secondary surge arrester, more commonly known as a lightning arrester," said Pete Lewis of Intermatic Inc., a manufacturer of home protection and control products.

"These devices are very effective in shielding electronic products from lightning. They also protect equipment from power surges and spikes caused by utility switching, electric motor cycling, or any other large or sudden change in electrical power flow."

Surprisingly, lightning doesn't even need to strike your home directly to harm your TV, VCR, telephone answering machine or personal computer. A hit on a power line that feeds your house can be just as destructive. Telephone and power lines also can experience voltage surges simply from the

electromagnetic energy created by nearby lighting.

Some homeowners mistakenly believe that a "lightning rod" is a suitable defense against lightning, Lewis said.

"While a lightning rod offers protection from a direct lightning hit, it can't protect sensitive equipment in your home from power surges caused by nearby lightning. A lightning arrester can."

Designed to be installed by a licensed electrical contractor, a lightning arrester is usually positioned at a point where electrical wires enter your home or at the main electrical panel box. It diverts the transient energy from lightning or a power surge into the electrical ground system, where it dissipates.

Typical lightning arrester applications include homes, offices, garages, barns, air conditioners, electric motors, outdoor lighting and signs, wells, pumps, tool sheds, farm equipment and

irrigation systems.

To learn more about the types of lightning arresters available, request Form IG526 from Intermatic Inc., Intermatic Plaza, Spring Grove, Ill. 60081-9698.

## Daylily dig set

Merrittcapp Inc., 5940 Cooley Lake Road in Waterford, will have its annual daylily dig 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Saturday-Sunday, July 15-16.

Merrittcapp has thousands of field grown daylilies in all colors. Leave your shovel at home; Merrittcapp will do the digging. Both named and unnamed varieties, and hundreds of other perennials, will be available from which to choose. All perennials, including hostas, will be on sale. Knowledgeable sales staff, food and a clown will be on hand. Call (810) 681-7655.