

21

Plant Portraits

A supplement to *Garden Railways Magazine*

Color photos showing scale
and possible usage

USDA Hardiness Zones, cultural
requirements, and growth
patterns for each plant

Handy index cards to keep, file,
or take to your local nursery!

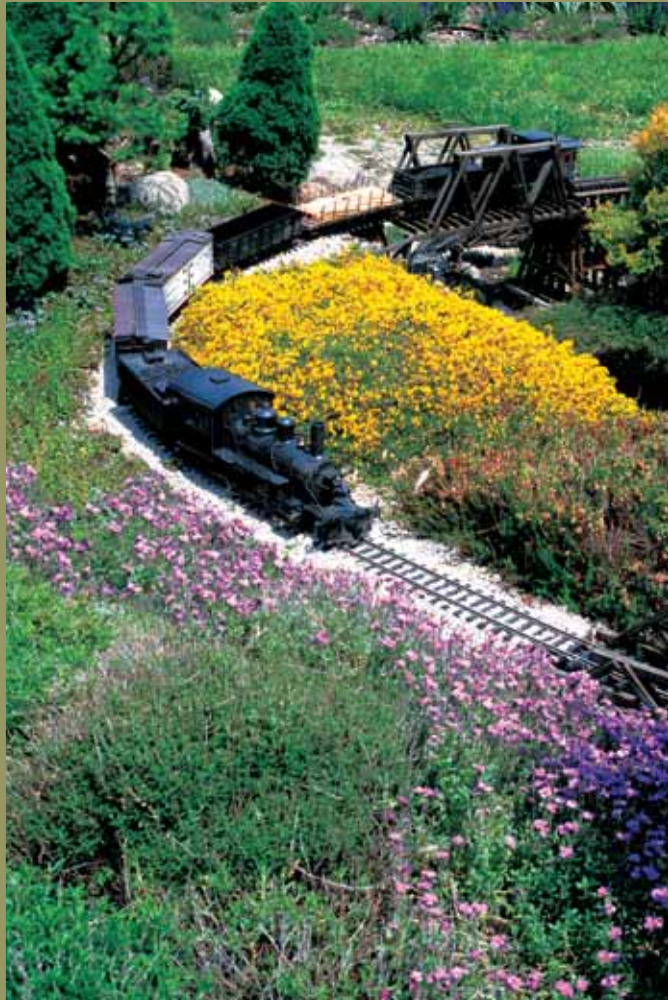
- 5 Shrubs and small trees
- 6 Annuals and perennials
- 4 Dwarf conifers
- 6 Water plants and groundcovers

Garden
RAILWAYS®

Chosen by *Garden Railways*
Horticultural Editor Pat Hayward,
each plant fits the scale require-
ments of any backyard garden
railroad. Keep these handy cards
in their booklet, file them for
future reference, or take them to
your local garden center!

TEAR & TAKE

3x5 Index Cards



DON PARKER

Miniature coleus

Annual



Nutmeg-scented geranium

Shrubs & small trees



Shore juniper

Dwarf conifer



Annual

Latin name: *Solenostemon scutellarioides*

Common name: Miniature coleus

Growth rate: Varies

USDA Hardiness Zone: Annual

Cultural needs: Full sun to partial shade,
moderate water

Coleus plants aren't just for windowsills and border edging anymore. Hundreds of exciting varieties are available from specialty growers, offering an amazing array of colors and textures for gardens everywhere. Miniature varieties with tiny leaves and extremely slow growth are perfect for garden railroaders looking for a change of pace. The smallest varieties can be planted as foundation shrubs, or pruned up into colorful small-scale landscape trees. Grow the smoky-colored selections in shadier sites, the brighter colored plants in sun for best results. Best miniature choices for garden railroads include Cantigny Royale, Purple Duckfoot, India Frills, Dark Frills, Charlie McCarthy, Kiwi Fern, and Kiwi Fruite.

PAT HAYWARD PHOTO

Shrubs & small trees

Latin name: *Pelargonium 'Fragrans'*

Common name: Nutmeg-scented geranium

Plant size: 10-14" tall x 12-14" wide

USDA Hardiness Zones: Annual

Cultural needs: Full sun, dry to moderate
conditions

Dozens of varieties of scented geraniums with small leaves make suitable small-scale trees or shrubs for garden railroads, but the gray leaved, nutmeg-scented variety is one of the easiest to grow and most commonly found. The rounded, gray-green leaves give off a spicy scent when rubbed. Specialty growers may have newer selections, including variegated, crinkle-leaved, and dwarf forms. Remove the tiny, white flowers to keep a more realistic effect. Garden railroaders in areas with freezing temperatures should bring their plants indoors to a sunny window sill for over-wintering.

PAT HAYWARD PHOTO

Dwarf conifer

Latin name: *Juniperus conferta*

Common name: Shore juniper

Plant size: To 12" tall, spreading

USDA Hardiness Zones: 5-9

Cultural needs: Sun, moderate water

Junipers are often maligned because they're thought to be so ordinary, but shore junipers are wonderful for garden railroads because of their small-scale pointy needles, slow growth, and appealing texture. Several beautiful selections are available, including Blue Pacific, a spreader with blue-green needles; Emerald Sea, a bright green selection; and Silver Mist, a mounding type with silvery-blue needles. Relatively drought tolerant once established, they only need occasional pruning to keep tidy. All varieties are quite salt tolerant, as well—a bonus for gardeners who live in coastal areas.

PAT HAYWARD PHOTO

Tea tree

Shrubs & small trees



Compact oregano

Perennial



Spreading petunia

Annual



Shrubs & small trees

Latin name: *Leptospermum scoparium*

Common name: Tea tree

Plant size: to 6' tall, unpruned

USDA Hardiness Zones: 8-10

Cultural needs: Sun, well-drained soil

Looking for small-scale, blooming evergreen trees for your railroad? Gardeners in warmer climates may find tea trees the perfect solution. These bushy natives of Australia, New Zealand, and Tasmania have small leaves, wiry stems, and small-scale blossoms in spring through early summer. Many varieties are available, with flowers ranging from white to pink to rose-red. 'Aurora Nana Rosea' (pictured) has pink flowers with reddish new growth. 'Kiwi' is a popular miniature variety for bonsai. Tea trees need regular, light pruning (especially after blooming) to keep compact. The name "tea tree" comes from the bitter tea made from the leaves. Herbalists often use this plant for a variety of holistic purposes.

SUE PIPER PHOTO

Perennial

Latin name: *Origanum vulgare* 'Compacta'

Common name: Compact oregano

Growth rate: 6" tall x 12" wide

USDA Hardiness Zones: 5-9

Cultural needs: Sun to part shade,
well-drained soil

Herbs are often used in garden railroads for their small-scale leaves and subtle fragrance and charm. The oregano used for cooking is a vigorous spreader and too coarse for an outdoor railway, but the compact form is just about perfect for foundation shrubbery, hedges, and mass plantings. The lavender-pink blossoms appear in mid summer and can be left on to provide landscape color. For a more formal appearance, remove the flowers with grass shears or scissors. Oreganos grow best in warm, sunny areas but will tolerate half-day shade.

PAT HAYWARD PHOTO

Annual

Latin name: *Petunia multiflora* cultivars

Common name: Spreading petunia

Plant size: 6-10" tall by 2-3' wide, untrimmed

USDA Hardiness Zones: Annual

Cultural needs: Full sun, adaptable to most soils

When the pink pots of "wave" petunias first came out, petunias were suddenly back in style. These new, spreading forms with smaller blossoms are more free-flowering and even easier to care for. Color forms include blue, lilac, pink, purple, rose, and "silver." Flower size also varies slightly among the different colors, the blue and pink varieties having the smallest (around 2"). 'Tidal Wave', a white-flowered form has the largest blooms (3"). Most stay fairly short (under 8" tall). If it takes up too much space, trim the longest shoots back toward the center and the plant will stay full and compact. Look for the word "wave" or "spreading" in the name.

PAT HAYWARD PHOTO

White Pygmy dwarf cypress

Dwarf conifer



Miniature pussy-toes

Groundcover



Variegated sweet flag

Water plant



Dwarf conifer

Latin name: *Chamaecyparis pisifera*

'White Pygmy'

Common name: White Pygmy dwarf cypress

Growth rate: 12" x 14" wide

USDA Hardiness Zones: 5-8

Cultural needs: Sun to part shade, rich soil, moderate water

White Pygmy is one of the smallest dwarf conifers available, usually growing only to a foot tall at full maturity without pruning. The finely textured branches are narrow and almost threadlike. The beauty of this miniature conifer is really in the creamy-white tips that practically glow in shady garden spots. Naturally rounded, it makes a wonderful small-scale foundation planting or border plant. Grown in full sun, the tips tend to be a yellower hue. Other, similar dwarf conifers include Golden Sprite, Snowkist, and Golden Pin Cushion. As with most dwarf cypress, these plants all prefer rich, slightly acid soil and even moisture levels.

PAT HAYWARD PHOTO

Groundcover

Latin name: *Antennaria 'McClintock'*

Common name: Miniature pussy-toes

Plant size: 1" tall x 15" wide or more

USDA Hardiness Zones: 3-8

Cultural needs: Full sun, dry soil

Like living felines, not all "pussy-toes" are created equal. Though all pussy-toes plants have silvery-gray leaves growing low to the ground, the height and color of the flowers can vary greatly from species to species. The name comes from the soft, cushiony flower buds that grow in clusters atop stalks that rise above the flat foliage. Some flower stalks are tall (6" or more) but these can be removed to keep the plant in scale. 'McClintock' is the smallest of all the pussy-toes, with tiny gray leaves and fuzzy white flowers that are almost tucked into the foliage itself. They thrive in ballasted areas, but can easily be removed from the tracks and divided to make new plants.

PAT HAYWARD PHOTO

Water plant

Latin name: *Acorus gramineus 'Variegatus'*

Common name: Variegated sweet flag

Leaf color: Green-and-white striped

Plant size: 10"-12" tall, 14"-16" wide

USDA Hardiness Zones: 5-10

Cultural needs: Part sun, wet soil

Water features, such as ponds and streams, benefit from living plants to help aerate and clean the water for fish and other living organisms. Variegated sweet flag is a beautiful, grass-like plant that's easy to grow and loves wet feet. It can be planted in the shallows of a stream or kept in a pot and set into gravel on a ledge in a pool or container of water. Morning or afternoon sun will keep the slender, variegated leaves bright and colorful, but too much sun may cause them to burn. It may also be grown in a garden setting, but needs access to plenty of moisture.

PAT HAYWARD PHOTO

Water hyacinth

Water plant



Wire plant

Groundcover



Miniature daylily

Perennial



Water plant

Latin name: *Eichhornia crassipes*
Common name: Water hyacinth
Flower color: Lavender

Plant size: 6"–8" wide, 4"–6" tall
USDA Hardiness Zone: 10
Cultural needs: Freestanding water, full sun

Any garden railway pond should have a few water hyacinths floating lazily on the surface. Like most floating plants, water hyacinths are easy to care for. They multiply rapidly and help reduce algae growth by shading the pond's surface. During warm weather, 6"-tall spikes of showy lavender flowers rise above the swollen leaves. Long roots dangle below the leaves, absorbing nutrients directly from the water. Native to tropical South America, this tender plant should be brought indoors during cold weather, or simply be replaced each year. Water hyacinths prefer to live in still or very slow-moving water, but should be kept out of natural ponds or streams because they multiply so rapidly.

PAT HAYWARD PHOTO

Groundcover

Latin name: *Muehlenbeckia axillaris*
Common name: Wire plant
Leaf color: Glossy green

Plant size: 2"–4" tall x 12"–15"+ wide
USDA Hardiness Zones: 6–10
Cultural needs: Well-drained soil,
moderate moisture, full sun

This diminutive member of the bistort family, with its tiny leaves, miniscule flowers, and slender stems, can be a perfect groundcover for garden railroads. Wire plant is similar to baby tears, but on a slightly larger scale. When planted in sandy, well drained, and slightly acidic soil, this miniature groundcover can be quite vigorous, while heavier soils will slow its growth rate. Good drainage is a must. Rounded, glossy, green leaves, barely ¼" long, are attached to reddish, wiry stems. In warmer climates, wire plant will be somewhat evergreen, but in colder areas it will die back when frosts begin. It's also easy to propagate by division or stem cuttings.

PAT HAYWARD PHOTO

Perennial

Latin name: *Hemerocallis* 'Leprechaun's Lace'
Common name: Miniature daylily
Plant size: 10-20" tall x 12-24" wide

USDA Hardiness Zones: 3-10
Cultural needs: Full sun, well-drained soil

By definition, "miniature" daylilies are those with flowers less than 3" in diameter. But not all miniatures are short—the flowers may grow on dwarf, medium, or tall scapes (stems). Garden railroaders desiring the smallest-scale daylilies should look for the shortest varieties of miniatures; there are many that grow less than 15" tall. Best choices include Bitsy, Happy Returns, Lemon Lollipop, Leprechaun's Lace (pictured), Mini Stella, Penny's Worth, and Stella d'Oro, among others. Choose varieties that bloom early, mid, and late season for the longest show of color. The smallest varieties are often found through specialty mail order growers. Divide plants every five years for best bloom.

PAT HAYWARD PHOTO

Yellow pineleaf penstemon

Perennial



Mt. Atlas daisy

Groundcover



Dwarf box-leaved holly

Shrubs & small trees



Perennial

Latin name: *Penstemon pinifolius*
'Mersea Yellow'

Common name: Yellow pineleaf penstemon

Flower color: Yellow

Plant size: 12" tall by 24" wide

USDA Hardiness Zones: 4–9

Cultural needs: Sunny and dry

For garden railroaders who enjoy color, pineleaf penstemon produces an abundance of small, lemony yellow, tubular blossoms that last for more than a month through early summer. The tiny leaves are narrow, needle-like and ever-green, offering small-scale interest all year long. After blooming, the old flowers should be removed and the plant cut back to about 4" tall. Fresh, new leaves will quickly fill back in. As the branches become woody with age, the plant can be pruned up into interesting forms. This Southwestern-native plant prefers very hot, sunny, and dry conditions.

PAT HAYWARD PHOTO

Groundcover

Latin name: *Anacyclus pyrethrum*
var. depressus

Common name: Mt. Atlas daisy

Flower color: White

Plant size: 3" tall x 10" wide

USDA Hardiness Zones: 4–8

Cultural needs: Adaptable

The rich green, finely cut leaves of Mt. Atlas daisy can form an almost-ferry groundcover for the middle areas of a garden railroad. This very-low-growing groundcover prefers a sunny site and can tolerate low-water conditions if necessary. It can even withstand a bit of foot traffic now and then. In early summer, 1" wide x 3" tall white daisies will appear for several months—you can leave these on to enjoy, or cut them off for a more scale-appropriate look. The flowers fold up at dusk, revealing beautiful red stripes on the undersides of the petals. Mt. Atlas spreads fairly rapidly, but can be divided or kept in check by gently pulling up rooted sections.

PAT HAYWARD PHOTO

Shrubs & small trees

Latin name: *Ilex crenata* cultivars

Common name: Dwarf box-leaved holly

Leaf color: Dark green

Height: 1'–2' tall by 1'–2' wide, unpruned

USDA Hardiness Zones: 6–10

Cultural needs: Full sun, moderate water

Specialty growers of miniature and bonsai plants offer several varieties of dwarf box-leaved (or Japanese) holly. With leaves barely $\frac{1}{8}$ " wide and $\frac{3}{16}$ " long, these evergreen shrubs are perfect for trimming into miniature trees for the garden railroad. Slow growing and easy to care for, these tough little shrubs thrive in the heat of the South as well as in more temperate climates. For single-trunked trees, chose plants with a strong central stem and trim out excess leaves along the main stem. Beehive, Convexa, Dwarf Pagoda, Green Dragon, and Mariesii are all excellent varieties to choose from.

PAT HAYWARD PHOTO

Miniature Japanese maple

Shrubs & small trees



Dwarf Canadian hemlock

Dwarf conifer



Creeping phlox

Groundcover



Shrubs & small trees

Latin name: *Acer palmatum* 'Sharp's Pygmy'

Common name: Miniature Japanese maple

Growth rate: 1" per year

USDA Hardiness Zones: 5–9

Cultural needs: Sun, moderate water

Sharp's Pygmy is one of the tiniest Japanese maples available, with miniature leaves, twiggy branches, and extremely slow growth. These characteristics, perfect for garden railroaders, also make it an extremely desirable plant for bonsai. It's sometimes difficult to find, but always worth the effort. Left to grow naturally, Sharp's Pygmy will form a rounded shrub. For a more "realistic" look, remove the lower branches to create a single- or multi-trunked tree form. Inner branches can also be removed to expose the attractive bark and branching structure. In the fall, Sharp's Pygmy will often turn a deep red color. Several other miniature varieties may also be available.

PAT HAYWARD PHOTO

Dwarf conifer

Latin name: *Tsuga canadensis* 'Jervis'

Common name: Dwarf Canadian hemlock

Leaf color: Dark green

Growth rate: 1"–2" per year

USDA Hardiness Zones: 4–8

Cultural needs: Shade, moderate water, rich soil

Hemlocks are normally thought of as towering forest trees, but Jervis is a variety that has been selected for its extremely slow growth and compact habit. Growing at about an inch or two a year, it will take many years to outgrow the scale of a garden railroad. Regular moisture, rich soil, and a shaded spot will keep Jervis healthy. The tiny, evergreen needles provide rich color all year long and the congested, upright growth habit can add a nice accent to a winter or summer railroad. This picture shows the fresh, light green of new spring growth on a young plant. Older examples of Jervis can be selectively pruned to create a weathered, natural look.

PAT HAYWARD PHOTO

Groundcover

Latin name: *Phlox subulata*

Common name: Creeping phlox

Flower color: Pastels (blue, pink, white)

Plant size: 2"–6" tall x 12"–20" wide

USDA Hardiness Zones: 3–8

Cultural needs: Sun, moderate water

Many spring gardens would seem incomplete without the cheerful blossoms of creeping phlox. This low-growing, evergreen, perennial groundcover is easy to grow and fits well into the scale of a garden railroad. Try interplanting creeping phlox with spring bulbs, such as dwarf daffodils, to create a colorful spring display. The $\frac{3}{4}$ "-long leaves are narrow and needlelike, and stay tidy-looking even when the plant is out of bloom. Though an adaptable plant, it prefers at least six hours of sun, moderate water, and normal garden-soil conditions. Creeping phlox can be quite vigorous, so give it room to grow. For a smaller plant, try pruning it back after blooming or choose a more compact variety.

PAT HAYWARD PHOTO

Dwarf English boxwood

Shrubs & small trees



Sea pinks

Perennial



Dwarf Alberta spruce

Dwarf conifer



Shrubs & small trees

Latin name: *Buxus sempervirens* cultivars

Common name: Dwarf English boxwood

Plant size: 3'–5' tall x 3'–5' wide, unpruned

USDA Hardiness Zones: 4–9, depending on cultivar

Cultural needs: Part shade to full sun, moderate water, well-drained soil

Need a leafy evergreen tree with small leaves for your railroad? Several varieties of dwarf English boxwood exist, and all can be easily pruned to almost any shape. Rounded, bright-green leaves adorn the branches year round, providing excellent winter color in most areas. For best results, provide plenty of organic matter for acidity and drainage, and keep the plants evenly moist. Green Mountain and Green Velvet are both slow-growing forms that were bred to be particularly cold-hardy. Prune and shape your trees in late spring, just after the new leaves have appeared, but while the stems and leaves are still “soft.”

PAT HAYWARD PHOTO

Perennial

Latin name: *Arneria* spp.

Common name: Sea pinks

Flower color: Pink, white

USDA Hardiness Zones: 4–9

Cultural needs: Sun, adaptable

Sea pinks are one of the easiest perennial plants for garden railroaders to grow. They require little care and seem to tolerate a wide range of conditions. The tufts of tiny grasslike leaves are practically evergreen, and little pom-pon-like flowers appear in early summer for several weeks. The more common species, *A. maritima*, grows to about 8" tall in bloom and to about 10" wide at maturity. *A. rubrifolia* is a red-leaved version with pink flowers. Another species (*A. caespitosa*) is much tinier and even more in scale, barely 3" tall in bloom! Victor Reiter is a miniature version with pink blossoms, and Alba is a delightful white.

PAT HAYWARD PHOTO

Dwarf conifer

Latin name: *Picea glauca* 'Conica'

Common name: Dwarf Alberta spruce

Needle color: Bright green

Growth rate: 3"–4" per year

USDA Hardiness Zones: 3–9

Cultural needs: Sun to part shade, moderate water

This dwarf spruce, originally found in a native stand of white spruce in Alberta, Canada, is today possibly the most popular garden railroad “forest tree” in use. Evergreen, its tiny needles are less than ½" long. Dense, slow growth makes naturalistic pruning easy, even for the beginner, and the lower trunks can often be exposed to create a more natural, “treelike” appearance. Its name comes from its tight conical shape. Very cold-hardy, but gardeners in southern climates should protect these tiny trees from hot, drying conditions in the heat of summer. Western gardeners may need to protect them from winter sun when young.

JOEL HAYWARD PHOTO