

PSLTC Ballasted Track Standards

Thomas Garrison First Published: January 2, 2023 Last Updated: December 31, 2023

Ballasted Track

In railroad terms, "ballast" is the material (usually crushed rock) that is placed between, below, and around the ties (or sleepers) that hold the rails. It keeps the ties in place, distributes the weight of track and trains, and allows drainage. In LEGO terms, "ballasting" means dressing up the track to look less like kit track and more like prototypical train track. PSLTC members have a long history going back to 2004 of various approaches to ballasting track. A beginning step is to place the track on a roadbed of a color or texture that marks it as different from the ground.



Railroad ties are typically made of wood or concrete and about 7"x9"x96". Lego kit track ties are dark gray and two studs wide. We can achieve an immediate visual improvement by putting 1x4 and 1x1 tiles in realistic tie colors of brown, dark brown, or gray on every other stud to represent the tops of the ties (with the rest implicitly buried in ballast); the effect is improved with a shoulder of ballast material to either side of the ties.

PSLTC Track Ballasting Standards

PSLTC developed a standard for ballasting straight track in 2007 and in 2022 Derek Schin and John Sherman extended that to repeatable, reliable instructions for 9V switches and curves. The general assumption for PSLTC layouts is that mainline track will be 9V track ballasted to the standard or ballasted with a transition to the standard. It is encouraged that branch lines, sidings, yards, and independent loops be ballasted in some way and transition where connected to mainlines; several alternative ballast approaches have been developed. The PSLTC standards have enough flexibility that each member's ballast may have its own "flavor", so it is good practice to focus each member's track pieces into their own zones, but the seams between members' sections are rarely obvious to the public and different members' track pieces ballasted to the standard may be mixed as needed.



PSLTC ballasted track is on a baseplate of "ground color" (usually green), in standard track position (centered on a 16-stud baseplate), and raised one plate above baseplate height. Of course the point is that everything must line up horizontally and vertically, so in the case of a brickscaped section on a lower table there may not be any baseplate at all and other parts bring the track to the required height.



There is a shoulder of ballast material three studs out from the rail (two studs from the track piece) on each side, at a slope of one plate per stud. Going down the length of the track, every other stud there are RedBrown 1x4 and 1x1 tiles directly on the track piece (or on filler where the track piece does not have studs). The balance is filled with plates in ballast colors, which should be a random mix of about 40% dark gray/dark stone, 40% light gray/medium stone, and 20% of other ballast colors (black, very light (Scala) gray, tan, dark tan, white, etc.). The ballast material should not be filled completely uniformly (there should be random gaps in ballast between ties and on the shoulder, and material on the shoulder may spill out) and need not be only 1x1 plates (there can be



variations in texture using tiles, round elements, slopes, etc.).

Because each member's ballasted



track looks much like everyone else's, one of the 1x4 tiles should be labeled to identify that section's owner.



Page **4** of **5**

Orientation

When placing tiles every other stud, every 16-stud section of track will have one end with a tile and one end without. Due to the construction of the ballasted curves, assume that the end with the tiles will be to the left from the perspective of someone viewing the layout from outside. Care should be taken to avoid joining two sections of track with their tiled ends together, as the double tile will look strange.