

GETTING STARTED UKULELES



■ Ask an avid “ukist”—once you buy your first ukulele, it’s hard to stop. Collecting full-sized guitars can be a bank-breaking, but a ukulele habit is much easier on the wallet, and it won’t clutter up the home. These are fun-sized instruments with a big-hearted sound.

Several factors affect the tone and sound of a ukulele. For one, there are four different sizes to choose from: soprano, concert, tenor, and baritone. The soprano is the most popular, and affordable, and has the iconic tone most people associate with Hawaiian music. The concert ukulele, sometimes referred to as the alto, has a 15-inch fretboard—compared to the 13.5-inch fretboard on a soprano—so it is a better choice for bigger hands, or for those who want more range and a fuller, louder sound.

The tenor uke generally has greater volume than soprano and alto ukes because of a longer fretboard. It’s a popular instrument for soloists such as Jake Shimabukuro and James Hill. Lastly, there’s the baritone, which carries the deepest sound. Its common tuning is the same as the bottom four strings of a Spanish-tuned guitar: DGBE, instead of the traditional GCEA tuning of the other ukes.

The amount of space in the instrument’s hollow body, the type of wood used, the string style, and the shape all affect the sound of ukuleles. The traditional wood for Hawaiian ukuleles is a native hard wood called koa. It produces ukes with a rich, bright sound, although it’s an expensive wood. Mahogany has a sweet, mellow sound, and ukuleles are also made from spruce, cedar, rosewood, and maples, often in combination.

TRY THIS: THREE MUST-KNOW UKE CHORDS

These fingering charts offer three essential chords of the hundreds of fingering/chord combinations for a ukulele. They assume the instrument’s standard tuning of GCEA

C MAJOR

Use your ring finger on the third fret of the bottom string.



G MAJOR

Use your index finger on the second fret of the third string; ring finger on the third fret of the second string; and middle finger on the second fret of the bottom string.



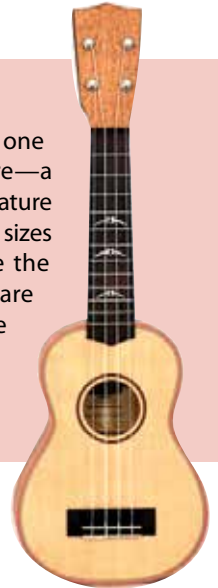
D MAJOR

Use your index finger on the second fret of the third string; ring finger on the second fret of the second string; and middle finger on the second fret of the bottom string.



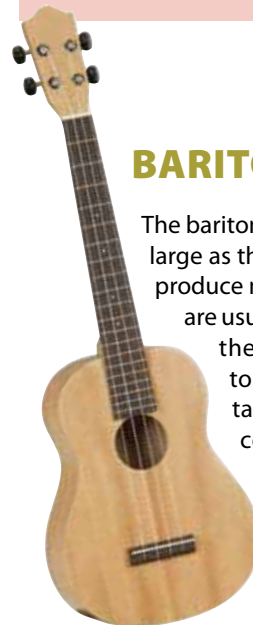
SOPRANO

A soprano ukulele like this one is what most people picture—a figure-eight shape like a miniature acoustic guitar. Slightly larger sizes with longer fretboards, like the tenor and concert sizes, share this shape. The classic ukulele sound is achieved using a low G tuning (G-C-E-A).



BARITONE

The baritone ukulele is half again as large as the soprano, allowing it to produce much deeper tones. They are usually tuned D-G-B-E. Since the tuning is more similar to that of a standard guitar, guitar players will feel comfortable fast on this variant.



NOVELTY SHAPES

The figure eight is by far the most popular but ukulele bodies come in a number of other shapes. Body shape is more than a cosmetic difference, it has a dramatic affect on sound. Mandolin-like pear-shaped instruments can get much louder, oval pineapples are strongest in the middle register, and bell shapes, like the one

