
Your first guitar

OK so you want to play guitar and you want to know which sort you should buy?

Electric or acoustic?

There are different schools of thought on this one. Most people start with an acoustic guitar and graduate to an electric guitar after gaining some experience and confidence.

Nylon strings are kinder on the tender fingers of the beginner and are often chosen for the first guitar.

It's worth bearing in mind that you can take an acoustic guitar just about anywhere and you don't need electricity to make it work.

On the other hand you can buy a new electric guitar and amplifier package such as a 'Squire Strat Pack' from your guitar store. The cost would amount to about a weeks pay for a lot of people.

You could always be kind to your parents and request a new instrument for Christmas or your birthday.

Ask a friend. It's likely you'll know somebody who has a guitar. Talk to people and gather opinions before you commit your hard earned cash.

Pitfalls-what not to buy

Look at the neck of the guitar from the side. The strings should be close to the neck and parallel to the neck all the way up. This is known as 'The Action'.

Remember if you need to press the strings down a long way to the neck it can cause pain and discomfort.

Many a would-be guitarist has been deterred by starting out on a difficult guitar.

Cheaper electric guitars often suffer from 'Bendy neck syndrome'. They may look cool but be sure to test the rigidity of the neck before you buy. Just strum across the open strings while holding the body with one hand. Then hold the top of the neck, known as the Headstock, with the other hand and see if it has any movement. If it has, the sound from the strings will distort and you may find the guitar wont stay in tune.

If you have a guitar store nearby why not pay them a visit. Explain that you are a beginner and they'll be able to offer advice on what's available in your price range.

Don't take the first guitar offered, take note of the price and model name and shop around.

Get a comparative price over the phone or check out the internet.

Remember, you get what you pay for and the cheapest won't be the best.

What else to buy?

You'll need a guitar strap. Just as you put on a seatbelt every time you travel in a car, strap on your guitar every time you play. This will secure the instrument to your body and the guitar won't slip around when you play.

Buy a couple of plectrums or guitar picks, to help you strum across the strings. They come in different thicknesses so get a couple to see which one you like best. They don't cost much. If you ask nicely, your guitar store should throw them into the deal, at no extra cost, when you buy your guitar.

An electronic tuner will save you hours of guesswork and frustration and you can carry it with you in your guitar case. So consider it right from the start. The cost isn't that great, maybe as much as a 'take out' for two people but you'll have it long after many meals have been digested. And your guitar will always be tuned to the correct pitch!



Example of an electronic guitar tuner.

Getting started

Now that you have your guitar, you're itching to play just like your favourite guitar hero. Well, you may need to learn some basics first.

Is your guitar in tune?

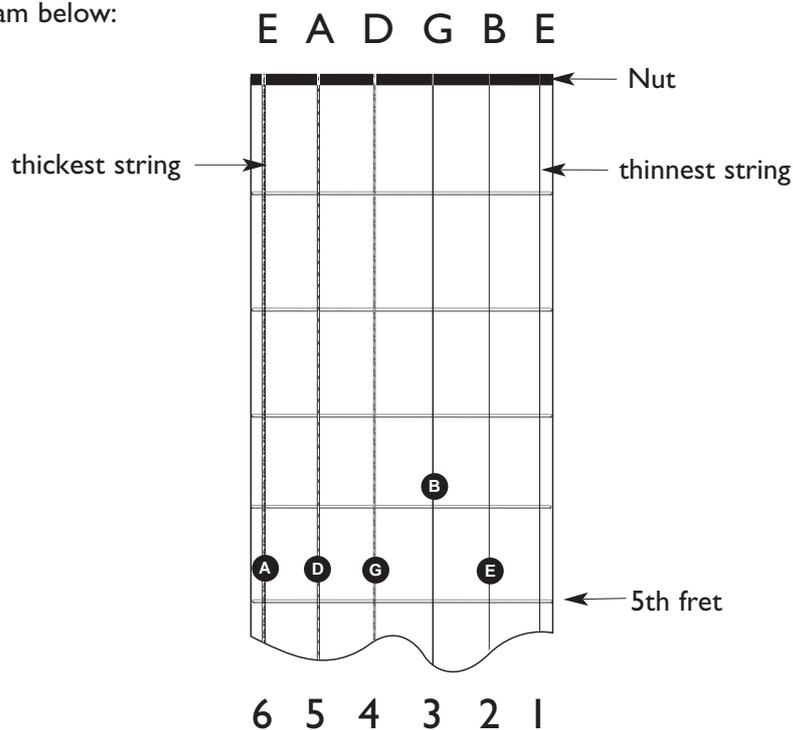
You can tune to the MP3 soundtrack, just click on the **PLAY MP3** buttons 1 through 6 to get the correct note for each string. Or you can use one of the other methods described below. Remember if your guitar is not tuned to the correct pitch you won't be able to play along with other people.

If you decide not to invest in an electronic tuner you need to tune manually to a piano, a pitch pipe or tuning fork.

Manual tuning

Play the thickest string, bass E, at the 5th fret. This note, A, should sound the same as the next string, A, played open and so on until you get to the, G, string. Play the, G, string on the 4th fret to get a, B, note. Then back up to the 5th fret to get the, E note (thinnest string).

See the diagram below:



Remember your bass E string should be tuned to the correct pitch. Check with your guitar store about methods of tuning. If you can't afford an electronic tuner, you may wish to buy a pitch pipe or tuning fork.