

Southampton Ukulele Jam Beginners/Improvers Group

Getting Started with the Ukulele

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Top Tip

It is suggested that finger nails on the left hand be kept short – this will make it much easier to hold down the strings and get a good sound.

Buying Your First Ukulele

If you are struggling with the huge range of different ukuleles available, have a look at [Buying a Ukulele](#), which will give you more information about the different types available.

The main thing to remember is to 'try before you buy'. Ask the salesperson to tune the ukulele for you then try different sizes of ukuleles to see which suits you best. However for the music that the group generally plays a soprano, concert or tenor ukulele is likely to be more suitable than a baritone as a first purchase.

The chord diagrams we show in our SUJ song sheets are for ukuleles tuned to standard tuning: GCEA, so it will make it easier if you have a soprano, concert or tenor ukulele tuned to GCEA.

Soprano ukuleles may not suit if you have large fingers. Prices range from £20 to £200+ (to really expensive!). If you aren't sure if the ukulele is the instrument for you then don't spend too much initially. Most ukulele players end up with a collection of ukuleles over time. We call it UAS or Ukulele Acquisition Syndrome. Ukeing does seem to be rather addictive.

How to tune the ukulele

There are different tunings for ukuleles but most of us play either tenor, concert or soprano ukuleles and the tuning we use at SUJ is **GCEA**; this means that the string closest to your face, also known as the 4th string, is tuned to the G note, the next string, the 3rd, is tuned to the C note, the next, or 2nd is tuned to E and the 1st string, the one closest to your knees, is tuned to A. There are other ways of tuning the ukulele and some of the different sized ukuleles, such as baritone and bass are tuned differently, but if you want to use the chord diagrams we put on our songs, you will need to have your ukulele tuned to GCEA.

You may hear mention of low G-strings and high G-strings. The 4th string can be higher or lower than the C string next to it. Usually it is higher, but some of us prefer a lower tone and buy a special low G-string and tune it an octave lower. You can still use the same chord shapes and the same tuner, whether your G-string is higher or lower. Don't bother trying to tune a normal high-G string an octave lower. It will sound dreadful.

Probably the easiest way to tune your ukulele is to use an electronic tuner. These are available quite cheaply either online or from a music shop. They make it really simple because you just keep turning the knob at the end of each string until your electronic tuner shows you have reached the right note. You tighten the string to make the note go higher and loosen it a little to make the note go lower. If you have just bought a brand new ukulele it's worth asking the shop assistant to tune it for you the first time, then you should only have to adjust the tuning slightly each time you play. You can also find written and video tuning instructions on the internet. New strings need very frequent tuning, but they do stabilise after a while.

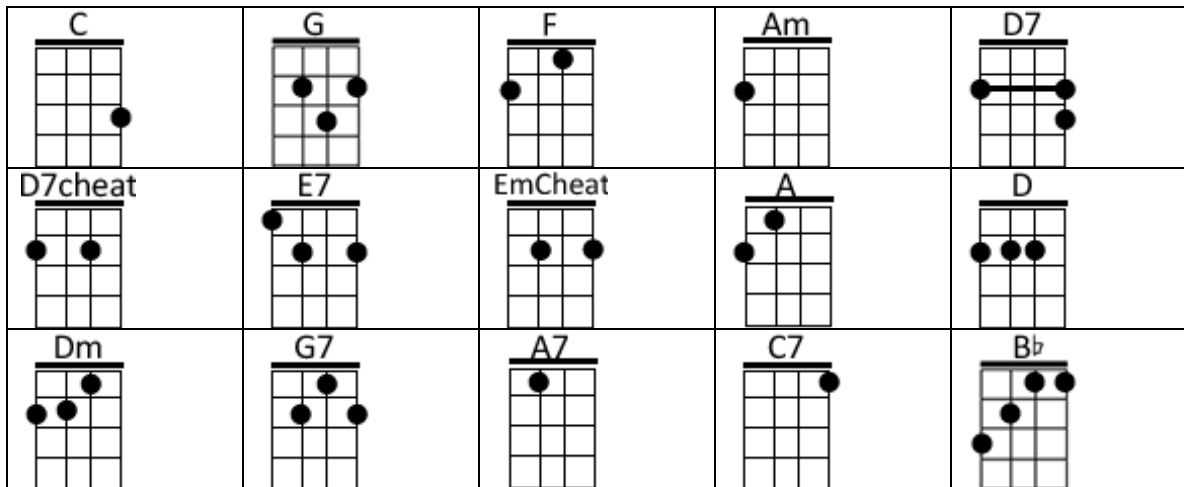
You will find that there are two types of electronic tuner. One type has a microphone and are hand held or sit on the table. The second type are specifically for stringed instruments and clip on to the end of the neck, picking up the sound by vibrations in the wood. The clip on type are strongly recommended because in the jam the microphone types also pick up everyone else's playing. The clip on types have been made specifically to avoid this problem. The Intelli Chromatic Tuner – 900 can be recommended as a known good reliable tuner.

If you don't have a tuner yet, you can get the notes from the Internet, e.g. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fk_Ot02AUbc

If you are only playing alone and don't need your ukulele to be tuned as accurately you may find this video useful:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-uWfTmAQf4>

Basic chord chart

These are the chords which come up most frequently in SUJ songs. If you learn these you will probably be able to strum along at least some of the time to most of our songs. You can pick up more chord shapes as you learn more songs.



Of course, there are many, many more chords. See our [Chord Chart](#) for more info.

Strumming styles

The beginners/improvers have been learning a few basic strums, including two useful ones which can be used for many of the SUJ songs, and which we refer to as 'Strawberry' and 'Tie Me Kangaroo'. These are words with approximately the same rhythm as the strums, but see [Basic Strums](#) for more details.

You will see some ukulele players strumming with their fingers and others using a plectrum. In the beginners/improvers group we prefer finger strumming because playing with a plectrum sounds much louder (and you might not want to stand out from the crowd in the early stages). Ukulele plectrums are usually made from felt and come in

several styles and thickness. If you do want to try some out at home, you can go to <http://ukulele-plectrums.co.uk> for a selection.

A selection of our easier songs to get started with

Bye Bye Love (G, D7, C)
Da Doo Ron Ron (C, F, G7)
Folsom Prison Blues (G, G7, C, D7)
I Wanna Be Like You
King of the Road (C, F, G7)
Only You (C, G, Am, F)
Ring of Fire (C, G, D)
Rock Around the Clock (G, G7, C, D7)
Sloop John B (G, C, D, Am)
The Lion Sleeps Tonight , (C, F, Bflat Note: Bflat is a bit trickier, so don't worry if it takes a bit longer to master. It does come up in a lot of songs, so it will be worth learning)

List of useful websites

SUJ Sites

You may well have already come across the main Southampton Ukulele Jam website at <http://southamptonukulelejam.co.uk>. It has an introduction to the group, a calendar showing when and where we are meeting, as well as most of the songs we play. It also has a link to the group's second site, which is a Yahoo group.

It is a good idea to sign up to the Yahoo group as it is a way of keeping in touch with everyone else in the group. You can choose to receive regular updates from the site, or just go there when you want to read the latest news. Click on the link below, then click on 'Join this Group' under our logo

<http://groups.yahoo.com/search?query=southampton+ukulele+jam&sort=relevance>

You can then view the posts and song files, suggest songs, exchange info and ideas and generally chit chat.

If you are into Facebook, there is also an SUJ Facebook site.

Other Useful Sites

There is a list of useful sites on the main SUJ website.

You can also find a listing of the top 50 ukulele websites at <http://www.boatpaddleukuleles.com/top50/>

We think that the most useful website by far is YouTube: www.youtube.com. There are so many songs and tutorials on YouTube that you could probably learn to play the ukulele just from them if you wanted to.

Ukulele Hunt <http://ukulelehunt.com/> is another rich source of all things relating to the ukulele. The pages are updated frequently, include videos, tutorials, songs, tips, etc.

Ezfolk <http://www.ezfolk.com/uke/> has some excellent ukulele tutorials.

If you are trying to find the shape for an unfamiliar chord, you will probably find more inversions (different ways of playing the same chord) than you could ever wish for at: <http://chordlist.brian-amberg.de/en/ukulele/standard/> Brian's huge chordlist collection

There are also a host of other sites where you can download songs.

There is a useful songlist at <http://www.scorpex.net/uke.htm> with reliable versions of songs

Taunton Ukulele Strummers <http://www.tusc.co.uk/> have several very good songbooks to download. You may hear some of the songs at the jam.

www.chordie.com has a huge collection of songs. It allows you to display chord diagrams for the ukulele and to transpose the key (make the song higher or lower to sing) by adjusting the settings on the right of the webpage. Some may not always agree with the chords given, though.

Happy Ukeing - We hope to see you at Beginners/Improvers or at the jam soon!