

ACOUSTIC AND ACOUSTIC/ELECTRIC GUITAR BUYER'S GUIDE & FAQs

What are things to consider when buying an acoustic or acoustic/electric guitar?

Factors to consider include, but aren't limited to:

- Tonewood
- Body Style
- Benefits of Acoustic-Electric
- Size

Tonewood

What wood should I choose?

Choosing the wood that the body of your guitar is constructed of mostly affects sound and appearance. Common examples of tonewoods are maple, alder, and mahogany. Denser woods create warmer, thicker tones while lightweight woods produce brighter tones. When deciding on the tonewood of your guitar, sound is generally considered the most important factor to take into account.

The other factor most affected by the body wood is the appearance you're looking for. Though more exotic and expensive woods may not always improve the sound of the guitar, they can create a unique and beautiful finish. It's important to note the finish of the guitar, because some paint will cover up the natural look of the wood. Generally, "natural" and "transparent" finishes allow the grain of the wood to show through the clear-coat or paint. If a guitar's description doesn't include "transparent" before the name of the color (e.g. Transparent Red), then no wood grain will be visible through the paint.

Body Style

What do Dreadnought, Parlor, and other body styles refer to?

Acoustic and Acoustic/Electric guitars are divided into different classes that refer to the size of the body. Here we'll clarify what each of those titles refers to:

-Dreadnought:

A very popular acoustic guitar body shape, the dreadnought is rather large, and typically emphasizes the bass frequencies of the instrument. The dreadnought shape was introduced by Martin Guitars and is named after the British battleship H.M.S. Dreadnought.

-Concert/Full:

Concert size, more commonly referred to as full size, is considered the standard size for acoustics, with a slightly smaller body size than a Dreadnought. They're probably the most popular size for the average adult guitarist.

-Parlor/Parlour:

Originating in the 19th century, Parlor guitars have a smaller body size than concert/full size acoustics. Their popularity arose from affordability and portability, which may have contributed to their common use by folk and blues musicians.

-Classical:

Though "classical" doesn't necessarily refer to the size of an acoustic, it is significantly different than a non-classical or steel-string acoustic. Classical acoustic guitars have nylon strings and wider fretboards, and are generally played with a finger-picking style instead of using a guitar pick. They have a warmer, less-bright sound that's commonly heard in Latin-style guitar and classical guitar recordings. First-time buyers should also consider that they can also be more challenging to restring.

Benefits of Acoustic/Electric

If I can hear an acoustic without an amp, why would I buy an acoustic/electric guitar?

The biggest benefit of an acoustic/electric is the ability to amplify the volume of a guitar while maintaining the brightness and shimmering overtones associated with acoustic guitars, without having to stand or sit near complex microphone setups. Most acoustic/electrics have a piezo-electric pickup that magnifies the vibrations in the guitar's wood and turns them into electric current that gets amplified, and then turned into sound by a speaker.

Another benefit is the ability to plug directly into a recording device or computer without having to buy expensive microphones. You can also record in relatively high-ambient noise environments without greatly compromising the quality of the guitar's sound.

The last and most obvious advantage to having an acoustic/electric is that you don't have to carry an amp with you to be able to hear your guitar. You always have the option of just picking it up and playing, regardless of whether or not there's an electrical outlet nearby.

Size

What do the measurements mean and what size is right for me?

There are many different sizes of guitars, commonly referenced by fraction (e.g. ½ size) or measurement (e.g. 38"). Most adults will want a full size guitar for maximum comfort and playability. A full-size guitar is 41" in length, and is referred to in item descriptions as "Full" or "Full Size." While less common, 7/8 size or 38" guitars are sometimes favorable for their compact size and shorter neck. There are also more playable for guitarists with petite builds, small hands, or children.

Smaller guitars like ½ size and 25” are recommended for children, so that they can more easily learn the basics of technique without getting frustrated by a body they can’t get their arm around or a neck they can’t grasp.

The bottom line in choosing the guitar’s size is selecting what’s going to be most comfortable for the player.

Care and Maintenance

I just bought the perfect guitar. Now how do I take care of it?

Taking proper care of your guitar is the best way to ensure years of enjoyment and playability. Regularly maintaining a few basic aspects of your guitar will make long-term maintenance easier. Here are a few common things you can do to keep your guitar looking and playing like new:

-Change the strings

Over time, your strings will accumulate oils from your fingers that will cause them to corrode and lose brilliance. Corroded and rusty strings can damage the neck of your guitar, so it’s important to put new strings on from time to time. The frequency in which you’ll need to change strings usually correlates to how often you play your guitar. A quick way to determine if you need to change strings is to pinch a string between your thumb and finger, and slide your hand down the neck. If it feels rough or your fingers turn black or rust-colored, it’s probably time for new strings. You can extend the life of a set of strings by cleaning them regularly.

Please refer to the FAQ entitled “Changing Strings” for detailed steps regarding how to change the strings on your guitar.

-Keep it clean

Using a soft cloth and some guitar polish can help maintain and restore the finish on a guitar’s body and neck. Clean the strings by sliding a cloth with some cleaner down the length of each string, gently pulling each string away from the neck. (Not that this may cause the guitar to be slightly out of tune after cleaning). Changing strings gives you an opportunity to clean areas that are difficult to access while strings are on the guitar. Go over each fret and the space between frets with a cloth before re-stringing. Not only will it look better, it will play better.

Avoid using harsh chemicals or cleaners with high alcohol content as it may damage the wood or finish. Also use care not to get liquid cleaner directly in any of the electronic components, including the pickups.

-Store it properly

Ideally, the guitar would be put back into a protective case when not in use. Some people find that they play their guitar more when it’s readily available on a wall hanger or stand. This is acceptable, just remember to wipe it down regularly to get the dust off. Leaning a guitar against the wall is not recommended; it will eventually cause the neck to warp and negatively affect playability.

