

Dusty Strings

Deciding Which Dusty Strings Hammered Dulcimer to Choose

There are many considerations when trying to decide which model of Dusty Strings hammered dulcimer will work best for you: size, materials, sound, range, tuning pattern, diatonic or chromatic, instructional material, types of music, and price. Here is some practical information we hope will prove useful.

Size

The Prelude, Apprentice, and D10 are the smallest and lightest instruments. The Overture, D45, PD30, PD40, and D300 are only slightly larger and have more bass notes and/or more chromatic range. The D500 and D550 are larger, and the D600 and D650 are the biggest dulcimers we make.

Materials and Sound

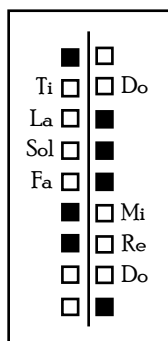
The Prelude, Apprentice, Overture, and PD30 have laminated birch soundboards and backs and produce a pleasant, bright tone. The D10, D45, PD40, D300, D500, D550, D600, and D650 have solid sapele backs and soundboards. Solid wood gives a richer, deeper tone, and the sound develops more over time. The laminated instruments have a slightly brighter tone and don't develop as much. Many people find the solid wood more visually attractive. Our "Chromatic Series" are the D300, D500, D550, D600, and D650. These instruments have a more complex bracing system and have an even deeper, more clear, and sophisticated sound.

Range

The Prelude, Apprentice, and D10 have 2½ octaves. The Overture, D45, D300, and D500 have just over three octaves, with the extra half octave in the bass. Greater range means more versatility, especially for arranging chordal accompaniments. The D550 has 3½ octaves, the D600 four, and the D650 4½. Some people enjoy the 2½ octave instruments forever, but most move up to a three octave instrument within a few years. For the piano dulcimers, the PD30 has 2½ octaves and the PD40 has 3½, also with the extra octave in the bass. See "Tuning" below about how the piano dulcimers differ from the traditional hammered dulcimers.

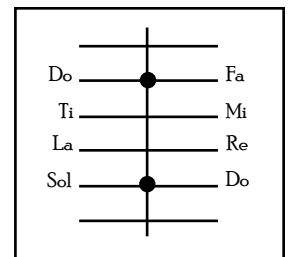
Tuning and Chromaticism

The PD40 and PD30 are called "piano dulcimers" and have a linear tuning scheme that mimics the black and white note arrangement of the piano. One of the biggest advantages is that they are fully chromatic instruments that are somewhat smaller in size and less expensive than the other chromatic instruments. The other models use the traditional tuning scheme, which is pattern-based rather than linear like a piano. While the Prelude, Apprentice, Overture, D10,



*Piano Dulcimer
Tuning Scheme*

and D45 are not fully chromatic, they can play easily in most popular keys. They are also not really diatonic, since they have several accidentals in each of the commonly used keys of D, G, C, A, and F. Our Chromatic Series instruments are all fully chromatic over the entire range of the dulcimer (with the exception of the lowest half octave on the D600 and D650, which lacks two chromatic notes).



*Standard Dulcimer
Tuning Scheme*

Instructional Materials and Learning

There are many instructional materials available for the traditional tuning, and so far just one fairly basic book for the piano dulcimer. While both types of dulcimer are very straightforward for learning hammering technique, the piano dulcimer attracts people with a strong piano background who want to play chromatically and can be self-sufficient in working out their own arrangements. The traditionally tuned dulcimer has a vast amount of teaching resources and repertoire available. Most teachers you will find teach the traditional tuning.

Type of Music

For playing folk tunes, most hymns, lots of pop music, and some classical material, the traditional tuning works great. For some ethnic music, most classical music, and jazz it is really nice to have a fully chromatic instrument, either a piano dulcimer or one of the Chromatic Series.

Price

Factors that influence the price are laminated soundboards and backs vs. solid wood, physical size and range, complexity of bracing, and cosmetic details such as handcarved soundhole inserts (Chromatic Series) and soundboard binding. In general, it is just as easy to learn to play a D650 as it is a Prelude. We recommend investing in as much range as your budget will allow.

Call Us

Please feel free to give us a call with any questions about the different models of dulcimers. If we know what your musical interests and experience are we can help you choose the dulcimer that suits your needs.

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