

How To Make A Cigar Box Guitar

C. B. Gitty Crafter Supply and CigarBoxGuitar.com present...

How to Build a Cigar Box Guitar

by Ben Baker



YOU CAN BUILD YOUR OWN CIGAR BOX GUITAR!

Thousands of people around the world have already discovered that you don't need any special training to make your own awesome, playable guitar. Using just simple tools and materials you either already have or can easily find, you can be strumming in no time.

This guide will walk you through building a basic "stick on box" 3-string cigar box guitar meant for playing with a slide. We worked hard to keep these plans nice and easy to follow, so that you can get your first cigar box guitar built with a minimum of effort and frustration.

*Before getting too far in, did you know that C. B. Gitty offers a complete, ready to assemble cigar box guitar kit, which these instructions are based on? We call it our ["Pure & Simple Cigar Box Guitar Kit"](#) and it was designed to be the **EASIEST** kit to build available anywhere. If you want a touch of "Do-it-Yourself" but are daunted by these instructions, give the Pure & Simple kit a try - find it at www.CBGitty.com!*



We'll start with listing the parts and tools you'll need (with some ideas on where you can find them), and then get into the how-to.

PARTS YOU'LL NEED

1. A Cigar Box
2. A 3-foot long 1x2" piece of hardwood lumber
3. Three (3) Guitar Tuners (Machine Heads)
4. A bolt, threaded rod or piece of wooden dowel for the nut
5. Another bolt, threaded rod or piece of wooden dowel for the bridge
6. Three (3) Guitar Strings

How to make a cigar box guitar is a rewarding project that combines creativity, woodworking skills, and musical expression. Cigar box guitars have a rich history, originating in the 19th century as instruments made from discarded materials. They are often associated with folk and blues music, and their simple yet effective design allows for a variety of tunings and playing styles. In this article, we will guide you through the process of making your very own cigar box guitar, covering everything from materials and tools to assembly and decoration.

Materials Needed

To create your cigar box guitar, you'll need to gather a variety of materials. Here's a comprehensive list:

- **Cigar Box:** This will serve as the body of your guitar. Choose a wooden box that is sturdy and has a nice finish.
- **Wood for the Neck:** You can use a piece of hardwood such as maple, oak, or mahogany. The neck should be about 36-40 inches long.
- **Fret Wire:** For adding frets to the neck.
- **Tuning Pegs:** These can be purchased at a music store or online. You'll need at least three or four, depending on how many strings you want.
- **Strings:** Choose guitar strings suitable for the tuning you prefer. You can use regular guitar strings or specialized cigar box guitar strings.
- **Bridge:** This can be made from wood, bone, or metal. It elevates the strings over the body of the guitar.
- **Nut:** The nut is typically made from plastic, bone, or wood and holds the strings in place at the end of the neck.
- **Wood Glue:** For securing parts together.
- **Screws:** To attach the neck to the body.
- **Sandpaper:** For smoothing the wood surfaces.
- **Finish:** You may want a lacquer, shellac, or oil to protect and enhance the appearance of your guitar.

Tools Required

Before you start, ensure you have access to the following tools:

1. **Saw:** A handsaw or jigsaw will work for cutting the neck and other wood pieces.
2. **Drill:** To create holes for the tuning pegs and to attach the neck.
3. **Files:** For shaping the nut and bridge.
4. **Ruler and Measuring Tape:** To measure dimensions accurately.
5. **Clamps:** To hold pieces together while the glue dries.
6. **Pencil:** For marking measurements on wood.
7. **Screwdriver:** For attaching screws.

Steps to Make a Cigar Box Guitar

Now that you have your materials and tools ready, it's time to start building your cigar box guitar. Follow these steps:

Step 1: Prepare the Cigar Box

- **Choose a Box:** Select a cigar box that suits your style. Ensure it is in good condition, with no cracks or major damage.

- Clean the Box: Remove any labels or stickers and clean it thoroughly. You want a smooth surface for your guitar.

Step 2: Build the Neck

- Cut the Neck: Measure and cut your hardwood to a length of approximately 36-40 inches. The width should be around 2-3 inches.
- Shape the Neck: Use a saw and files to shape the neck, making it comfortable to hold. You can taper it towards the headstock for a more ergonomic design.
- Mark the Fret Positions: Use a ruler to mark where the frets will go. A common fret layout for a three-string guitar includes 3, 5, 7, 9, 12, and 15 frets.

Step 3: Attach the Fret Wire

- Cut Fret Wire: Cut pieces of fret wire to fit the marked positions on the neck.
- Install the Frets: Use a hammer and a small block of wood to gently tap the fret wire into place. Ensure they are snug and level with the neck.

Step 4: Create and Attach the Nut and Bridge

- Cut the Nut: The nut should be about 1/8 inch thick and fit snugly at the top of the neck. Use wood or bone for a traditional sound.
- Create the Bridge: The bridge can be made from wood or metal. It should elevate the strings about 1/4 inch above the box.
- Secure Both Parts: Use wood glue to attach the nut at the top of the neck and the bridge on the cigar box where the strings will rest.

Step 5: Drill Holes for Tuning Pegs

- Mark the Peg Positions: Determine where you want to place the tuning pegs at the headstock. Typically, they are spaced evenly.
- Drill Holes: Use a drill to create holes for the tuning pegs. Ensure they are the correct size for the pegs you have chosen.

Step 6: Assemble the Guitar

- Attach the Neck to the Box: Line up the neck with the cigar box and secure it using wood screws. Make sure it is firmly attached and aligned correctly.
- Check for Stability: Ensure that the neck is stable and does not wobble. If needed, reinforce with additional screws or wood glue.

Step 7: String the Guitar

- String Installation: Attach the strings to the bridge and thread them through the nut. Then, attach them to the tuning pegs.
- Tune the Guitar: Use an electronic tuner or pitch pipe to bring your strings to the correct pitch.

Step 8: Finishing Touches

- Sand and Smooth: Use sandpaper to smooth any rough edges on the neck and box. This will make it comfortable to play.
- Apply Finish: Choose a finish that enhances the wood's appearance and protects it. Apply it evenly and let it dry thoroughly.
- Decorate: Get creative! You can paint, stencil, or add stickers to personalize your cigar box guitar.

Tuning Options and Playing Techniques

Once your cigar box guitar is assembled and finished, it's time to explore different tunings and playing techniques.

Tuning Options

- Standard Tuning: The most common tuning for a three-string cigar box guitar is G-D-G.
- Open Tunings: Experiment with open tunings like G-B-D or D-A-D for bluesy sounds.
- Custom Tunings: Feel free to create your own tunings based on your preferences and playing style.

Playing Techniques

1. Slide Playing: Use a slide to play smooth, gliding notes across the strings.
2. Fingerpicking: Use your fingers to pluck strings for a more melodic sound.
3. Strumming: Use a pick or your fingers to strum chords for rhythm playing.

Conclusion

Making a cigar box guitar is an enjoyable and fulfilling project that can lead to the creation of a unique musical instrument. With a few materials, basic tools, and some woodworking skills, you can craft a guitar that not only sounds great but also showcases your creativity. Whether you are a beginner or an experienced musician, this DIY project can provide you with a deeper appreciation for music and craftsmanship. So gather your materials, follow the steps outlined above, and enjoy the journey of building and playing your very own cigar box guitar!

Frequently Asked Questions

What materials do I need to make a cigar box guitar?

You will need a cigar box, a guitar neck (which can be made from wood), guitar strings, frets, a bridge, and tuning pegs. Optional materials include paint, wood glue, and decorative elements.

How do I choose the right cigar box for my guitar?

Look for a cigar box that is sturdy and has a good resonance. The size and shape can affect the sound, so consider whether you want a larger box for a deeper tone or a smaller box for a higher pitch.

Can I use a pre-made guitar neck or do I have to make one?

You can use a pre-made guitar neck for convenience, but making your own allows for customization and a personal touch. If making one, ensure it is properly shaped and fitted to the cigar box.

What is the best way to attach the neck to the cigar box?

You can attach the neck by cutting a slot in the cigar box to fit the neck snugly, then securing it with wood glue and screws for added strength. Make sure to align it properly for accurate string placement.

How do I string my cigar box guitar?

Attach the strings to the bridge and pull them up to the tuning pegs on the neck. Make sure to leave

enough slack for tuning, then wind the strings tightly around each peg and tune them to your desired pitch.

What tuning should I use for a cigar box guitar?

Common tunings for cigar box guitars include open G (GDGBD) or open D (DADFAD). You can experiment with different tunings to find the sound that suits your style.

Can I add electronics to my cigar box guitar?

Yes, you can add an electric pickup to amplify the sound. This can involve installing a piezo pickup under the bridge or using magnetic pickups similar to those found on traditional electric guitars.

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Discover how to make a cigar box guitar with our step-by-step guide! Unleash your creativity and craft a unique instrument today. Learn more!

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