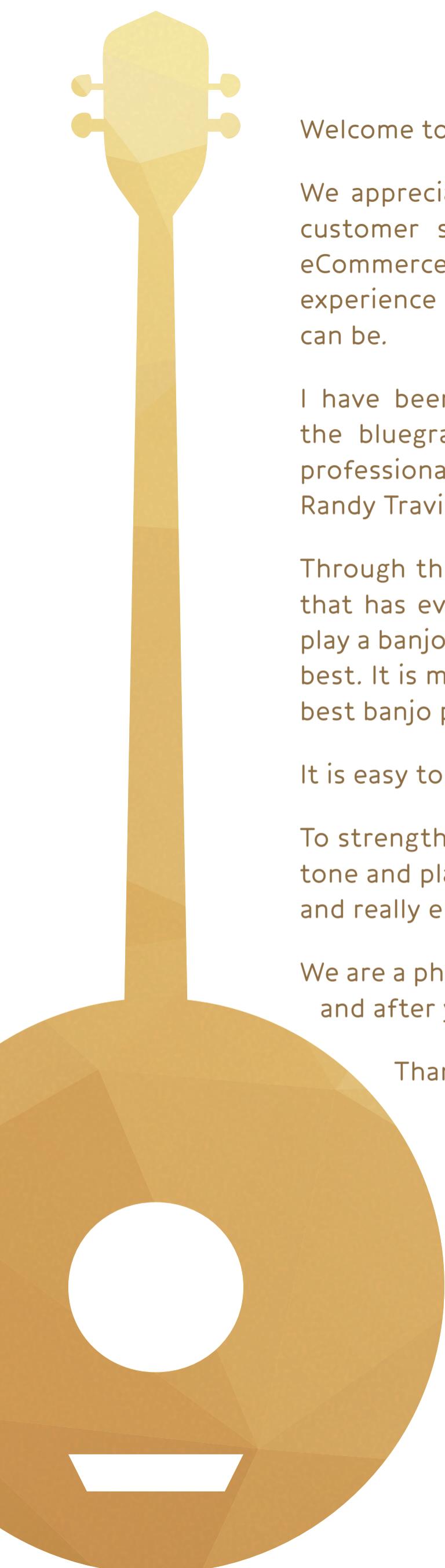


since 2003  
**BANJO**  
.com

# Beginner's Buyer's Guide





Welcome to Banjo.com.

We appreciate your trust and strive to provide the best quality customer service in all things related to banjos. We are an eCommerce store with a personal passion to make sure your experience in purchasing and playing your new banjo is the best it can be.

I have been playing banjo since the age of 6. Starting out on the bluegrass festival circuit, and then touring and recording professionally with main stream Country and Americana artists Randy Travis, Zac Brown Band and many others.

Through the years I have owned just about every brand of banjo that has ever been made. I know exactly what it's like to try to play a banjo that's not very good, and also what it's like to play the best. It is my personal goal to guide each customer to getting the best banjo possible that also fits their budget.

It is easy to be deceived with the appearance of some banjos.

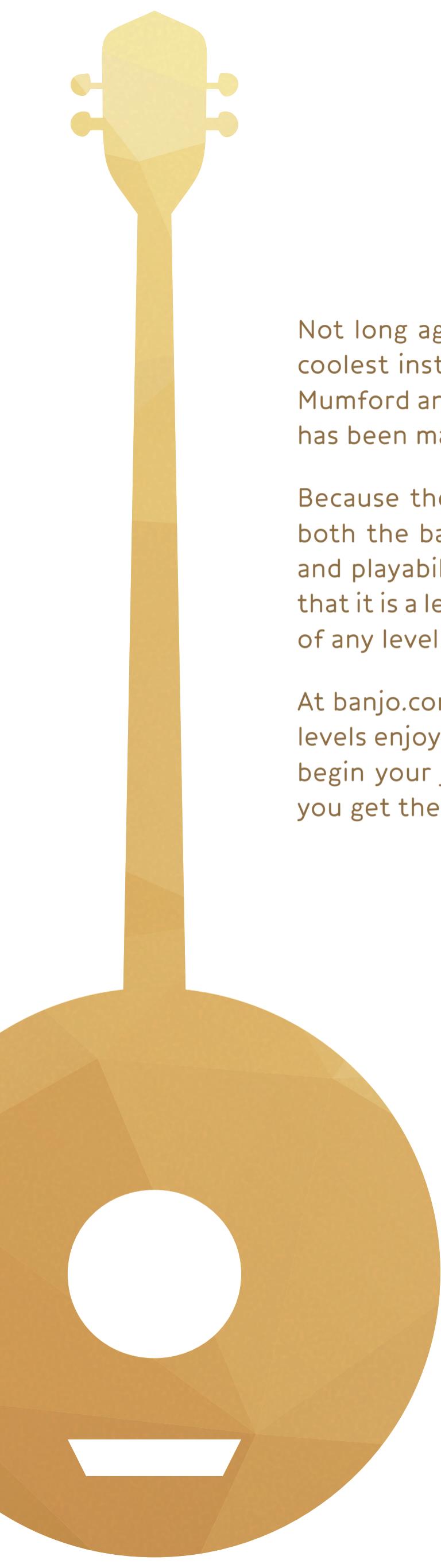
To strengthen your longevity, it is very important to focus on the tone and playability. This will ensure that you will sound your best and really enjoy your new banjo.

We are a phone call away to answer any questions you have before and after your purchase.

Thanks,

**Barry Waldrep**

President/Owner  
Banjo.com

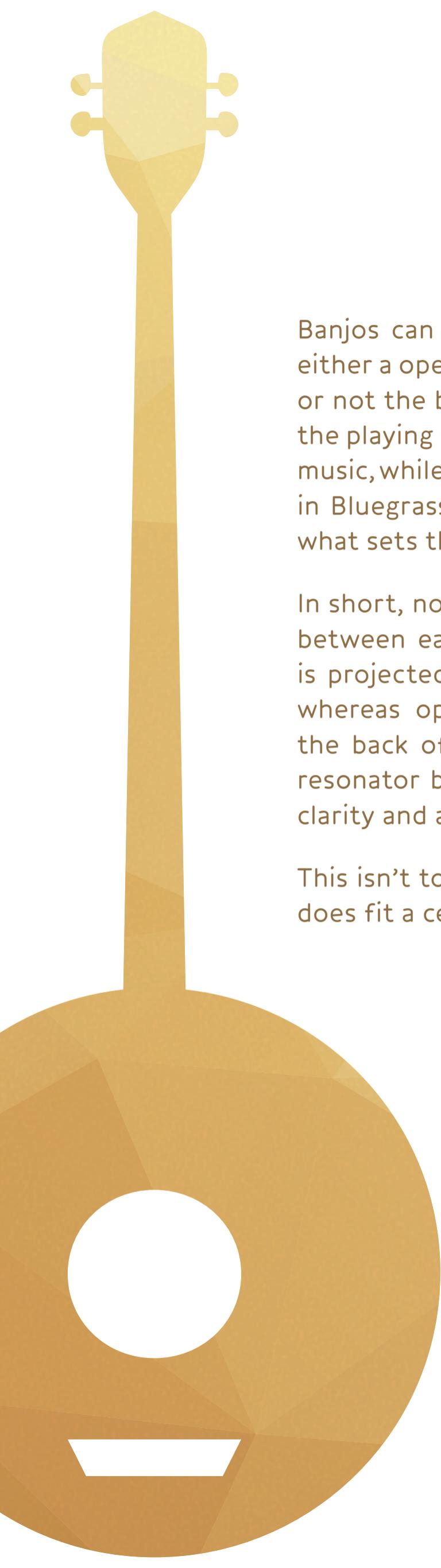


# Banjo.com's Beginner's Buyer's Guide

Not long ago everybody wanted to play a guitar since it was the coolest instrument at the time. But thanks to popular artists like Mumford and Sons, Taylor Swift, and the Avett Brothers, the banjo has been making a comeback with players both young and old.

Because they're both similar, many beginners might assume that both the banjo and the guitar are identical in their construction and playability. but spending any time playing the banjo will show that it is a league of its own, and an exciting challenge for musicians of any level.

At banjo.com we're dedicated to helping banjo students of all skill levels enjoy playing and learning this great instrument. To help you begin your journey, we've written this to show how we can help you get the right banjo for you.



# Resonator Banjos vs. Openback Banjos

Banjos can first be categorized two ways; banjos are built with either a open back, or a resonator that encloses the back. Whether or not the banjo has an open or closed back generally determines the playing style. Openback banjos are typically played in Folk style music, while closed back or resonator banjos are predominantly used in Bluegrass music. Aside from the obvious external differences, what sets these two banjos apart from each other?

In short, not much, if at all. In fact, the only significant difference between each banjo is the tone: with the resonator, the sound is projected forwards out the instrument instead of backwards, whereas openback banjos send the sound out the opening in the back of their pot assemblies. This forward projection gives resonator banjos a full, bright and warm sound that speaks with clarity and authority.

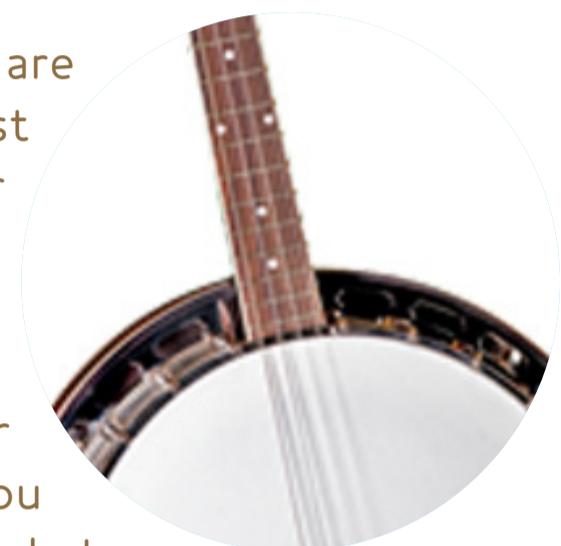
This isn't to say that one is better than the other, but each banjo does fit a certain style better than the other.

# Different Types of Banjos

Once you have determined what style of music you would like to play, that is, you know if you are shopping for an openback or a closed back, there are a few different types of banjos within each major category.

## Five string banjos

The most common banjos you'll find are 5-strings, and have been used in almost every recording and performance ever made. 5-string banjos are used mainly for more traditional styles and genres like bluegrass, and old time folk music, and are built with either an open back or a resonator, depending on what style you want to play. These types of music is what has traditionally been played, but now artists are playing banjo in many different genres, and creating their own style.



## Four string banjos

Although bass banjos do exist, they are not to be confused with the 4 string banjos in this guide. Instead, many of these banjos are typically smaller and played more like ukuleles; in fact, some four-strings are called "Ukulele banjos" because of this. But they still sound like banjos.

Other four-string banjos include the tenor and plectrum banjos. Both share a bright and prominent tone which makes them great for playing Dixieland Jazz, cutting the wall of the big band's sound to stand out on top. The tenor banjo, however, is shorter in length than





the plectrum banjo; the plectrum banjo plays just like a standard 5-string.

## Six string banjos

For all you guitarists looking to make the switch to the banjo, we recommend trying six-string banjos for an easier switch. From the peghead down to the neck, they're built almost exactly like a guitar, except for the pot assembly, of course.

Like guitars, 6-string banjos come built with either steel strings or nylon strings, and even come built in acoustic and electric versions, too!



## Electric banjos

Like guitars and other string instruments, banjos come built in either acoustic or electric versions, whether they're built with five or six strings. Like guitars, electric banjos come built with pickups that detect the strings' vibrations, and then transmit them to an amplifier to give these banjos a bigger sound. But as with other electric instruments, they're tough to hear when played unplugged.





# Anatomy of the Banjo

It's helpful for new players understand the parts of the banjo and how it's built. To give you a better idea of what goes into a banjo we're going to break it down part-by-part:

- **Neck:** The neck is gives it its structure and also plays a big part in the tone. Most necks can also be adjusted using a built-in truss rod which will adjust the curve of the neck, which needs to be properly adjusted by a skilled luthier.
- **Fretboard:** The fretboard lies on the front face of the neck. It contains bars on the neck called frets, in which players press down on the string between them to produce a note.
- **Peghead:** The peghead houses four of the the banjo's tuning pegs (the fifth is on the neck), as well as access to the truss rod. Like the neck, the peghead helps keep the instrument stable and in tune.
- **Bridge:** The bridge is integral to producing the banjo's sound, since it holds the strings in place on the lower end. It also helps transmit the string's vibrations through the head to give it sound.

The bridge is not glued down to the head and is free to be moved for proper intonation, it is critical that the bridge be in the correct position for the banjo to be in tune when it is played all the way up the neck. The 12 fret of the banjo is the half way point between the nut and the bridge. Moving the bridge is how you set the intonation. This can be done by using an electronic tuner. When you play a string open and it is in tune, it also needs to be in tune by noting the same string on the 12 fret. If it is more sharp move the bridge toward the tailpiece, if it is flat move it toward the neck.

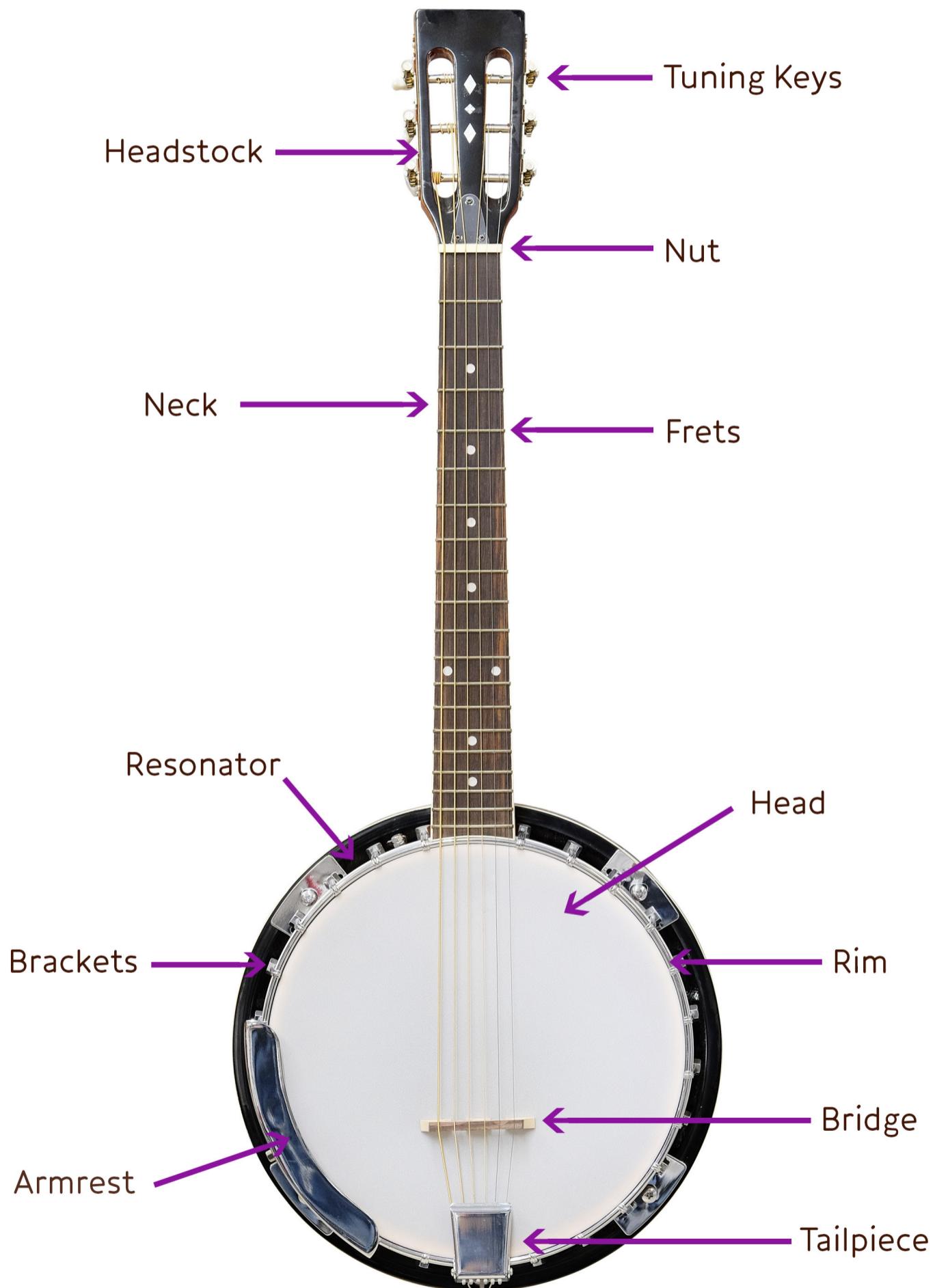
- **Pot assembly:** The pot assembly may look like a snare



drum, but that's where the similarities end. It contains several parts and is responsible for producing most of the instrument's sound and tone.

- Rim: The rim is the heart of the banjo. This is the base of the pot assembly, and needs to be perfectly circular to give the banjo a clear tone. Also the better quality of the rim, the better the tone will be.
- Head: The vibrating surface from which the banjo's sound comes from, and the tone ring within it gives the banjo a different sound, depending on the material used to build it.
- Tailpiece: This is the “bottom” of the banjo, and is what holds the strings in place.

# Anatomy of the Banjo





# Buying Your First Banjo

Now for the question that every beginner asks themselves: “How much should I spend for my first banjo”?

Budget is important to consider, especially at the beginning. The first thing you want to think about is your budget and how serious you are about playing.

Back to the first question: How much should you spend on your first banjo?. It's easy to find cheap banjos for a couple hundred dollars, but these don't last very long and might have you needing a new banjo within a year if you play it regularly.

The beginner banjos that we sell starting at \$399 offer significantly more durability and a better sound. Keep in mind, just because a banjo looks fancy doesn't mean that it is of high quality. We sell plenty of Deering Goodtime banjos and while they look basic, they are sturdy and sound fantastic!

## Do I need to buy accessories when I buy my first banjo?

When you buy your banjo from Banjo.com, we are going to send along a free starter pack. We'll include a strap, picks, and a beginner DVD.

There's also a number of accessories for banjos that will come in handy for players any time. Accessories that would help your playing include:

- Padded shoulder strap for mobility
- Gig bag for transportation
- Extra strings for replacement
- Picks for different playing styles



# Before your banjo ships

When getting your first banjo it's important to have make sure that it's properly set up so you can enjoy a strong, solid tone and comfortable playing. We always check our banjos to ensure that they're properly setup for your comfort and ease of playing. Here is what we check for in every banjo before shipping:

- **Head tension:** a loose banjo head will not vibrate properly, and will thus give the banjo a weak, flatsound. Make sure that your head is tight and tuned to G# for to avoid this.
- **String action and height:** If the strings are too high and tight the uncomfortable to play; or too low,it might not sound at all.. Make sure you specify how high and tight you want your strings to be, as this will give you both ease of playing and a nice, sharp tone.
- **Bridge position:** Bridge position is also important for tone, playability, and tuning. If you buy a banjo that's out of tune, chances are it's because the bridge is out of place. But this can be easily fixed: because it's not glued, we can easily slide it up and down the head until it's placed in the correct position. As we talked about earlier, the 12 fret is the half way point between the bridge and nut.
- **Capo spikes:** Capo spikes help keep a banjo in tune when a capo is in use. They're typically placed on the 7th and 9th fret of the banjo fingerboard for the most common tuning positions. Why do you need capo spikes?

If you use a capo on the 2nd fret, you would need to



slide the 5th string under the 7th fret. The 5th string is always 5 frets ahead. If you do get a banjo with capo spikes installed, make sure they're installed properly, and according to your tuning preferences.

Learning about the banjo and finding the right one to play may seem difficult at first, but it doesn't have to be. With this buyer's guide, you and other beginners will save time on finding the right banjo, and spend more time actually playing it. From the crew at [banjo.com](http://banjo.com), we hope you enjoyed reading this guide, and hope to hitting the stage soon! Don't hesitate to call us if you have any questions.

