

Box Zither

Example of one of many music projects from Bart Hopkin's book, [Making Musical Instruments with Kids.](#)

Rubber band box zithers are easy to assemble. They produce a quiet but clear tone, and they make a good project for small children.



PROCEDURE

Fold the top of a box open and place several rubber bands around the box.

PLAYING THE INSTRUMENT

Pluck the rubber band segments that stretch across the open top of the box.

You can enjoy the random scale of pitches that you created when you put the rubber bands in place, or adjust their tuning to your liking. To adjust the tuning, stretch and slide the rubber bands over the edge of the shoebox, varying the tension on the playing segment of the bands. Different tensions will give you different notes. Precision tuning is difficult, but you can make recognizable scales.

MATERIALS

Cardboard box, open at the top. Shoebox size is good, but a little bigger and stronger is better.

Large rubber bands.

FURTHER POSSIBILITIES

To get better sound and improve range of rubber bands: Using several different sizes of rubber bands allows you to get a wider range of pitches with clear tone quality. For large boxes, try extra-long seven-inch rubber bands. These are sold in office supply stores, sometimes under the name "file bands," and sometimes just as "long rubber bands."

With flat, ribbon-like rubber bands you can improve the sound by twisting them so that the playing segment takes on more of a round or spiral shape.

To improve the sound of the instrument by making improvements to the box:

Larger boxes have the potential to create a louder and fuller sound than shoe boxes. With much larger boxes, use the extra-long seven-inch rubber bands.

Corrugated cardboard boxes are sturdier and often sound better than those made with a single layer of cardboard.

If the box has flaps for closing over the top, fold these down inside the box before putting the rubber bands on. This makes the sides stronger.

Small Styrofoam containers can serve in place of boxes. Fresh mushrooms are often sold in styrofoam containers which, despite their small size, work nicely. Be sure to wash these containers well before use with children. Avoid Styrofoam meat trays.

Thicker, more permanent boxes and bowls made of ceramic, plastic or metal are stronger, but they usually don't sound as good with rubber band strings as cardboard or styrofoam.