

LEARN

Musicians from around the world have a long history of repurposing everyday materials into instruments. At the turn of the twentieth century, amateur musicians in the United States were recycling jugs, washboards, spoons, and washtubs into melodic and percussive instruments. These easily found items enabled people to play a variety of folk music from Tin Pan Alley favorites to blues. As recording technology increased, jug bands found a popular audience in cities along the Mississippi River, including Louisville and Memphis. While American music continuously evolves, certain genres still embrace repurposed instruments like washboards and spoons.

MAKE**Materials****Washboard**

- Sheet of cardboard
- Straws
- Aluminum foil
- Tape
- Scissors and yarn (optional)

Spoons

- Plastic spoons
- Masking tape

Instructions

1. Tape 10–15 straws horizontally on the cardboard sheet. Stagger straws and stretch them out to make them as long as possible.
2. Once all the straws are adhered, cover the sheet in aluminum foil.
3. Feel for the straws over the foil and firmly press down the foil.
4. Optional: put two holes on top of the washboard and attach yarn to make the washboard wearable.
5. For the spoons, tape two plastic spoons together back-to-back by applying masking tape to the handle end of the spoons.
6. Wad up a small roll of tape and put it in between the two spoons to create separation.
7. Play your spoons on your knee—or use them to play your washboard!

SEE



Visit MIM's United States / Canada Gallery and see the washboard, spoons, and other instruments made from everyday objects.

LISTEN

Check out [this playlist](#) for:





- A description of jug-band music

- Performances of jug-band music featuring the washboard and spoons





PLAY ALONG

[Play along](#) with the Emmet Otter's Jug-Band Christmas song "Barbecue" adapted by Jim Henson.

Washboard pattern 1:

1	2	3	4
			
Down	Down	Up	Up

Washboard pattern 2:

1	2	3	4
			
Down	Down	Hit	Hit





Make up your own washboard pattern:

1	2	3	4
_____	_____	_____	_____











INSTRUMENTS! WASHBOARD AND SPOONS

Spoon pattern 1: Down = Lap

1	2	3	4
			
Down	Down	Down	Down

Spoon pattern 2: Down = Lap; Up = Hand

1		2		3		4	
							
Down	Up	Down	Up	Down	Up	Down	Up

Make up your own spoon pattern:

1		2		3		4	
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

LEARN MORE

Explore more Americana music through [American Roots Music produced by PBS](#).