

Bass Fiddle



3/4-size Bass Fiddle played by Martha Hills

- **Belongs to the String Family**
- **Made of wood with wound metal strings**
- **Lowest sounding instrument in Bluegrass**
- **Used to keep the beat**

The string bass is the most commonly-used bass instrument in bluegrass music and is almost always plucked, though some modern bluegrass bass players have also used a bow. The bluegrass bass player is part of the rhythm section, and is responsible for keeping a steady beat, whether fast or slow. Most bluegrass bass players use the 3/4 size bass, but the full and 5/8 size basses are also used. The upright bass' slower attack and its percussive, woody tone gives a more "earthy" or "natural" sound than an electric bass.

Bluegrass bass lines are usually simple, typically staying on the root and fifth of each chord throughout most of a song. There are two main exceptions to this "rule". Bluegrass bass players often do a "walkup" or "walkdown" sometimes referred to as runs. Runs are usually done when there is a chord change. To make a run, a different note is played for every beat leading up in or down in pitch to the new chord. In addition, if a bass player is given a solo, they may play a walking bass line with a note on every beat or play a pentatonic (5-note) scale-influenced bass line. Another style called "Slap-bass" is sometimes used in bluegrass bass playing. When bluegrass bass players slap the strings against the fingerboard, it adds the high-pitched percussive "clack" or "slap" sound to the low-pitched bass notes on the off-beat, sounding much like the clacks of a tap dancer.



Single-String "Tub Bass" played by Euva DePoy