



Howdy!

*This Tech Tips Newsletter on the topic of humidity control for acoustic and amplified acoustic guitars was written by Sally Perkins.*

To maintain the value of an acoustic guitar, it is essential to keep it in a condition in which it 'sounds the same' as the builder intended it to. Even though it doesn't require a daily maintenance regimen, guitars need occasional check-ups to keep them sounding good and ready to be played. Even though they can take a lot of rough handling, lack of proper care can render them unplayable.

The most important component in maintaining the musical instrument is to keep it in a specific climate range. Acoustic guitars are made under specific humidity conditions and within a specific temperature range. Hence, it's important that they should be maintained in a specific environment. Too much dryness can cause the instrument to crack, while too much moisture can result in swelling and buckling in the soundboard, back, sides or neck of the instrument.

First thing to understand is the environment: is it humid or dry?

A device that can help you keep a check on the right humidity level for your acoustic guitar is a *hygrometer*. Available at any hardware store, this inexpensive device accurately measures the relative humidity of a room. The device is available in a wall hanging design or as a portable unit. It may be more helpful to buy a small hygrometer that can be kept in the case of the guitar.

Let's look at some of the ways in which one can maintain the right environment for an acoustic instrument:

- Investing in a room humidifier or dehumidifier will help you keep the environment at the right humidity level. If you can afford it, a room unit is a perfect way to control the humidity where you keep the guitar.

- A less expensive solution to maintain the humidity level is buying a guitar humidifier specifically made for guitars. This item is a sponge that is enclosed by a plastic or rubber housing. Before placing it in the case, one has to saturate the sponge with water and place it inside the case of the instrument to raise the level of humidity. Some instrument humidifiers are designed to be secured to the sound hole of the instrument.
- You can use a powder or crystal substance known as a *desiccant* to draw humidity out of the air. This substance comes in small packets and is useful in bringing down the level of humidity in the air in the confines of a guitar case. Some new guitars come with packets of desiccants in their cases.

In addition to using these devices, one should also make sure that the guitar is not exposed to radical shifts in temperature as it can cause cracking of the finish and in extreme cases can compromise glue joints. Also, give the instrument time to warm up gradually if it has been exposed to the cold temperatures for several hours.

Just maintaining occasional check-ups will ensure that your acoustic treasure stays in good shape for many years.

*Sally Perkins is a professional freelance writer with many years experience across many different areas. She made the move to freelancing from a stressful corporate job and loves the work-life balance it offers her. When not at work, Sally enjoys reading, hiking, spending time with her family and travelling as much as possible.*

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Pete Biltoft

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