

# *Is your ukulele getting enough moisture? Find out before it's too late!*



With the weather getting progressively cooler in the winter months, it's important to maintain a healthy relative humidity level for your ukulele(s). The ideal humidity range for an acoustic ukulele is 45-55 percent; shoot for between 40 to 60% and you should be pretty safe.

A solid wood acoustic ukulele is made of thin pieces of wood; because the wood is so thin, it has a great deal of surface area and therefore it both gains and loses moisture very quickly.

*When wood loses moisture, it shrinks.*

*When wood gains moisture, it expands.*

Keep in mind that the more you heat your home, the more the indoor humidity drops. Dry conditions will not only compromise the playability of an ukulele, they can also lead to more serious issues such as wood cracking and other damage. Luthiers estimate that dehydration accounts for about 90% of climate-based repairs to acoustic instruments.

Here are some tips to help you keep your ukuleles healthy during the winter months—or all year long if you happen to move to Palm Springs!

**Store your ukulele in its case when you're not playing it.** Unless you keep your instruments in a climate-controlled room, the enclosed environment of your case will provide a more protective environment for your ukulele, particularly if you need to humidify it. As much as you might like to display your ukuleles on wall hangers or stands for accessibility, you're better off stashing them in their cases, especially if the air is dry.



***OUCH! This is definitely not good.***

**Use a digital hygrometer.** Having an accurate humidity monitor lets you know if you need to use a humidifier. Don't rely on outdoor humidity readings; what matters is the environment where you keep your ukulele. And be sure to use a digital hygrometer rather than an analog type with a needle; a digital unit is far more accurate.

**Keep the hygrometer in the case with your ukulele.** You want the most accurate reading of the humidity conditions your ukulele is experiencing, so inside the case is better than simply in the room where the case is. Note: Don't put the hygrometer inside the case compartment, since it's a sealed-off area. It should be placed in the open section of the case. A good spot is the outside of the case compartment on the ukulele body end. There may be enough room there to Velcro a small hygrometer in place without having it touch the neck heel.

**Use an ukulele humidifier.** There are several products available so look around. Keep in mind that the goal is to humidify the entire ukulele.

**Keep a lid on it.** If you're using a humidifier, you're also humidifying the case, so you don't want to give up that moisture when you take out your ukulele. Close the lid during your playing sessions to preserve the humidification.

**Know the physical symptoms of a dry ukulele.** These include sharp fret ends (the result of the fretboard shrinking, which causes the frets to protrude), string buzz, and in extreme cases, cracks. If you experience this, run, don't walk, to get a good humidifier in your ukulele case!

*Adapted from an article about acoustic guitars by TaylorGuitars.com. Also includes input from SchneiderGuitars.com and DavesWoodstockMusic.com.*

## **Here's what works for me:**

*My ukuleles travel from home (heated by woodstove only) to the office (standard heating system). Both of those types of environments get really dry--drier than you might realize.*

**Case:** I keep my ukuleles in "hardshell" type cases. I do have a travel case I use when I need to put it in overhead plane storage, but 95% of the time, my ukuleles are kept in an Oahu case and a Gator ABS case. Both have a harder surface which keeps the humidity level inside at a more stable level; cloth-type cases allow the air to pass through more freely, causing greater fluctuations in humidity inside where your ukulele lives.

**Humidifier:** I've used a variety, from the make-it-yourself damp sponge in a plastic film container (with holes punched in it), to the clay-type which you soak. My very favorite is the [Oasis ukulele humidifier \(click to see it on Amazon\)](#). It's about \$20 and I have one for each of my ukuleles because it's so easy to use, foolproof (as long as you screw the cap on tight!) and effective. You fill the humidifier from the screw cap with water (using the provided syringe) then "hang" it from your ukulele strings so it dangles inside your instrument's soundhole. Sounds weird, huh? But it works great!

**Hygrometer.** No worries, it's just a fancy name for "How Humid Is It In My Ukulele Case?" Digital output showing temperature as well as humidity level. It's about \$13 and it helps me to really see what the humidity level is; it also adds a great deal of guilt and my personal promise to my ukuleles to do better when I see it dip too low because I've let my humidifier go too long between filling. Sometimes guilt is good. [Here's one on Amazon.](#) Note: This is generally sold as a cigar humidor but it's half the price of the ones advertised for musical instruments.

