

# DULCIMERS



## Where does the word 'dulcimer' come from?

The word is derived from the Latin word 'dulcis/dulce' translated as 'sweet' and the Greek word 'melos' translated as 'melody' or 'song'.

## How were dulcimers played by the old-timers?

Old-time traditional dulcimers (especially Galax, VA style) were authentically played with a turkey quill cut into two pieces. The thin end was flexible enough to strum the strings, the thick end, known as a 'noter', was pressed against the melody string to shorten it, thereby making the pitch higher as it quickly slid up and down the fretboard, producing a wonderfully characteristic 'twang' sound. The old dulcimers were often tuned to DAA or all strings tuned to the same note, like GGG. They had only a '6' fret, not a '6 1/2', which is a more modern invention that changed the scale, allowing us to play in several different scales (also known as 'modes').



Gwen's turkey quills used in demonstrating how the old-timers played



## Why haven't I seen dulcimers in music stores?

The 'real' instruments are all meticulously handcrafted by dulcimer builders who sell them directly to a niche market of players. Some specialty acoustic music stores or mountain music stores might sell well-crafted dulcimers, but might not have a large selection. as they are labor-intensive to build and are not mass-produced. Many players order dulcimers from a builder, then the work commences and is delivered upon completion. Builders also vend at dulcimer festivals, a good way to try out a variety of instruments.