

A simple yet effective tool to ease lute peg/string winding problems

Many new lute players struggle to grapple with lute pegs. Particularly those coming from the guitar and more familiar with modern guitar tuners, 13 or so traditional lute pegs tightly packed in a pegbox can seem quite daunting. The pegs can seem to unwind randomly without notice, or become too stiff for comfortable use.

Stiff or slippery pegs can be helped in part with some peg paste, but often the main cause of peg problems arises from how the string is wound on the peg.

In the Lute Society's booklet "How to care for your lute" (a very handy guide to pop in your lute case), the general principles are outlined. The string ought to be wound on the peg so that the last one or two turns just touch the sides of the pegbox before heading towards the nut. In this way the string helps to hold the peg in place, reducing the tendency to unwind due to the slight extra friction and tension between the string and the side of the pegbox.

However these string windings need to be adjusted from time to time, so that this tension is just right. Both the peg and string will settle in, particularly after a new set of strings are fitted (but also generally over time), and so the string winding in the pegbox will need to be periodically adjusted to be not too tight and not too loose.

In practice it can be difficult to control the string winding within the cramped area of the pegbox among the many other strings and pegs. New lute players in particular often need help with this, but any lute player can benefit from this process being made easier.

You can very easily make a simple lute pegbox string guider to help with adjusting the strings in the pegbox. It is very low tech and is simply a shaped piece of wood with rounded ends. It lets you get into the strings in the pegbox and guide them left and right as the peg is wound. It should be made of wood with rounded edges so no damage could be done to the pegbox or strings.

Here is an outline of the tool. The precise dimensions are not critical, but the larger end is to help it to be comfortably held between the finger and thumb for control. The thinner end allows you to get into the pegbox and guide a chosen string left or right as you make your peg box string adjustments.

I make mine from 2mm thick ebony offcuts (from making lute fingerboards), but any dense timber should suffice. It is rounded on all edges with some sandpaper to prevent any damage. The overall dimensions are approximately: 40 x 15 x 2mm.

Just keep it in your lute case!

A very easy alternative for lute players could be to purchase an ice cream (the type with a wooden handle). The ice cream stick shape and dimensions are more or less the right size too. And you get to enjoy the ice cream, guilt free!

