

Five Clip-On Tuners Reviewed

We test models by Crafter, Planet Waves, Sabine, Seiko, and TuneTech.

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An electronic tuner is one of the first accessories a guitarist should acquire—regardless of a player's skill, setting, or style of music. These days, three main categories make up the tuner market: the still-popular handheld or tabletop designs found in first-generation tuners, pedal tuners for stage use, and miniature tuners that clip directly to the instrument. Pioneered by OnBoard Research with its Intellitouch tuner, the portable and compact clip-on tuner has experienced a surge in popularity over the past few years.

Clip-on tuners, which use piezo technology to sense vibrations, offer several advantages—they're small enough to fit into the accessory compartment of a guitar case, they're easily accessible when clipped to the headstock while playing, and—because they sense the guitar's vibration with a sensor built into their clips—they work well in loud environments. In addition, most clip-on tuners are priced at the affordable end of the electronic tuner spectrum (list prices indicated below). In other words, there's a lot to like about these tuners.

For this review, we gathered five clip-on tuners made by Crafter, Planet Waves, Sabine, Seiko, and TuneTech (Intellitouch and Korg—both leaders in the clip-on tuner field—will replace their own popular models with new tuners in the months to come). All of our featured models are chromatic tuners, which means that they can recognize any note (many guitar-specific tuners are often limited to the E A D G B E notes that make up standard tuning). They can also be calibrated to notes other than the A=440 pitch standard, a feature that is handy if you're playing along with instruments (like piano) that may be slightly sharp or flat but aren't easily retuned. Some of the units also have built-in mics, which enables them to double as tabletop tuners.

To put these tuners through their paces, I used a Martin OM, a Juan Huipre flamenco, and a Taylor 355 12-string tuned low (B F# B E F# B). In addition, I kept a Planet Waves Tru-Strobe tuner on hand to use as a reference to test accuracy.

PLANET WAVES HEADSTOCK TUNER \$49.99, planetwaves.com

While most of the tuners I checked out swivel on a universal joint, Planet Waves' brand new Headstock Tuner features an integrated tuner/clip design. The design enables Planet Waves to make the tuner much less bulky than the others, because the clip takes up almost no additional space (overall dimensions, including the clip, are about 2½ x 1½ x 1 inches), and eliminates a potential spot for breakage, making this a tuner you can throw into your gig bag or jacket pocket without much worry. The Planet Waves display and control set are simple and uncluttered, employing a simulated needle and note indicator. Once in tune, the backlit display changes from a dark red to a bright green. There are only two buttons: a power button on the front of the unit and a "frequency" button (for calibrating the tuner to notes other than A=440) behind the display. The tuner has only chromatic mode, and there's no microphone. The clip itself is a clever design that employs the tuner body as the top half of the clip and a pivoting pad as the bottom.

In practice, the Headstock Tuner worked very well—the digital "needle" was precise and analog-like in its responsiveness, and the unit was quick to sense and hold even the low notes on my 12-string. Given its accuracy and klutz-proof, rugged design, it's a solid new entry to the clip-on tuner market.

