



Getting Started: Choosing Your Drum Equipment

From your first pair of sticks to choosing the right drum set

The best drum set is the one that fits your circumstances and allows you to practice regularly.

Starting drum lessons doesn't mean you need to immediately spend hundreds - or thousands - of dollars on a drum set.

In fact, you don't need a drum set to get started.

Many new students begin with just a pair of drumsticks and a practice pad. This gives you everything you need to begin developing fundamental skills while you build confidence, establish a practice routine and decide what kind of drum set will eventually work best for you.

As you progress, having regular access to a drum set will become increasingly important. This guide will help you understand the options and choose equipment that fits your home, budget and goals.

PART ONE - GETTING STARTED

01 WHAT DO I NEED TO GET STARTED?

Very little!

Drumsticks

For most new students at Ogden Drum Studio, I recommend a pair of Vic Firth 5A drumsticks. 5A is a versatile, general-purpose stick size and a great place to start. You don't need a collection of different sticks when you're beginning - a good pair of 5As is all you need.

Practice Pad

A practice pad provides a quiet, convenient surface for working on stick control, rudiments, timing and many of the fundamental techniques we'll develop in lessons. They're inexpensive, portable and useful even after you eventually buy a full drum set. A practice pad isn't something you'll quickly outgrow - experienced drummers use them too.

That's enough to begin.

Starting with a pad and sticks gives you time to experience drum lessons before making a larger investment. When you're ready to add a drum set, you can make that decision based on your circumstances rather than buying something quickly and discovering later that it wasn't the right choice.

PART TWO - CHOOSING YOUR DRUM SET

02 WHEN SHOULD I BUY A DRUM SET?

There's no fixed point at which every student needs to buy one. Early lessons can include plenty of work that can be practiced effectively on a pad. As your playing develops, access to a drum set becomes increasingly useful for coordination, grooves, fills, movement around the kit and playing along with music.

When you're ready, there are three main approaches worth considering:

ACOUSTIC	LOW-VOLUME ACOUSTIC	ELECTRONIC
The traditional drum-set experience, with real drums and cymbals.	A conventional acoustic set fitted with low-volume heads and cymbals.	Pads and cymbals connected to a drum module, usually played through headphones or speakers.

None of these is automatically the "best" choice. Consider noise, space, budget, and how and where you expect to use the kit.

03 ACOUSTIC DRUMS

An acoustic drum set gives you the traditional drumming experience. The sound comes directly from the drums and cymbals, with no electronics or amplification required.

Natural feel and response

Acoustic drums and cymbals respond directly to how you play them. Learning to control dynamics, tone and different cymbal sounds is an important part of becoming a drummer.

Built to last

There's no electronic module or software to become outdated. A good acoustic drum set can last for decades with basic maintenance.

Easy to upgrade

Drumheads, cymbals, pedals and hardware can all be upgraded individually as your playing and budget develop.

Excellent value used

A good used acoustic kit can often provide considerably more for your money than buying new.

Things to consider: they're loud, they need space, and not every advertised kit includes everything required to play. Beginner-package cymbals are usually basic, but they'll do the job while you're learning and can be upgraded later.

04 LOW-VOLUME ACOUSTIC DRUMS

A third option - and one that's sometimes overlooked - is to take a conventional acoustic drum set and fit it with low-volume drumheads and cymbals. For the right situation, this can offer an excellent compromise between acoustic and electronic drums.

Real drum sizes and positioning

You're still sitting behind a conventional drum set, so everything can be positioned naturally.

Much lower volume

Specialized low-volume heads and cymbals substantially reduce the sound produced by an acoustic kit.

Still a real acoustic kit

Swap the low-volume heads and cymbals for conventional ones and the same kit can be used for rehearsals, performances or recording.

The trade-offs

Low-volume doesn't mean silent, and this route costs more because you're buying an acoustic kit plus low-volume heads and cymbals.

What I use at Ogden Drum Studio
Yamaha Stage Custom + Evans low-volume heads + Zildjian L80 cymbals + a heavily dampened bass drum.

05 ELECTRONIC DRUMS

Electronic drums can be an excellent choice when volume, space and convenient practice are priorities.

Quieter practice

Headphones allow you to practice without filling the house with the sound of an acoustic drum set.

Smaller footprint

Electronic kits can often fit into spaces where a conventional acoustic set would be difficult to accommodate.

Easy play-along practice

Many kits let you connect a phone or tablet so you can hear both your drums and your music through headphones.

Practice and recording tools

Metronomes, different drum sounds, recording and coaching functions are commonly built into electronic modules.

Things to consider: electronic doesn't mean silent; sticks and pedals still create impact noise and vibration. Very inexpensive kits can also compromise pad size, triggering, feel, pedal design and positioning.

06 WHICH TYPE IS RIGHT FOR ME?

IF THIS MATTERS MOST...	CONSIDER...
Most natural playing experience	Acoustic
Quietest practice	Electronic
Limited space	Electronic
Easy headphone / play-along practice	Electronic
Developing acoustic drum and cymbal control	Acoustic
Real drum sizes at reduced volume	Low-volume acoustic
Maximum value on the used market	Acoustic
Easy home recording	Electronic
Can later become a conventional gigging kit	Acoustic / Low-volume acoustic

PART THREE - WHAT SHOULD I BUY?

07 RECOMMENDED ACOUSTIC DRUM SETS

Prices are approximate and will change over time. Check current pricing, packages and availability before buying.

BUDGET PICK

Pearl Roadshow

Approx. \$725

If you're buying your first acoustic drum set new and want everything you need in one package, the Pearl Roadshow is my budget pick. It includes a full five-piece drum set, hardware, throne and starter cymbals, so you can assemble it and begin playing without immediately needing lots of additional equipment. Pearl has a strong reputation for reliable drums and hardware. The included cymbals are basic, but perfectly adequate for practice while you're getting started.

Best for: Keeping the initial investment reasonable while getting a complete, dependable acoustic setup.

BEST VALUE

Tama Imperialstar

**Approx.
\$1,000**

If your budget allows you to spend a little more, the Tama Imperialstar is an excellent first acoustic drum set and one you shouldn't quickly outgrow. It's available as a complete package with the drums, hardware and cymbals needed to get started. Tama's hardware is particularly well regarded, and the kit provides a solid platform that can be improved over time with better heads and cymbals.

Best for: A committed beginner who wants a better complete package from the start.

LONG-TERM PICK

Yamaha Stage Custom Birch

**Approx. \$900
for drums**

The Yamaha Stage Custom is my long-term acoustic pick - and it's also the drum set I use at Ogden Drum Studio. Unlike the complete beginner packages above, it is primarily a drum package rather than an all-in-one starter set. The complete setup costs more once hardware and cymbals are added, but you're investing in a higher-quality core instrument that can serve you from lessons through rehearsals and performances.

Best for: Someone who would rather invest in a higher-quality core drum set and build their setup around it.

Don't be fooled by package prices. Once an upgraded beginner package approaches the cost of the next level of drum set, it may make more sense to step up to the better kit.

08 DON'T OVERLOOK USED DRUMS

Buying used can be one of the best ways to get a good-quality acoustic drum set without spending a lot of money. Here in Utah, KSL Classifieds is a useful place to look.

The same budget that buys a new beginner package may buy a considerably better-quality used drum set - sometimes with hardware and cymbals included. Always compare the complete cost.

USED DRUM CHECKLIST

Drum shells and storage

Look for significant cracks or damage. Cosmetic scratches are usually less important. Pay particular attention to mold, musty smells, significant rust or corrosion, which can indicate damp storage.

Hardware

Make sure stands, pedals, tom mounts and adjustment mechanisms work correctly, tighten securely and aren't missing important parts.

Drumheads

Worn or heavily marked heads are replaceable. They're not necessarily a reason to reject a kit, but include replacements in your budget.

Cymbals

Check carefully for cracks around the edges and bell, and inspect the center hole for excessive wear or keyholing. Cracks generally continue to spread.

What's included?

Confirm the snare, throne, bass drum pedal, hi-hat stand, cymbal stands, hi-hats, crash and ride are present if you expect them to be.

Used doesn't have to mean perfect. Cosmetic wear and old heads can be fine. Missing equipment, damaged hardware, cracked cymbals or signs of poor storage deserve much more caution.

09 CREATING A LOW-VOLUME ACOUSTIC SETUP

If you like the idea of acoustic drums but conventional volume isn't practical, you can convert an acoustic kit into a low-volume practice setup. This is the approach I use at Ogden Drum Studio.

01 START WITH AN ACOUSTIC KIT

Any suitable new or used acoustic kit can work.

02 ADD LOW-VOLUME HEADS

I use Evans low-volume heads. Remo Silentstroke is another good option.

03 ADD LOW-VOLUME CYMBALS

I use Zildjian L80s. Evans dB One cymbals are another option.

04 TAME THE BASS DRUM

I use a moving blanket inside the drum plus an Evans EQ Patch at the beater impact point.

QUICK TIP

Low-volume heads are often sold in packs, but not every five-piece kit uses the same sizes. Check your kit specifications first. If you're unsure, measure the diameter of each drum across its widest point. Don't assume a "5-piece" head pack will fit every five-piece drum set.

Why I like this approach: it retains real drum sizes, conventional hardware, cymbal positioning and the physical experience of moving around an acoustic kit while substantially reducing overall volume. The conversion isn't permanent - conventional heads and cymbals can be fitted again later.

The downside: cost. You're buying an acoustic kit and then adding low-volume heads and cymbals. If minimizing initial cost or maximizing quietness is the priority, an electronic kit may make more sense.

With electronic drums, I think it's particularly important not to buy solely on price. Extremely inexpensive kits can compromise pad size, positioning, triggering, hardware and pedal design.

Prices are approximate and will change over time. Check current pricing, packages and availability before buying.

**BUDGET
PICK**
Alesis Nitro Pro
Approx. \$600

The Alesis Nitro Pro is the least expensive electronic drum set I currently feel comfortable recommending to students. It provides a full five-piece configuration with mesh drumheads, including a 10-inch snare and three 8-inch tom pads. Importantly, it uses a real bass drum pedal and kick pad rather than a simple switch-style foot controller. It also provides chokeable cymbals, Bluetooth connectivity and enough adjustability to create a sensible practice setup.

Best for: Someone who needs the advantages of electronic drums while keeping the initial investment relatively low.

BEST VALUE
Roland TD-07KVX
**Approx.
\$1,300**

The Roland TD-07KVX is my best-value electronic recommendation. Its larger 12-inch snare provides a much more comfortable playing surface than many kits in this price range, while the three 8-inch toms are a reasonable compromise between compact size and realistic positioning. A conventional hi-hat stand arrangement, proper kick pad and larger electronic cymbals help the overall setup feel more like sitting behind an acoustic kit.

Best for: The committed student who wants a better playing experience without moving into high-end electronic drum prices.

Remember: A bass drum pedal and hi-hat stand may need to be purchased separately depending on the package.

**LONG-TERM
PICK**
Yamaha DTX8K-M
**Approx.
\$2,400**

If budget allows and you want a substantially more acoustic-like electronic drum set, the Yamaha DTX8K-M is my long-term pick. Its 12-inch snare and larger 10-inch tom pads provide considerably more playing area than most compact electronic kits, while the larger hi-hat and cymbal pads and conventional hardware arrangement create a more natural overall setup. At this level you're paying not simply for more sounds, but for a better physical playing experience.

Best for: The committed drummer who wants the benefits of electronic drums with fewer of the physical compromises associated with smaller, less expensive kits.

Remember: Depending on the package, budget for items such as a bass drum pedal and throne.

ELECTRONIC DRUM BUYING CHECKLIST

- A mesh snare at minimum, preferably mesh toms too
- A real bass drum pedal and kick pad
- A full five-piece configuration with three toms
- Chokeable cymbals, preferably multi-zone where appropriate
- A usable hi-hat controller
- Headphone output
- An easy way to play along with music
- Stable, adjustable hardware
- Enough adjustment to position the kit similarly to an acoustic drum set
- A reputable manufacturer with reasonable product and parts support

11 FINAL ADVICE

Buying your first drum equipment should be exciting, not overwhelming.

You don't need to own everything immediately, and you certainly don't need expensive equipment in order to become a good drummer. Start with what you actually need.

For a brand-new student, that may simply mean a practice pad and a pair of sticks. When you're ready for a drum set, choose the type that works with your home, your budget and the amount of practice you're realistically able to do.

If you choose acoustic, remember that used equipment can offer excellent value and that heads and cymbals can be upgraded over time. If noise is an issue but you want the physical experience of acoustic drums, consider a low-volume acoustic setup. And if electronic drums make it possible for you to practice more frequently, that's an excellent reason to choose them.

The best drum set isn't necessarily the most expensive one. It's the one that fits your circumstances, is set up properly, and makes it easy for you to sit down and practice.

Ogden Drum Studio

A practical guide for new students and families.