

The most common banjo keys used in old-time music, and the tunings we will most often use on this Hilarie Burhans Patreon site. *Note that while I reference using a capo, you can just tune the strings up to the notes instead of using a capo. A capo is faster, though you should always check your tuning after putting a capo on as you'll usually need to tweak it a bit.*

To play in the key of G (and occasionally in E minor): use the most common 5-string banjo tuning, generally called "open G" tuning. It's "open" because you don't need to hold down any strings in this tuning to make the "1" chord... all the strings are notes in a G chord. g, D, G, B, D

To play in the key of A: Starting in G tuning, you'll put a capo at the second fret and tune the 5th string up to A. (a, E, A, C#, E)

To play in the key of C: Generally referred to as "Double C" Tuning because the banjo has two C strings. From an open G tuning, tune the 2nd string UP to C, and tune the 4th string DOWN to C. g, C, G, C, D

To play in the key of D: If you are in Double C tuning, and you put a capo on at the second fret, and tune the 5th string up to A, you're in "double D." (If you are already capoed up to A, just tune the 4th string DOWN to D, and the 2nd string UP to D.) a, D, A, D, E

To play in G Modal: This tuning goes by many names: "G Modal" or "sawmill" or sometimes "mountain minor.". You can think of Sawmill as halfway between G and Double C tunings... if you are open G tuning and tune the second string UP to C, you're there. (To complete the tuning change to double C, you'd then also tune the 4th string DOWN to C.) Modal tuning is nice for some minor-sounding tunes. g, D, G, C, D

To play in A Modal: This is just G modal, capoed up two frets (with the 5th string tuned up to A): a, E, A, D, E

