

CARING FOR YOUR TOHLAKAI DRUM



Think of your drum as you would your own skin: Tohlakai Drums are made with rawhide, which is dried skin from an animal. We mainly use moose, bison, elk or deer, which is stretched on round light redwood cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) hoops.

Storage: We keep our personal drums hanging on a pegboard in our workshop or on the walls in our home. Be sure not to hang your drum or keep it in direct, hot sunlight or over heaters. Depending on what kind of climate you are in, the dramatic change in temperature can be hard on the skin or the hoop. Never leave your drum in a damp room for long periods of time without using it. Mould may actually grow on both the skin and the hoop. If you do keep your drum in a cold damp room, you will want to get it warm before you use it by one of a variety of methods mentioned below. There are no quick good ways to warm a drum when it is “dead” (skin warped and not taut). But do not despair, there are ways to bring it back to life again. Just be aware that you will have to plan ahead to make sure that your drum is taut and playable.

Travel: When we travel with our drums we carry them in bags. A low cost solution for a drum bag is a cymbal bag. You can get them at any music store that sells drum kits and accessories. If we are just carrying 2-4 drums, we use cymbal bags. If we are carrying a lot of drums for circles or sales, we use large, heavy duffle bags. Drums do travel well in airplanes. We take them as carry-on luggage in the cabin. Usually 12”-16” drums fit the easiest. You may need to call your airline and ask if an 18” diameter would fit in the same space. Always treat your drum with respect and take care of it as you travel.

Temperature and humidity changes: Like your skin, drums will become slack or taut with varying temperature and humidity changes. For example, when it is very wet and cold a drum has the tendency to soak up moisture in the air and lose tension in the head. This makes it go “dead.” In other words, it sometimes becomes so loose that when it is struck with the beater or hand there is no resonance to the sound. It is dull and lifeless. This is typical in the Pacific Northwest in the United States, or any humid climate. In this case the drum needs to be warmed up and dried out. The best way to achieve this is to get it into a warm dry room and allow it to acclimatise again.

Do not put it too close to any heat source (heaters, hair dryers, stoves, candles, etc.) as it will cause it to dry out too fast and may damage the skin. Think of how your own skin reacts to these conditions. Just by keeping your drum in a sunnier room, but not in direct sunlight can always give your drum a good, playable voice. Even keeping your drum in a warm kitchen rather than a bedroom helps it sing with no need for warm up time.

Tohlakai Drums
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If your drum is not completely “dead,” you can warm it up by simply holding it against your heart for a period of time and your body heat will help it to resonate properly. Besides, this is a wonderful way to make a heart connection with your sacred friend.

In the Southeast of the United States, drums constantly deal with high humidity, but the toughest times are in the spring and fall when air conditioners or heaters are not used to help dehumidify the air inside our homes. You might try letting your drum sit in the sun just for a short period of time to dry it out. We never recommend it sitting in direct sunlight too long because it can dry out the skin. However, in the short term this may be a viable way to dry out your drum. Drums love fresh air, but please do not forget it. If your drum’s voice becomes very high, then you have left it out in the sun for too long. Put it back under shelter and it will be fine. Of course, playing your drum in the sun is fine.

The other extreme weather conditions are dry and hot, such as the weather in the Southwestern parts of the United States. With these types of conditions your drum will become very taut and have a much higher voice. Worse case scenarios are the skin actually becomes so tight that it splits or the frame twists out of shape. These worse case scenarios normally can be avoided with some special care. In this case you want to cool the drum down. Get it in some shade or a cool place inside. You can carry a small plastic spritzer bottle filled with water when you travel to hot areas. Lightly spray your dry tight skin to help it cool down.

Do not leave your drum in the car exposed to sunlight. You want to be careful not to leave your drum in a hot car uncovered or directly in the sun for a long time. You can bury your drum in sleeping bags under blankets and pillows to help keep it cool. Always treat your drum with respect and according to the climate conditions.

Respect: You do not want to lay your drum on its face on rough gravel or anything that could damage it. This is the natural way to treat anything you love and respect. Remember that your drum came into your life as a guide.

Cleaning and moisturizing: To clean your drum just wipe it with a damp cloth. To moisturize, just rub your hands over the skin. The oil from your skin will help it to stay beautiful and lustrous. If the skin happens to dry out too much, you can use a product called Lexol PH. Lexol is a leather cleaner and moisturizer. We suggest you use a half water/half Lexol solution and just wipe your drum with a soft rag soaked in this mixture. Most of you will not need to do this. It only seems to be necessary if you are in a very dry climate and then only every couple of years. If done too often, it may soften the skin too much.

Drums with images: Please **do not apply** leather conditioner on the face of your drum where the image has been painted. Only apply conditioner (generously) to the sides of the drums and the ties-offs at the back. This will ensure the skin does not dry out over time and start cracking.

Drumming: Tohlakai Drums are meant to be played so please ensure you don't just use them as ornaments. And it's nice to open a relationship with your drum before you use it. Holding it against your heart and just connecting with its energy is a good start. Also, rubbing your hand across its face in a way that feels best to you (clockwise etc.) is a good way to warm your drum up and get to know it. When you feel you and the drum are ready, just begin. If you think you can't carry a beat or don't know anything about drumming you just might find that as you allow yourself to meld and melt into the energy of the drum, it will help you to play the most heartfelt and spontaneous of beats.

If you are playing with a group, after you have connected with your drum, allow yourself to connect with the group energy. Listen with your heart and then begin to play. Just let go and let your body/Soul do the "talking." Drumming is one of the most powerful ways to create community. Humans have been doing this from the beginning. Allow yourself to remember.

Building your own drums: If you would like to build your own drum we hold regular workshops throughout the United States and Europe. We require a minimum number of people per workshop so please get in touch with us to discuss details.

Although we fully guarantee our craftsmanship, we cannot be responsible for Mother Nature or your neglect to take care of your drum. Please remember though, skin and frames can be replaced. We have needed to do this at times for our valued customers, so we can support you with drum repairs. Just get in touch with us and let us know what issues you are experiencing.

**“May the heartbeat of The Mother
fill you with peace and harmony”**

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