

The greater the instrument's depth, the greater its bass response; therefore, the hourglass and violin shapes, which usually are not very deep, tend to produce less bass and slightly more treble. Moreover, they create a kind of a stereo effect by separating the bass and treble modulations. They are somewhat like the sitar in this effect; the narrow channel at mid-instrument blocks the larger functioning frequencies of sound (bass) and permits the tighter frequencies (treble) to pass through to the smaller chamber toward the head of the instrument.

The teardrop shaped dulcimer, with a sound chamber one and a half to two inches deep, provides a good balance.

This and the hourglass dulcimer are the most common, particularly in three- or four-string arrangements.

The elliptical shape is also about two inches deep. Due to its symmetry, its sound quality, when visualized, resembles two concentric circular ripples converging in a pond. This shape produces a very round sound.

The lute shaped dulcimer, found with great variation in depth and number of strings, is the rarest type of dulcimer. Some are as shallow as the elliptical or teardrop dulcimers, and others are as deep as ten inches. Some lute shaped dulcimers have four strings, and others have up to ten or more. All have a very rich, full sound, but they are not suited for fast tempos and tend to sound like a piano played with the sustaining pedal depressed.

Two "specialty" instruments are the courting dulcimer and something we call the "wall dulcimer." The courting dulcimer is usually rectangular with two fretboards placed in opposite directions. Two lovers sit facing each other, rub knees, and play dulcimer duets. It's not a good instrument to learn on because you usually can't maintain the needed concentration. And then there is the "wall dulcimer." Some people call