

The most common tuning for acoustic steel guitar (Dobro) is **open G**:

1. D
2. B
3. G
4. D
5. B
6. G

One advantage to this tuning is that you have three sets of strings one octave apart for each note in a major chord. It's easy to play the same thing an octave higher or lower by just moving down (or up) three strings. It's also great for quick hammer-on type playing.

Some people use this tuning tuned up a whole step to **open A**:

1. E
2. C#
3. A
4. E
5. C#
6. A

There is also a tuning called **low bass A** or **Hawaiian A**:

1. E
2. C#
3. A
4. E
5. A
6. E

This is the original tuning used in many early Hawaiian guitar instruction books. If you find a very old book without any indication of which tuning is being used, it's probably this tuning. This tuning is also frequently seen tuned one whole note lower, as **low bass G**:

1. D
2. B
3. G
4. D
5. G
6. D

These tunings allow a nice fingerpicking rhythm to be set up, alternating the root and fifth of the chord using the bottom three strings. It's a nice tuning to use if you play solo. The low bass G tuning is used by [Bob Brozman](#) on his National steel guitars.

On electric lap steel guitar, I started out by using **open E**:

1. E
2. B
3. G#
4. E
5. B
6. E

although some people prefer the same tuning in **open D**:

1. D
2. A
3. F#
4. D
5. A
6. D

The advantage for me in using this tuning is that the tonic (the note representing the base to which all other notes relate) is represented three times, and the third (which indicated whether the chord is major or minor) is only present once. By leaving this note in or out of your playing, you can "fake" playing minor chords. This type of tuning also lets me play sixths on the top and third string up and down the neck for a Hank Williams/pedal steel effect. This tuning is also great for power chords played through a highly overdriven amp.

The **C6/Am7 Tuning** has been mentioned several times by different people. It's tuned as follows:

1. E
2. C
3. A
4. G
5. E
6. C

The advantage to this tuning is you have almost every type of chord interval under the bar without having to slant the bar. C E G is an C major chord, A C E G is an A minor 7th chord, C E G A is a C sixth chord, etc. You can play sixths up and down the neck without slanting the bar as much as you would in the open E tuning due to the fact that you have two sets of strings situated a sixth apart (the second and fifth strings are a major sixth, the first and fourth strings are a minor fifth).

The disadvantage is that everything you play sounds Hawaiian until you get your act together (or until you join a Hawaiian band). Once you learn how to play the right combination of strings (and more importantly, how to stay away from certain strings), you can play many different styles. Because the bottom strings are tuned much higher than normal, many people use a combination of fifth and/or fourth strings (in other words, lighter gauge strings) in the bottom three strings. This is the tuning that **DeWitt "Scotty" Scott** uses in his [Basic C6th Nonpedal Lap Steel Method](#).

Some people play this tuning with the bottom string tuned to C# rather than C. This makes it a **A7 tuning** and gives you additional chordal possibilities. I think this tuning works better with eight strings.

Here's a list of some other common tunings. Some of these are from **Stacy Phillips'** steel guitar methods; others from playing around; others are suggested by other players.

Alternative C6 Tuning:

1. E
2. C
3. G
4. E
5. C
6. A

Another C6 Alternate Tuning:

1. E
2. C
3. A
4. G
5. C
6. G

Yet Another C6 Alternate Tuning:

1. E
2. C
3. A
4. G
5. C
6. E

The three tunings above are variations of the C6 tuning I've described previously. Each one has its strengths and weaknesses. Experiment with each to see which one fits your style best.

Here's another C6 Tuning:

1. G
2. E
3. C
4. A
5. G
6. E

Keith Cary says of this tuning: I was lucky enough to get a long lesson from Vance Terry about 15 years ago. His pedal steel was set up at a club somewhere so I brought one of my spare 6-strings for him to play on. (I only had 6-strings at the time) It was tuned E-G-A-C-E-G. He said that if he only had six strings that's the way he's tune it. He was amazing with those six strings, making fat jazz chords look so effortless. It has that nice 1-3-5 Dobro thing happening on top, giving just a little more space if you want to avoid the 6th. It's always felt too strange to me to not have the root or fifth as the top string.

G6 Tuning:

1. D
2. B
3. G
4. E
5. B
6. G

This tuning is great for playing the classic ballad "Sleepwalk" by Santo and Johnny. Another variation of this tuning leaves the bottom three strings in the open G tuning described above, then moves the sixth note to the third string as follows:

1. B
2. G
3. E
4. D
5. B
6. G

G9 Tuning:

1. D
2. A
3. G
4. D
5. B
6. G

C13 Tuning:

1. E
2. C
3. G
4. Bb
5. D
6. A

C# Minor Tuning:

1. E
2. C#
3. G#
4. E
5. C#
6. G#

F#9 Tuning:

1. E
2. C#
3. G#
4. E
5. A#
6. F#

B11 Tuning:

1. E
2. C#
3. A
4. F#
5. D#
6. B

Em or G6 tuning:

1. E
2. B
3. G
4. D
5. B
6. E

Lance Ashdown writes about this tuning:

This tuning has the advantage that it is only different from the standard guitar tuning on one string (hey, it makes it easier for those learning steel as a second language), yet gives easy one-fret bar positionings of all major and minor chords in the standard folk and country keys.

1. D
2. B
3. G
4. D
5. B
6. E

This tuning was suggested by Pieter Verkuylen (verkuyle@xs4all.nl), who says about it:

I play an old Irish reel called 'Princess Royal' in this tuning and a chord/melody arrangement of 'Round Midnight', a slow, melancholic jazz classic. I also use this tuning for one or two songs in the band. It works well in E and Emin of course, but also in songs in Amin. The -min7 sound gives extra 'flavour' that fits well in rock and jazz tunes/songs and makes accompanying swing/bebop tunes with all those II V I- chord progressions a lot easier. Retuning is quickly done: I hate to spend much time tuning on stage.

E13 Tuning:

1. E
2. C#
3. G#
4. E
5. D
6. B

Cmaj9 Tuning:

1. D
2. B
3. G
4. E
5. C
6. G

The above tuning gives you three chords - C major (G C E G), E minor 7 (E G B D) and G major (G G B D).

Hide Hanenburg's open Gsus2 Tuning:

1. D
2. A
3. G
4. D
5. G
6. C

Note that in this tuning, the sixth string is tuned higher than the fifth string, one whole note below the fourth string.

William Leavitt's new tuning from **Steel Guitar World**:

1. D
2. C
3. Bb
4. G
5. E
6. C#

This tuning gives you a C# diminished chord, a G minor chord, and a C major chord, among others. It's a very interesting tuning for jazzier tunes. More information on this tuning, including tab for a series of jazz standards, can be obtained from **Mike Ihde** (mihde@berklee.edu). **Joe Wright** lists all the [modal patterns for this tuning \(in the key of C\)](#) on his excellent [web site](#).

David Hamburger's G11 tuning from the July 1996 **Guitar Player** magazine:

1. C
2. A
3. F
4. D
5. B
6. A

David Torn's lap steel tuning from September 1996 **Guitar Player** magazine:

1. D
2. C#
3. B
4. F#
5. B
6. E

Hide Hanenburg says of this tuning, "I tried it a few nights ago and I thought it sounded ambient, ethereal, "pretty" -- and kinda weird. I thought it was cool, so I'm keeping one of my lap steels in this tuning for now."

[Bob Brozman](#) wrote me recently with some additional modal tunings that look like a lot of fun. If you are playing solo lap steel, you should definitely experiment with these tunings. Check out Bob's recent article in [Guitar Player](#) magazine.

1. C
2. C
3. G
4. C
5. G
6. C

The lack of a third note in the above tuning makes it easy to imply either a major or minor chord.

1. D
2. C
3. G
4. C
5. G
6. C

Bob says the above tuning gives a great modal sound.

1. Eb
2. C
3. G
4. C
5. G
6. C

1. E
2. C
3. G
4. C
5. G
6. C

Note that the four tunings above are exactly the same except for the highest string. As you change the pitch of the highest string, the entire feel of the tuning changes. Look at the same type of changes represented in the G tunings below.

1. D
2. Bb
3. G
4. D
5. G
6. D

1. D
2. B
3. F#
4. D
5. G
6. D

1. D
2. C
3. G
4. D
5. G
6. D

The following two tunings are centered around a D tonality. Compare them to the open D tuning mentioned previously.

1. D
2. A
3. F
4. D
5. A
6. D

1. D
2. A
3. G
4. D
5. A
6. D

This tuning is the one used by Ben Harper on his Weissenborn-style guitars. The lack of a third means the major/minor problem previously discussed is not present in this tuning.

1. D
2. A
3. D
4. D
5. A
6. D

Bill Reid writes, "Makuakane, Billy Reid Sr. played a D9th and I have followed suit:

1. E
2. C
3. A
4. F#
5. D
6. A

"You have your major DF#A with an optional lower bass A also the seventh with the C. The top three strings give you the minor chord like the C6th The F#AC give you the diminished chords. When slanted, the top three strings give you the 6th chords and slanted 5,4,3 give you the related major chords. In some respects it's like the B11th . He played C#mi for many years and E7th and AMaj .The D9th is a fast melodic tuning and and great for popular as well as Hawaiian."
