

How to Buy Strings

Sharon Thormahlen 2025

Things you need to know to order strings:

1. Kind of string
2. Note Name and color: red, blue or clear
3. Octave
4. String Number on your harp
5. Gauge (for nylon and fluorocarbon)
6. Vibrating length plus about 6" to give you what you need to tie the knot and wind it on the tuning pin.

When your harp maker designed your harp, it was made for a particular kind of string. Sometimes the harp is designed to take more than 1 kind of string but not always. You should consult your harp maker about changing string types on your harp. If you do change the type of string, it's likely you would need a lever regulation, as that is dependent upon the gauge of the string.

Most harp makers don't sell strings. They rely on the string companies to supply you with the correct strings. Robinson's has gone out of business as well as Vermont Strings. We still have North Shore in Massachusetts run by Eric Stallings and Markwood Heavenly Strings in Oregon run by Laurie Hill of Mountain Glen Harps. There are also various stores that carry strings like ~~Melody's~~.

So that is to say that you can't just call your harp maker for the strings you need. You will need to know exactly what string you're ordering, so let's figure that out.

1. Kinds of Strings:

Nylon, wound nylon and bass wires

Nylon, Lever Gut or Concert Gut and bass wires

Fluorocarbon and bass wires

Other strings: Sapiro, Kershner and Aquila (nylagut) <https://www.aquilausa.com/ngh-harp-string>

Fluorocarbon is actually a nylon extruded in a different way than what we think of as nylon. It is not Carbon Fiber. The KF means Kareha Fluorocarbon which is where in Japan fluorocarbon was invented as fishing line. It does not mean Karbon Fiber.

Where to get strings:

Nylon:

North Shore Strings in Massachusetts. Eric Stallings eric.stallings@northshorestringsusa.com

Markwood Heavenly Strings in Oregon Markwood HeavenlyStrings mwstrings@markwoodstrings.com

Melody Music Melody Music <melody@folkharp.com>

Lever and Concert Gut:

Lyon & Healy Music Sales musicsales@lyonhealy.com Vanderbilt:

vanderbilt Orders orders@vanderbiltmusic.com Harp Stores like

Melody's, Atlanta Harp Center, Virginia Harp Center

Fluorocarbon

Lyon & Healy Music Sales musicsales@lyonhealy.com

Vanderbilt: vanderbilt Orders orders@vanderbiltmusic.com

Bass Wires: All harp makers use different bass wires. For example Thormahlen uses Steel core with fiber fill and silver plated copper wrap. Dusty uses bronze with nylon wrap and steel fiber stainless steel wrap

2. Note Name, Octave and String Number:

On the piano the lowest C is C1 and the octaves apparently go from C to C. The highest octave on the piano is octave 8.

The numbering system on the harp starts with E1 at the top of a pedal harp which is 2 strings higher than your 36 string harp and 4 strings higher than your 34 string harp.

The octaves change between F and E. I tried to find out why but the only reason I could come up with was that pedal harps often start with E above your C on a 36 string harp.

If there are higher notes than E1 they are called the zero octave. On a 36 string harp, your highest C is C1 and the first octave goes down to F1 and then changes to E2. You only have 5 octave 1 strings on your 36 string harp, 3 octave 1 strings on your 34 string harp. Your lowest bass wire strings on a 36 string harp are 6th octave and you have only 3 of those. The E, D, C. Middle C is C4 or 4th octave C.

To make matters a little more (or maybe a lot more confusing) if you use Savarez Alliance Strings, their top C1 string is marked as zero octave on the package.

On YOUR harp, string number one is string number one whether it's a C, B, A or any other note. The number system is tied directly to the harp model. There is no naming convention like that used with pedal harps. Your string #1 might be a C while mine might be an A.

Each string on our harps will be number named differently depending on what our top note is. And the numbers on the string packages of lever and concert gut will differ

3. Gauges:

You can get calipers at a local hardware store to measure the gauges of your strings. You have to be careful to hold the calipers at a 90-degree angle to the string when measuring or you will get an incorrect reading. Also remember that your string has stretched over the years so the measurement most likely will be smaller than the gauge you actually need.

Nylon: The standard gauges for nylon strings are:

.020, .025, .028, .032, .036, .040, .045, .050, .055, .060

If your string measures, for example, .038 then it's most likely a .040.

Fluorocarbon can be complicated as harp makers use different gauges. There does not seem to be a standard. Fisher Harps from Canada and Thormahlen Harps from Oregon have the same gauges but Lyon & Healy do not share the same gauges below middle C. I measured all the gauges and luckily the gauges were compatible from 4th octave middle C up to 1st octave A for a 34 string harp. The B is the same as the A. Lyon & Healy does not have a C but Vanderbilt does. It is 45R (R is for Red). Below middle C on a Thormahlen or Fisher you need:

B 105,

A 108

G 121

F 127B (for blue)

E 140

D 150

C 160 R (for red)

Lever and Concert Gut: Things are much easier for lever or concert gut strings as you just need to buy the standard strings that are packaged for gut strings. Thormahlen harps starts gut at string #5 (2nd octave E). The top 5 strings are .025 nylon. The complicated thing here is that the numbering system is different. The package of the 2nd octave E says it is string #8. On your harp it is string #6 so all the packages are 2 numbers higher for a 36 string harp. For a 34 string harp, the packages are 4 numbers higher on the package than on your harp.

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