HOW TO DAMPEN DRUMS

Dampening, or muffling, is a method of reducing the resonance or harsh overtones that drums sometimes emit. Many drum head manufacturers offer heads with built-in dampening, but sometimes further modification is necessary. Here are some of the more popular techniques of dampening drums.

1. Put a blanket or pillow inside your bass drum. Experiment with the placement of the muffling. Note the difference of sound when the muffling is touching or not touching the batter head. The batter head is the drum head that is struck with the kick pedal.

2. Cut a hole in the back drum head to reduce resonance. The drum head is the head that is not struck by the pedal. Use a razor blade and cut somewhere between the rim and the center of the drum. Use a bowl or coffee can to outline the cut. A bigger hole results in less resonance.

3. Place a cloth strip against the inside of the batter head. Cut a strip of cloth about 4 inches (10 cm) wide. Secure the strip against the drum head by tightening the ends inside the tuning rim. The strip is usually set to the left or right side of the drum head, not in the center.

4. Place dampening gel on the batter head of your snare or tom drum. A few companies offer these small gel pads, which stick to the drum head and offer light dampening. Put it in a spot where you will not hit it when you play.

- Slowly run your thumb around the top of the drum in a circle, about 1.5 inches (3.8 cm) from the rim, while striking the center of the drum. Take note of the position of your thumb when the drum muffles best - this is usually a good place to stick the gel.
- Move the gel around and listen to the different timbres you create by placing the gel in certain spots. Add another gel pad or two if you want more muffling.

5. Put a drum ring on top of your snare or tom drum. Drum rings are usually about 1 inch (2.5 cm) wide, made of thin plastic, and rest around the diameter of the drum. Although these rings are available in music stores, you can make your own by cutting a circle from the outer edge of an old drum head with a razor blade.

6. Put a strip of duct tape on the batter head. Experiment with different lengths of tape to find the right sound.

7. Stand where the audience will be when you are playing your drums (if you are dampening them for a performance).

- Have someone play your drums while you listen.
- Adjust the dampening as you see fit. The sound of a drum differs greatly from the drummer's position to the audience's.

TIPS

- Do not use too much muffling, or your drum will lose all resonance and sound "dead." Instead, start with a small amount of muffling and, bit by bit, add more, until you reach the desired tone quality.
- Listen carefully to your drum before applying dampening. Not all drums need to be dampened.
- Learn to tune your drums correctly. Often, this will remove the need for dampening.

YOU WILL NEED

- Pillow or blanket
- Razor blade
- Bowl or can
- Cloth strip
- Drum gel
- Drum rings
- Tape