



Blue Grass
Family Band
Song Book

SAMPLE

by Bradley Laird

**10 POPULAR
BLUE GRASS TUNES
FOR ALL 5 INSTRUMENTS & VOCALS
BASIC ARRANGEMENTS FOR BEGINNERS**

**Everyone can learn to play the same
tunes and songs in the same keys!**

www.bradleylaird.com



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**10 POPULAR
BLUE GRASS TUNES
FOR ALL 5 INSTRUMENTS & VOCALS**

FIRST DIGITAL EDITION

*Dedicated to Bill Reynolds & his Family
who helped me realize how useful a little
collection like this could be.*

Published by Bradley Laird
www.bradleylaird.com

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and are arranged by Bradley Laird.

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SAMPLE



INTRODUCTION

Over the years I have taught thousands of people to play bluegrass and old-time music, either through my books and videos or in private lessons. One of my goals with every student has been to help them get to the point where they can play music with other people. One of the problems I encountered over the years was the fact that most beginning books for the various instruments teach different songs, sometimes in different keys!

I understand that banjo pickers often begin with songs like Cripple Creek and mandolin players often start with Boil Them Cabbage Down. A fiddle teacher might prefer to start folks out on Old Joe Clark, and a guitar teacher... well, you get the idea. Everybody isn't learning the same tunes at the same time. I realize that there are various good reasons for choosing to teach a beginner certain songs but eventually, in order to play together, it becomes necessary that everybody learns some of the same tunes!

I set out to solve this problem and this book is the result. Each beginning player, regardless of their instrument of choice (banjo, mandolin, guitar, fiddle or bass) will still need some basic lessons to learn beginning techniques and how to read the printed notation, either tablature or standard notation. Those beginning steps can be learned using one of my beginning instruction courses. As soon as a person is able they should then supplement their practice by learning to play the songs in this book. Then, when everyone gets together to play as a group, they will have a common set of tunes and songs.

The arrangements in this book have all been made as simple as possible without losing the "essence" of the tunes. All of the songs can be played using only four chords. Some of the songs are written in the key of G and some in the key of A and I will explain that as needed in the chapters for each individual instrument.

The book is organized by instrument (or vocals) and within each chapter the songs are in alphabetical order. Special instructions and tips for each instrument are found within each chapter. As the purchaser of this book you are free to print out and distribute the pages you need to provide to your family or bluegrass friends. However, I would ask you not to post this PDF file (or parts of it) on the internet or to spread around digital copies. I have put a lot of hours into creating this resource and anyone who wants a copy can easily get a copy of their own by the same means which you did. They are available at www.bradleylaird.com. (Certainly feel free to distribute the free sample download version which is found on my website.)

Happy picking and singing!
Bradley Laird



If you have already worked your way through my beginning “Banjo Instruction Course” you should have no trouble with these arrangements. Where possible I have kept them simple, but some of the tunes will require you to practice some patterns, licks and rolls which you have not used before. Take them slowly and you’ll soon be playing them.

All of the tunes are arranged for banjo in standard G tuning and in the key of G. Some of these tunes, such as Boil ‘Em Cabbage Down (and other “fiddle tunes”) are preferred in the key of A by the mandolin and fiddle players. In order to play any of these banjo arrangements in the key of A you simply put a capo at your 2nd fret, also raising the 5th string two frets as well, and you’ll instantly be playing in the key of A. Details on this are explained fully here: <http://www.bradleylaird.com/survival>

The tunes in this book only use a total of 4 chords: G, C, D and F. At the end of this section I will show you the chords you need if you need a little help playing backup for the other musicians.

BOIL ‘EM CABBAGE DOWN - BANJO

G S C G S D
 T I M T M I T M T M T I M T I M T I M T M I T M T M T I M I T M
 G S S C G S D P G
 T I T M T I T M T M T I M T I M T I T M T I T M T T I M T I

Notes:

This is the exact version of the tune taught in “Banjo Instruction Course”. To play this with a fiddle player or mandolin player, you should capo at the 2nd fret and raise the 5th string by 2 frets. The guitar and bass parts in this book are written in both the key of G and the key of A, so if there is no mandolin or fiddle player, you can play it in G or A.



Whether you are a beginner or an accomplished bass player of another style, there are a couple of things you should know about playing bluegrass bass. First, nearly all songs in bluegrass are played in “two beat” or 2/4 style. (Waltzes are in 3/4, but they are pretty rare and none are found in this book.)

Second, at the most elementary level, the bass will play a note on each of those two beats. Without getting into any heavy music theory I’ll just say that nearly all of your notes will be a “root” alternated by the fifth note of the scale of the chord currently happening. But you don’t need to worry about that now. You can simply play the notes as written, either reading the standard bass clef notation at the top, or the bass tablature at the bottom. If you learn to play these ten songs you will have absorbed a pretty good basic understanding of how the bass in a bluegrass ensemble functions.

Whenever I play bass I like to try to achieve these 3 goals:

1. Play correct notes, in tune. The ones shown are one of several correct options but they are a good place to start. Wrong notes on the bass “do more damage” than wrong notes on some of the other instruments so it is important to know where you are in the song and do your best to play “correct” notes above all else.

2. My second goal, and truthfully it is perhaps more important than goal number 1, is to play each note at the correct time. Steady is the word. Yes, you must play “with” the others even if they stray from perfect timing, but you shouldn’t be too easily led astray. You may hear others say that your job is to keep time and that is correct, but the thing those folks often forget is that they have the same job! It is everyone’s job to play with good timing. Since your part, at least in this book, is fairly simple it may be easier for you to play in time than the other instruments. Do your best, practice with good solid recordings or a metronome, and then remain a tiny bit flexible to help keep it all together. Listening to the mandolin chop and the downbeats of the guitar can help you “lock in.”

3. My third and final goal, and one which I often do not spend much time worrying about since I am focusing on goals 1 and 2 so much, is to play musically. Yes, even simple “boomp boomp boomp boomp” can be played musically or not. Work on your tone. Work on your separation between notes. (Note: overlapping ringing notes can be very muddy sounding.) Try to play at the appropriate volume. And, when all of these things are coming together then, and only then, should you attempt to play “fancy runs” and “walking lines.” In other words, fancy notes played out of time, with poor rhythm and tone, can be more harmful to the overall sound than good, clean, basic playing.

You may at times feel unappreciated as a bass player. But, trust me, good musicians will feel when a bass is played well and when it is not. They may never say it, but they know. Do not take your job lightly. It is far more important than most people know.

BOIL 'EM CABBAGE DOWN - BASS

BASIC - Key of A

BASIC - Key of G

Notes:

1) This song is generally played by fiddle and mandolin players in the key of A. Without them, or if the banjo and guitar players do not have “capos”, it can be helpful to be able to play it in the key of G too.



All ten of the fiddle solos in this book are written in the same key as the mandolin. In many ways the fiddle and mandolin solos are similar since the instruments are both tuned the same way. However, most of these solos have been written to take advantage of the fiddle's ability to hold longer notes. Also, here and there, the "shuffle rhythm" will be used.

When deciding exactly what to play for your fiddle solo you might want to try playing these ten versions first. If you find difficult spots, or just want to play a more simple melody line, you might also try playing the lead vocalist's melody line which you will find in the section called "Melody & Lyrics." Obviously, a couple of the tunes are instrumentals only (with no lyrics) so in that case you will not have that option.

Another good idea, before you settle on exactly what you play as a solo, is to attempt to play the mandolin parts written in this book. In theory, since the instruments are tuned the same, you could play the same parts. However, there are some things which mandolin players do, such as playing a long series of repeated 8th notes, which might sound rather choppy and strange on the fiddle. But, it is still worth looking through the mandolin solos since you might find some more licks that you really like.

Since the fiddle is not really a rhythm instrument you do not have to learn to play chords like the mandolin player does. However, sometimes it sounds good to play an "offbeat chop" effect by bringing the bow hair (near the frog) down onto the strings abruptly with only the slightest lengthwise movement. This creates a very short, chopping sound. Usually it is done on a pair of strings while your left hand fingers lightly damp or deaden the pitch of the note. You may need to ask a good fiddle player or your teacher for some pointers in how to do this effectively.

Keep in mind that the "chopping" technique I described should not be overused. Usually the mandolin is playing a similar "chopping" offbeat rhythm and it is redundant for both players to do the same thing. However, when the mandolin is playing a solo, that is a great time to provide that missing offbeat chop.

Sometimes you may find it appropriate to play long notes, double stops or little melodic "fills" to accompany the singing and playing. Little bits and pieces of the written solos here will give you some ideas. Try to "answer" the phrases being played or sung and don't overplay. Simple is often best.

Keep in mind also that it is perfectly alright to just hold the fiddle and play nothing. Sometimes that is the best sounding thing to play instead of "sawing away" continuously throughout the song. Always remember that the idea is to compliment and enhance whatever the singers or other soloists are doing. When it is your turn to play a solo, they should think in the same manner.

BOIL 'EM CABBAGE DOWN - FIDDLE -

BOIL 'EM CABBAGE DOWN - BASIC

BOIL 'EM CABBAGE DOWN - DOUBLESTOPS

Notes:

- 1) The first version is a simplified melody and is played on a single string.
- 2) The second version uses “double stops”. Bowing indications are shown in the first two measures. That style of fiddle bowing is called a “shuffle” and continues throughout.



GUITAR

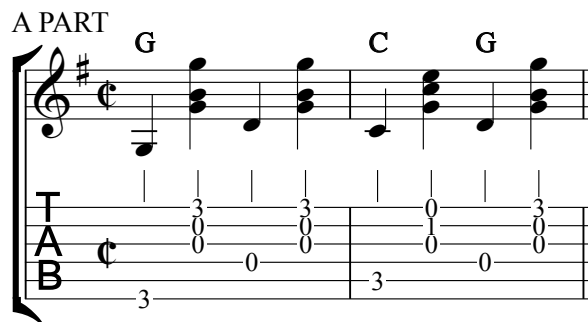
All ten of the songs in this book are written in the key of G. To play in the bluegrass style it is correct to use a “capo” to play in other keys. Some of the tunes in this collection are written in the key of A for the benefit of the mandolin and fiddle and you’ll need to place a capo at your second fret to raise the sound of your guitar to the key of A. You still “think in the key of G” but your sound is higher.

At the top of each page you will see an indication of whether you need to use your capo. If you do not have a mandolin or fiddle player you can play all of these tunes in the key of G. Incidentally, the banjo player will also use a capo at the same fret as you to move up to other keys.

The songs in this book can all be played using only four chords. They are G, C, D and F. At the end of this section I have included chord charts in case you need to review them.

Bluegrass guitar generally plays the “down beat” and the “off beat” maintaining a “boom-chunk” or “bass-strum” rhythm. Here is an example of that from the beginning of “Cripple Creek”:

A PART



G C G

This book assumes you already understand how to read tablature. You can see that each measure has four basic notes. A bass note followed by a strum, then another bass note followed by another strum. All four of those notes are played with individual down strokes of the pick. They are counted as “one-and-two-and.”

It is possible to insert some up strokes in your playing but they are not generally written in here. The up strokes will always come after one of those four basic down strokes, if you use them at all. It is good to limit the amount of up strokes and reserve them for rhythmic emphasis at the end of phrases. Continuous down and up strokes creates a very “strummy sound” which is usually frowned on in bluegrass circles.

I have written all the strums as 3 strings even though it is okay to make them 4 and sometimes 5 strings wide. Remember that you are playing the role of bass player on notes 1 and 3 and mandolin player, with those off beats, on notes 2 and 4. Listen to them and try to play together.

BOIL 'EM CABBAGE DOWN - GUITAR

Capo = 2, Key of A

BASIC BLUEGRASS RHYTHM

The first system of music consists of a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The melody is written in a simple, rhythmic style. Below the staff is a guitar tablature (TAB) with six lines. The TAB includes fret numbers (0, 2, 3) and a '3' indicating a triplet. Above the staff, the chords G, C, G, and D are indicated.

The second system of music is identical to the first, showing the same melody and tablature for the chords G, C, G, and D. A large, semi-transparent blue watermark with the word "SAMPLE" is overlaid across the center of the system.

BLUEGRASS RHYTHM WITH ADDED "RUNS"

The third system of music features the same basic melody and tablature as the previous systems, but with added "runs" (ornaments) in the melody line. The runs are indicated by slurs and additional notes in the treble clef staff. The tablature remains the same as in the previous systems.

The fourth system of music continues the melody and tablature with added runs. The runs are indicated by slurs and additional notes in the treble clef staff. The tablature remains the same as in the previous systems.



Some of these ten solos or breaks are written in the key of G and some are in the key of A. Later as you progress in your playing you will learn to play in other keys.

If you have worked through my beginning “Mandolin Instruction Course” you shouldn’t have much trouble with the solos. At the end of this section I have included chord charts you will need to play rhythm for all ten of these songs.

Some of these solos are pretty easy and some of them will require more practice. Take them slow when you are practicing on your own and concentrate on the correct pick directions, clear notes and good timing. Here is the first tune, one you’ve already seen in my beginner course:

SAMPLE

BOIL ‘EM CABBAGE DOWN - MANDOLIN -

Musical notation for the first system of "Boil 'em Cabbage Down". The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is common time (C). The melody is written on a treble clef staff, and the fretboard is shown below with strings T (top) and B (bottom) indicated. Chord diagrams are placed above the staff: A, D, A, E.

Musical notation for the second system of "Boil 'em Cabbage Down". The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is common time (C). The melody is written on a treble clef staff, and the fretboard is shown below with strings T (top) and B (bottom) indicated. Chord diagrams are placed above the staff: A, D, A, E, A.



MELODY & LYRICS

This section contains the melody and lyrics for the eight songs in this collection which have words. Some of them might surprise you since you don't often hear people sing "Boil 'Em Cabbage Down" or "Cripple Creek." A lot of those old time fiddle tunes do have lyrics, and if they didn't folks would make up some!

Each song is written in the key of G. This can be played on a piano, or by one of the members of your group who can read standard notation, so you can hear the way the melody goes. Another great idea is to pull up versions of the songs on YouTube or on recordings and listen to other people singing them. You'll discover that everyone does it the same way but it will give you some ideas.

At the end of this section is a short primer on bluegrass harmony singing. This teaches the basics of bluegrass style harmonizing. You can use this information to sort out singing duets (lead and tenor) and trio (lead, tenor, baritone) harmonies.

BOIL 'EM CABBAGE DOWN

TRADITIONAL

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G major (one sharp). The first staff contains the first line of the melody with lyrics: BOIL 'EM CAB - BAGE DOWN BOYS, BAKE 'EM HOE - CAKES BROWN, THE. The second staff contains the second line of the melody with lyrics: ON - LY SONG THAT I CAN SING IS BOIL 'EM CAB - BAGE DOWN. Chord symbols G, C, and D are placed above the notes. A large blue 'SAMPLE' watermark is overlaid on the lyrics.

Verse 1:

Raccoon has a bushy tail
Possum's tail is bare
Rabbit's got no tail at all
But a little bunch of hair

Chorus:

**Boil them cabbage down, boys
Bake them hoe-cakes brown
The only song that I can sing is
Boil 'em cabbage down**

Verse 2:

Raccoon and the possum
Comin' cross the prairie
Raccoon says to the possum
Do you want to marry?

Verse 3:

Raccoon up a 'simmon tree
Possum on the ground
Possum says to the raccoon
Shake them 'simmons down!

Verse 4:

Jaybird's got the whooping cough
Sparrow's got the colic
Along came the frog with a fiddle on his back
Inquiring his way to the frolic.

Note: See page 76 to learn 2 or 3-part harmony for this song!

BASICS OF HARMONY SINGING

Bluegrass Harmony

This teaches the basics of bluegrass style harmonizing. You can use this information to sort out singing duets (lead and tenor) and trio (lead, tenor, baritone) harmonies. Some songs are easier to work out the harmonies than others. I am going to use one of the most simple melody in this book as our example so that you can understand the principles which create the magic of harmony singing.

In bluegrass there are generally three singing parts. If you are singing the melody you are called the LEAD singer and we say you are singing LEAD. So, lead is nothing but the melody of the song. If you sing a song by yourself then you are the lead singer.

If you add a second vocal part (creating a “duet”) you will generally add a part just above the lead melody. This is called the TENOR part. In a moment I will explain how you find the tenor part above the lead singer’s melody.

The third vocal part in bluegrass is found just below the melody or lead and it is called the BARI-TONE part.

Chords Are The Essence of Harmony

As you know from observing a guitar player they are often playing chords. But, what exactly is a chord? A chord is when 3 different notes are played or sung at the same time. To keep this as simple as possible I want you to notice that throughout this book I have written the chords above the music. Here is an example:

TRADITIONAL

The image shows two staves of music. The top staff is a melody line in G major (one sharp) with lyrics: BOIL 'EM CAB - BAGE DOWN BOYS, BAKE 'EM HOE - CARES BROWN, THE. The bottom staff is a chord line with lyrics: ON - LY SONG THAT I CAN SING IS BOIL 'EM CAB - BAGE DOWN. Chords are written above the notes: G, C, G, D, G.

As you can see the first measure is marked G. That means the band plays a G major chord. When singing you would also sing notes of the G chord during that measure. In the second measure you can see that the chord changes to a C chord. Then back to G and then it goes to D.

In the song Boil Them Cabbage Down the melody (written above) is always on a note found in the current chord. For example, in measure one the melody sings a B note over a G chord. This works because a B note is one of the 3 notes of a G chord. So what are the three notes of a G chord?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Each person in the group, whether banjo, guitar, mandolin, fiddle or bass, will either come to the table already knowing how to play or they will need some other basic instruction to learn how to hold the instrument, how to tune, basic techniques, scales, chords, etc. Here is a list of other learning materials sorted by instrument:

Banjo:

Banjo Instruction Course - I wrote this complete course for the beginner bluegrass banjo player. It covers everything from tuning to rolls, chords, slides, hammer-ons, pull-offs, tunes, chords and backup. It is a PDF ebook with MP3 tracks. It is available here: www.bradleylaird.com/dojo

The Flint Hill Scrolls - This is a follow-up book for banjo players who have already learned the basics. It is a fun exploration of basic music theory, chord and scale formation, and other topics. You can read more about it and download a copy here: www.bradleylaird.com/dojo

Mandolin:

Mandolin Instruction Course - I wrote this complete course for the beginning mandolin player. It covers everything from tuning to playing chords, lead solos and backup. It is a PDF ebook with MP3 tracks. It is available here: www.bradleylaird.com/mandou-site

Mandolin Master Class - This is a follow-up book for mandolin players who have already learned the basics. This book and tracks covers music theory, chord and scale formation, improvisation, practice techniques and other topics. You can read more about it and download a copy here: www.bradleylaird.com/mandou-site

Mandolin Training Camp - This book is a full of exercises and ideas to get your fingers to do what you tell them to do! Read about it here: www.bradleylaird.com/mandou-site

Video Mandolin Lessons - I have created a huge series of video mandolin lessons, many which are completely free, which you can find here: www.bradleylaird.com/playthemandolin/videos.html

Guitar:

Free Bluegrass Guitar Lessons - I put together a website with basic lessons in playing bluegrass style guitar. This is good for complete beginners or musicians who have played other styles but don't know how bluegrass works. The site also have guitar tabs and chord charts. They are here: www.bradleylaird.com/guitar

Other Information:

Capos, Playing in Other Keys, Jam Session Cheat Sheets - You can find this free information here: www.bradleylaird.com/survival

Clawhammer Banjo, Dulcimer, etc. - I am constantly adding new lessons and materials for other instruments which you can find at my main site here: www.bradleylaird.com