

How to tune a Djembe

Look at rope pairs here. I always cross the ropes that almost touch as they pass through the same loop of the bottom cradle as pairs for the first row. It does very little tightening, but the row goes fast and easy and stays very low to the bottom cradle. When you are FINDING the pair of ropes you are using ALWAYS look at the top ring. Once you get started the ropes cross here and there on the way down and finding the two ropes of a pair can be confusing. Here the pairs of the whole first row of weave are the two ropes that pass through one cradle knot on the top ring. This makes a wide space up top to weave the rope.



Now you need to learn this tuning mantra:

- Under Pair
 - Dive back between
 - Over top
 - Under next pair
- At far left see the vertical rope end half hitch, Next the first pair have been crossed. and the second pair are threaded and ready to be pulled. Always do each mantra part by itself and up near the top ring where there is more room, then slide each part all the way down the pairs as far as it will go as you remove slack and snug up. Always pull down toward the trumpet slightly, at an angle tangent to the drum. This way it pulls easiest and stays neatly as low as possible. Low allows more rows of weave, though if your drum is cranked like this one, you will never finish the second row!

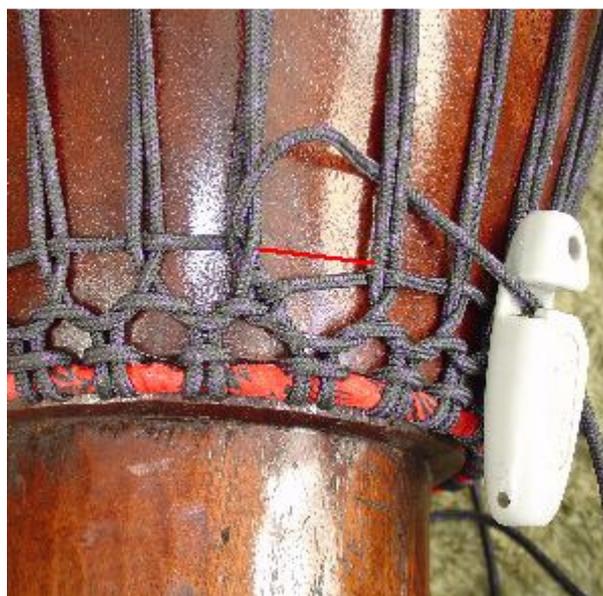


Now a brief break for a rant.

Always pull diamonds safely. These first ones you can just grab the rope and pull, they aren't that hard. As they get harder you can hurt yourself! First protect your hands. Either use a rope [gripping tool](#) or gloves, or wrap the rope around a stick and then pull on that as a handle. Rope can really damage hands! Always pull angling down and tangent to the drum. It simply is easier. To protect your arms and back from injury do this: Put the drum on some carpet and sideways against your couch. Rotate the weave you are pulling so the rope is slightly away from you sitting on the floor, and the rope comes right at you on a tangent. Put one bare foot near the top ring, and one on the trumpet, pinning the drum so it can't move. Get a hold of the rope as near the weave as possible. You are probably leaning forward, knees bent to do this, like trying to grab your ankles. Now just like rowing a boat you push back with your thigh muscles, lean back with your back, and help out with your arms. Using this method I have seen 100 pound teenage girls with no upper body strength fully tune the largest djembe....and without injury! I have pulled arm muscles that can take weeks to heal being careless or in a hurry, please be careful !

Now some of you are saying, wait what is with this weave mantra, he has it all backwards! Yes if you search the net you will find many references to the opposite mantra (I don't even want to say it, but it begins with "over two"). It is true that that method has one advantage. The knots of the weave are harder to pull out or open. That is also a disadvantage! Most traditional drum builders I have met use "my" mantra, and here is why. By going under first, you are pulling one rope OVER another, this is both physically easier(see 100 LB girl), and damages the bowl finish less. It is easier to keep the rows low and tidy, using this method. If you finish the mantra with "under the next pair" that pressure by the next pair to be crossed keeps these weave knots locked just as well. A major reason for me to use my mantra is I end up working on your drum, and with this method I can easily pop a few weaves out and then grab the weave rope and just pull it backwards unlocking multiple weaves at a time. This makes drum repair or re-heading much faster and easier. Some will argue and say, no, the other way is best. I figure they do it in Africa that way for a reason, and after using the "wrong", American mantra, and then trying this method, the advantages are great. Maybe indigeoness wisdom? Well anyway, you can't tell "nobody nuttin", so either try this method, or work from the opposite mantra....ok, ok back to work!

Ok, I work fast. I am all the way around the first row, and have just crossed the loop knot pair (note, I made this easier because I kept the loop up high toward the top ring, and because it has a minimum of knot in the vertical. Where it doubles back to the half hitch at bottom, no worries just treat that double rope as one rope.) Time to start the next row. Ever seen those drums where the weave just spirals up to infinity? avoid that by finishing the row. Follow across and under the first pair you crossed to make a nice finishing horizontal line (red)



Now I find a rope to tuck under back to the left and this finishes and "locks" down the row. Now when I start the second row, I can keep it nice and low, too!



Ok, remember those rope pairs for the Weave? Now we use the ropes that adjoin each other in separate adjoining upper cradle knots for the pair to weave, This row is a little harder as you are threading the rope through and back out of the gaps now narrowed by the first pairs crossing in row one. A needle nose pliers may help here in the threading.

Here the "under two" part is snugged down and the rest of the weave mantra is threaded ready to snug down.



Now the first weave of the second row is ready to pull. Follow the red path... Note how the "under the next pair" looks a little confusing with the far right ropes crossed. If you follow the rope up, you see it is correct. ALWAYS find your pair at the top ring !



The first "Diamond" of the second row is now pulled and the rope is crossed. Look straight down from the crossed ropes and the shape made by the rope below is like a diamond (point up and point down). This is why tuning is called "pulling diamonds".



I have threaded the second diamond. Another trick for rope handling is to use a loop in the middle of your working length for your "needle" instead of the end. It makes for less rope handling.



Second diamond, row two, ready to pull!



Third weave threaded, ready to pull... But you know what? This drum sings! As I mentioned, with the verticals pulled tight on a perfectly dry drum, it should sound great. I usually put in the first row of weave <basically on principal. I like to get the next row started, so a buyer is started the right way. I also leave a weave threaded like this so you can see the pattern.

