

YUMI-CARE GUIDE

by Don Symanski

A bamboo yumi has living qualities that are contained in its strung and unstrung shape. It is made up of bamboo (grass), wood, glue, leather and rattan; basic natural materials. Through a yumimaker's skill, these natural materials are shaped and contained into a living form. No two bamboo yumi are the same. Each has a particular nature to be discovered. In having a yumi you are its caretaker and attendant. Proper care and use allows it to become tamed and mature to an elegant old age.

When the balanced shape of a yumi is maintained and it is shot properly it will serve you well, and be a teacher to you for many years. Also consider the range of knowledge and feelings that comes to you throughout its life.

By not attending to the care of a yumi, through general neglect or careless use, it will lose its life. A simple example is that if you leave it unattended in a corner of a room for extended time, it will warp and twist out of balance to where it is of no use, and becomes an impotent antique.

Stringing a Yumi

Your full attention, alertness and caution are necessary when handling and stringing a yumi.

1. Before stringing a yumi, look it over for any irregularities.
2. (Fig. 1) Place the red loop of the string (tsuru) on the top nock (urahazu) of the yumi seeing that it is centered where the knot rests on the yumi and that it is center or slightly to the right of center below the knot where the wood plate meets the rattan. Note that the loop on the top is coiled to the right side (and have in mind that the loop on the bottom nock (motohazu) will be coiled to the left side.)

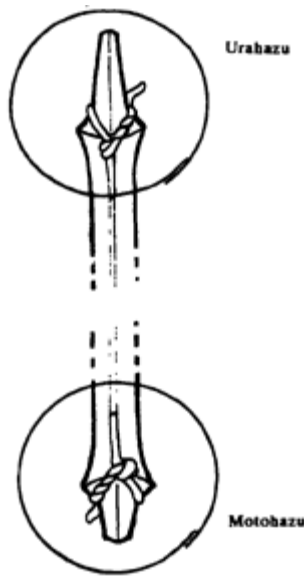
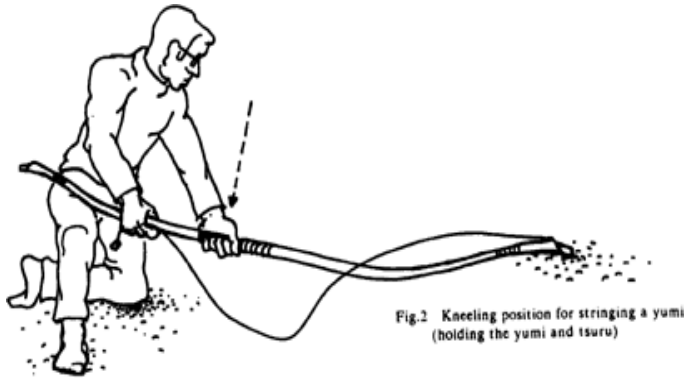


Fig. 1. Placement of the loops (tsuruwa) of a string (tsuru) on the urahazu and the motohazu of the yumi

3. (Fig. 2) While you are in a kneeling position with the top tip of the yumi touching the ground and the last bottom curve resting on your bent right knee, your left hand is softly gripping the yumi as if holding it to shoot. The right hand is holding the tsuru loosely while gripping the yumi halfway between the first and second inside joints below the leather grip. The first purpose of the right hand is to help guide the yumi straight down.



4. (Fig. 3) With your left arm locked at the elbow, lean your upper body weight down slowly and alertly at a right angle to the floor until you feel there is enough curve in the yumi to put on the tsuru: Hold your movement and slide back your right hand (with the tsuru in it) along the yumi and slip the bottom loop of the tsuru on the motohazu. During this movement, keep your eyes on the urahazu area, and have a sense of undistracted balance while holding the curve of the yumi down without pushing further. Don't push forward of the yumi while doing this. Don't look back to the bottom loop of the tsuru. When placing the bottom loop of the tsuru on the yumi take care not to push violently or excessively at the grip, into the curve. Do not stretch the yumi more than needed to put the tsuru on.

5. Having slipped the bottom loop of the tsuru on the motohazu, make sure that it is securely on. Feel the area that you have put the loop on. After the bottom loop is secure, slide your right hand back to the first position.

6. As you let the yumi up slowly with your body weight until no pressure is felt, keep sighting that the top loop is as centered as possible. Release your right hand from the yumi once you feel that the tsuru is staying aligned on the yumi.

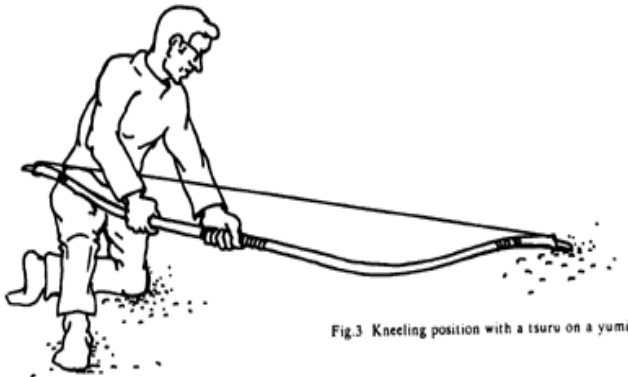


Fig.3 Kneeling position with a tsuru on a yumi

7. (Fig. 4) In a kneeling or standing position hold the bottom of the yumi with your right hand straight out in front of you centered on your body. The tip of the yumi is on the ground. The grip of your right hand is soft so that the yumi can swing freely.

8. As you sight down the tsuru, check the upper, middle and bottom areas of the yumi. The top loop is centered on the urahazu with the string either centered or slightly to the right of center. At the center of the yumi, the tsuru is either centered or offset slightly to the right of center. At the bottom, the loop and string are centered. The top and bottom areas must be checked for alignment **EACH TIME YOUR YUMI IS STRUNG**. Adjust the loops more precisely if necessary. This overall procedure is **CRITICAL CARE**, before using the yumi.

When first beginning to shot, after a few shots check the centering of the top loop, and if necessary, make the needed adjustment at that time, particularly with a new or unfamiliar yumi.

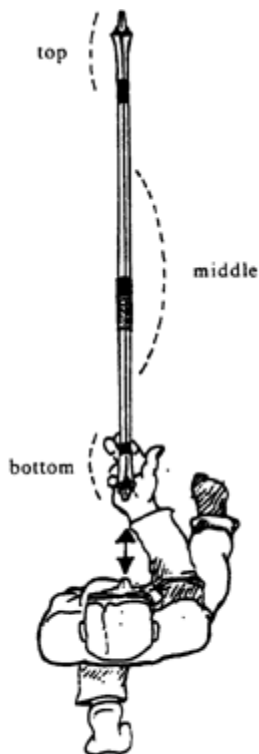


Fig.4 Body and hand position for checking a tsuru alignment on a yumi

9. (Fig. 5) CRITICAL CARE: When your yumi is strung, check that the distance from the inside of the grip to the tsuru is 6". When this distance is less than 6" shorten the tsuru. To shorten the tsuru, unstring the yumi by doing steps 2 to 6 in reverse. After removing the tsuru, slightly take in the top loop to shorten it. (Only shorten the top loop.) String the yumi again and check for the 6" distance.

This is the standard measurement that yumimakers set the balance of the yumi at after it is made and strung. This measurement can be slightly more but NOT less. A new tsuru will stretch when on a strung yumi just standing. As you shoot the yumi, particularly with a new tsuru on, this distance yumi shorten to less than 6" with the stretching of the tsuru. Find an easy way to measure this 6" distance, so that you can quickly and efficiently take the measurement during practice sessions. Before you begin shooting, if you feel something is out of alignment, check through steps 8 and 9 first, before consulting a knowledgeable person. Shooting a yumi out of balance may lead to twisting or breakage sooner or later.

NEW YUMI

(Fig. 6) The large central recurve of most new yumi have a HIGH "rise height" when unstrung. (The rise height is measured up from ground to the highest point of the central curve.) Usually, older tamed and mature yumi have a lower rise height. A new yumi can take weeks or months for its shape to be tamed so that when it is unstrung the rise height measurement is less than 9" (22.5 cm). A yumi is made to be used.

Regular use, more than anything, helps tame and mature a yumi. With regular use of a yumi, the unstrung rise height will lessen over a period of time. Regular use could be once a day or once a week. Lowered rise height that becomes stable is a desirable and natural sign of the yumi being tamed. When you own a yumi and it is shot regularly for a period of months, the rise height curve will lessen, and stabilize for that period. Take note of these changes. Allowing, maintaining, yet containing the rise height of a yumi is one way of permitting its life to be full and in balance. Containing the rise height will be discussed below.

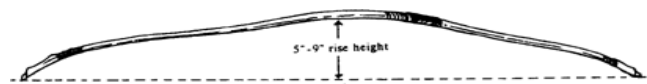


Fig.6 The "Rise Height" on an unstrung yumi

When the rise height falls below 5" (12.5 cm), if you can, let the yumi rest for a period of weeks or months. This tamed effect is unpredictable as to when it will occur. Another way of viewing this condition is that the yumi has become tired and it needs a rest. In either view, healthy use of the yumi brings about this change. Also, know the feeling quality of shooting a tamed yumi. What life there is in such a yumi is not to be discounted. Traditionally, kyudo practitioners had at least two yumi with which they alternated their use with the seasons. One reason to alternate use is that it allowed a yumi to rest and restore some of its innate power.

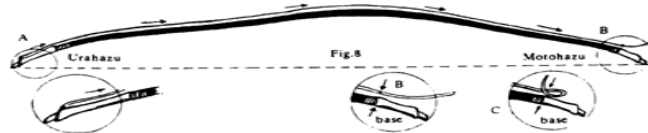
When an unstrung Yumi rises higher than 10" (=25,50 cm)

When an unstrung yumi rises higher than 10" (25.5cm) after being left standing a day or more, string it and leave the tsuru on the yumi a week and test the yumi rise

height again. Do this whether the yumi is in use or not. Keep the tsuru on, and keep testing the yumi week to week, until the rise height becomes stable in its rise when the yumi is left unstrung. The intent here is that the yumi's rise height is contained by keeping it strung. By becoming "stable," the unstrung yumi stays at a rise height below 10".

A yumi will show its life when being shot in different seasons. Seasonal weather changes can have physical effects on a yumi. Check the rise height of a new or tamed yumi, particularly when weather conditions change drastically. A few examples are humidity or heat.

High humidity or high temperature days can greatly effect the rise height, either in greater height with humidity on an unstrung yumi, or flatness of the yumi due to heat, when the yumi is left strung, and not attended to. With intense heat the yumi can flatten. In this case, leave the yumi some breathing room. Unstring it and observe its rise height. For the proper balance, usability and a full life of a yumi, your attentive care is needed.



Tying aTsuru

When your tsuru breaks you need a new one appropriate to the length size of your yumi. Most yumi are of two basic sizes. The color of the knotted loop on bottom end of your old broken tsuru tells you the tsuru size. If you don't know, find out what length yumi you have, so you will know what length tsuru to buy.

A new tsuru comes with a preformed knotted loop. The loop is cloth wrapped in either purple, light green, white or brown in color. This loop always goes on the bottom of the yumi. The unformed, red end of the tsuru is left for you to make a loop of the proper size.

Overall, the three main points to have in mind about the tsuru on your yumi are: One, that the tsuru length is correct, so that the measurement from the grip out to the tsuru is 6"; Two, that the two properly formed loops fit snugly on the end nocks; and three, that the two loops and the string itself are centrally aligned on the strung yumi. The first two points will be explained here.

To find where to make the loop on your new tsuru do as follows:

1. (Fig. 7-8) Kneel on the floor, with the unstrung yumi across your knees.
2. (Fig. 8) Place the preformed loop on the TOP nock of the yumi. (A) With the yumi balanced across your knees or in front of you firmly stretch the tsuru down along the curves of the top side of the yumi until you come to the base of the wood of the bottom nock area. (B)
3. (see illus. C) Down from point B, form the curve of a loop and hold it. Then take up the loop in your hands so you can form the knot and coil. (Fig. 9)

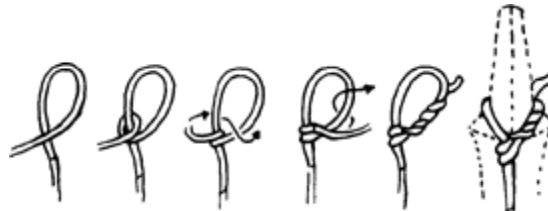


Fig.9 Method for tying the knot of the upper loop

4. After forming the loop, balance the yumi on your knees in front of you, stretch the tsuru down the yumi as in step 2 and CHECK that the knot of the loop is at the base where you sighted it in point B. (Have in mind that the forming of the loop at this point will not always be the correct spot, but is the best starting point. Further adjustment may be necessary.)
5. Finally, place the red loop that you formed, on the top(urahazu) of the yumi. It should fit snugly, but not too tight. Center the loop on the urahazu and begin to center the tsuru down the yumi.
6. Take up the correct kneeling position and stringing the yumi as described on previous pages.

Critical: the two loops of the tsuru need to fit snugly on the nocks of the yumi when it's strung. the loops and the tsuru are centered on the yumi, and the measurement from the grip across to the tsuru is at 6". if less or more than 6", the yumi usually needs to be unstrung, the loop reformed, and the yumi restrung and checked again until correct, before going further.

Tsuru notes:

In the course of shooting your yumi with a new tsuru, it will stretch more easily at the beginning, particularly with a strong yumi. You'll need to check the grip/tsuru distance regularly, even when the yumi is strung but not shot.

Notice the coiled twist of the body of the tsuru. Watch that the tsuru's coiled twist stays twisted in the course of putting it on. When necessary, coil it in a clockwise direction just before putting on the bottom loop. Notice what effect this may have on the feeling of the shot.

A hemp tsuru needs special attention. Ask your teacher or instructor what is necessary to maintain it.

Over the course of shooting, notice the different quality feelings that come with using

tsuru of different materials.(eg., Kevlar vs. hemp tsuru)

Allow a tsuru to run its life coarse and break on the yumi. Usually it will break while you are shooting. This can be an experience of shocking value, and awareness.

Physically, the breaking of the tsuru when the yumi is being shot allows the yumi to stretch out its bamboo and wood fibers fully. The yumi likes this stretching exercise. It helps restore life in it. It's sometimes said, that when a tsuru breaks while shooting, you should let the yumi rest for a day or so without use. This is an individual choice with each student. Other students will have a second tsuru ready formed: put it on, and use the yumi immediately.