

2026 Uncle Dave Macon Days

Music Competition Guidelines

Note: These rules and guidelines are subject to change at any time at the discretion of the contest committee. Last revised: 08/04/2026

1. Visit the registration tent and register for your category or categories as soon as you can upon arriving at the festival grounds.
2. Check in with the stage manager as soon as your category is called.
3. Remain backstage throughout the entire duration of your category.
4. While waiting in the backstage area, be respectful of others and the proceedings onstage. Practicing or “warming-up” must be done away from the immediate backstage area so as not to interfere with the judging or the performance of other contestants.
5. Failure to appear when called may result in disqualification from the contest. It is NOT the responsibilities of staff to make sure you are there ready to participate. Please keep aware of the proceedings and respond immediately when your name is called.
6. No additional registrants will be allowed in a category after the first contestant begins. Exceptions may be granted at the discretion of the Chairman of Judges.
7. The following categories generally do not have finals. Consult the official program or the stage manager for any revisions.
 - a. Beginner Instrumental (2 Tunes)
 - b. Dobro (2 Tunes)
 - c. Guitar (2 Tunes)
 - d. Mandolin (2 Tunes)
 - e. Old-Time Singing (2 Tunes)
 - f. Old-Time/Bluegrass Shade Tree Band
- 8 The following categories **will have finals**. Consult the official program or the stage manager for any revisions.
 - a. Bluegrass Banjo
 - b. Old-Time Banjo National Championship
 - c. Traditional Fiddle
9. Contestants in categories without scheduled finals are expected to perform two (2) selections, subject to time constraints. In music categories with scheduled finals, contestants are expected to perform one (1) selection in the preliminary round and two (2) numbers in the finals. Finalist contestants are not allowed to repeat their selection from the preliminaries.
10. Contestants who have won their category two (2) years in a row are not eligible to win. They will be reinstated for eligibility the next year.
11. Contestants are expected to honor the spirit of the competition and not attempt to manipulate any contest by taking advantage of multiple registrations (i.e. as a single and duo or trio) in order to

maximize stage time. Nullification of any contest registration is at the discretion of the Chairman of Judges.

12. NO SINGING may accompany the contestants in any category except the following:

- a. Old-Time Singing
- b. Old-Time/Bluegrass Shade Tree band

13. Drum kits are not allowed in any category. Traditional hand-percussion instruments are permitted as appropriate.

14. Electric amplified instruments are not allowed in any category.

15. No back-up instrument is required in any music category (except bands). The presence or absence of back-up instrument(s) will not be a basis for judging the performance, unless the accompaniment overshadows or distracts from the main instrument.

16. In individual instrumental categories, a maximum of two (2) back-up instruments is allowed. However, contestants are encouraged to limit the accompaniment to only one (1) back-up instrument.

17. The duration of contest songs or tunes should not exceed approximately three (3) minutes. Judges may interrupt the performance and/or disqualify any excessively long entries.

18. No traditional tunes or songs are “banned” from the competition. However, contestants are encouraged to choose selections which are truly appropriate for the categories. Feel free to consult the Chairman of Judges with any questions about the appropriateness of a selected piece of music.

19. Uncle Dave Macon Days is a family-oriented event. Lewd, vulgar or otherwise generally offensive material may not be performed. At their discretion, the judges may disqualify inappropriate performances.

20. If time becomes a constraint or any unforeseen circumstances, the chairman of judges and/or festival director may restrict the number of tunes/dances performed in any category or make other changes to the rules and schedules as required for contest administration.

Additional Guidelines:

Old Time Singing (2 Tunes no finals)

1. Songs should be in an authentic old-time style such as: Jimmie Rodgers, the Carter Family, Uncle Dave Macon, The Delmore Brothers, etc.
2. Modern (post-1945) songs should be avoided. If in doubt about a selection, please consult the Chairman of Judges.
3. A maximum of two (2) backup instruments is allowed. No accompaniment is required.
4. Duet and trio singing is permitted.
5. The above accompaniment rules apply. No full bands allowed.

Beginner Instrumental (2 Tunes no Finals)

1. Open to musicians with less than five (5) years of experience on their instrument and who have not previously placed in an adult or professional competition category on this instrument. There is no age minimum or maximum to enter in this category, however, the judges and festival team reserve the right to deny entry from the beginner category and require entry in the main category instead.
2. Contestants may play any traditional instrument that is allowed in the general categories.

Contestants who enter this category may not enter the regular competition for the like instrument. However, beginner instrumental contestants may participate as members of a band.

Traditional Fiddle (1 Tune pre, 2 Tunes finals)

1. Tempo, drive and phrasing should be conducive for dancing. Rhythmic bowing is more important than ornamentation.
2. Cross-tuning and re-tuning are allowed.

Old-Time Banjo (National Championship) (1 Tune pre, 2 Tunes finals)

1. This category features pre-bluegrass banjo playing styles such as: clawhammer, frailing, two-finger picking, up-picking, stroke style, etc
2. The use of thumb and/or finger pick(s) is only allowed when conducive to the appropriate old-time banjo style. Modern 3-finger “Scruggs-style” picking is not permitted, and should be entered in the Bluegrass Banjo category.
3. Tune selection should be historically appropriate to the style. If in doubt about a selection, please consult the Chairman of Judges.

Bluegrass Banjo (1 Tune pre, 2 Tunes finals)

1. This contest is with the emphasis on the more modern style (3-finger picking) as developed by Earl Scruggs, Don Reno etc. and played in the style developed by Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys in early 50s’ forward. Intensity and drive are hallmarks of this style.
2. Old-time styles such as clawhammer, frailing, etc. are not permitted and should be entered in the Old-Time Banjo category.
3. Tune selection should be historically appropriate to the style. If in doubt about a selection, please consult the Chairman of Judges.

Old-Time/Bluegrass Shade Tree Pickin' Band (No Finals)

1. Bands should perform traditional Appalachian string band music or traditional bluegrass repertoire. Original songs are permitted if they are performed in an appropriate traditional style.
2. Bands are encouraged to participate in informal community jamming throughout the day prior to the on-stage competition. Audience members will have the opportunity to observe the bands during these jam sessions and vote for their favorite band.
3. Each festival attendee will receive one (1) audience voting ballot. Audience voting will close prior to the beginning of the Shade Tree Pickin' Band competition.
4. The Shade Tree Pickin' Band competition will conclude the music contests on the main stage. Bands should be prepared to perform two (2) selections.
5. Final scoring will consist of:
 - Fifty percent (50%) Audience Vote
 - Fifty percent (50%) Judges' Score
6. Bands that do not participate in the community jam sessions will not receive audience voting points.
7. A maximum of six (6) performers is permitted per band onstage. Audience and dancer participation during shade tree jamming is encouraged with no limit on participants.

8. Traditional acoustic instruments only. Drum kits and electric amplified instruments are not permitted.

General Judging Criteria for all individual categories: The contestants playing or singing will be judged on (1) song choices and execution in the appropriate style, (2) rhythm/timing, (3) pitch, tone and quality, (4) execution/fluency, and (5) expression/overall performance.

Judging Criteria for Shade Tree Pickin' Band: Judges' scoring will account for fifty percent (50%) of the band's final score, and will focus on the band's onstage performance, including; (1) Song choices and execution in the appropriate traditional style; (2) Rhythm and timing; (3) Pitch, tone, and quality of instrumentation and vocals; (4) Cohesion, musical interaction, expression, and audience engagement. Audience voting will account for fifty percent (50%) of each band's final score. Audience voting is intended to recognize bands that best capture the spirit of a traditional community jam through musicianship, participation, and entertainment.

Appropriate comments and suggestions are greatly appreciated. Every year, the contests and rules are reviewed and adjustments may occur as required. Your input is desired and valued. Please contact the following and it will be forwarded to the appropriate individual(s). Thanks and have FUN!