

Shiro Bara Ju Jitsu
&
Shiro Bara Self Defence

The Kubotan
(Yawara Bo)

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What is a Kubotan?

The Kubotan is not a weapon, but rather a tool. It is a cylindrical keychain that is made out of plastic, wood or metal measuring about twelve to fifteen centimeters long and about one to one and a half centimeters in diameter. One end has a ring for keys and other things that are normally attached on a keychain.

Carried alone is an offensive weapon, but carried as a key ring with keys attached its primary function is a key ring and not a weapon, and technically legal. However, some police forces will treat the Kubotan as an offensive weapon in any form and the onus is on the user to convince a jury that it is not. It is because of this that I have investigated a number of Kubotan options and discovered an ideal Kubotan that would be hard to consider a weapon. More later...

Master Kubota refers to the Kubotan as an attitude adjustment tool. However Master Kubota's teachings are based around law enforcement where control and restraint techniques are dominant. I personally do not feel comfortable with the thought of trying to control an angry assailant for twenty minutes until the police arrive. My personal choice in such a situation would be to use a finishing strike if the opportunity arose and then retreat to a safe distance until the police arrive. This theory is adhered to in my Kubotan teachings too. Although the Kubotan is a fantastic locking and seizing weapon it also excels as a striking weapon, a flail and a tool to compliment existing Ju Jitsu techniques, so my personal angle incorporates less of the locking and seizing techniques possible. I see this very much as the JKD concept of disguarding knowledge that is not of use to me and absorbing what is useful.

One of the greatest strengths of a Kubotan as a self defence weapon is that your assailant is unlikely to know how to use it against you it is dropped or taken from you in a confrontation. This wouldn't be the case if you found yourself defending yourself with a baseball bat, knife or hammer!

Summary: The Kubotan is simple and easy to use weapon that does not take many years of practice to become competent with.

What are the Kubotan's origins?

The term Kubotan comes from Master Takayuki Kubota who made his interpretation of the Yawara bo famous following a number of books and videos where he taught his own interpretation of Yawara bo knowledge. Master Kubota is a Japanese karate master who learnt Yawara bo techniques from his father. Master Kubota adapted those techniques and the Yawara bo itself to make it a legal weapon, by adapting it into a key chain.

The origin of the Yawara bo is less clear, though quite easy to guess. In Japanese social circles weapons would often be removed before entering court, a public gathering or acquaintances home. However, many people developed ways of using innocent items like paint brushes, fans, wooden hair pins, brushes and the likes as weapons. This is the assumed origin of the Yawara bo, the predecessor to the Kubotan.

The benefits of the Kubotan as a modern day defensive weapon

Any sensible and law abiding member of society would think twice about carrying a weapon such as a baton, a knife or a gun to defend themselves, though someone with less morals would not. This leaves the sensible moral people in society often at a disadvantage to some of the less desirable ones.

If we were to carry any of the afore mentioned weapons we would quite simply be committing a crime and a danger to other people. However, as a means to evening up the score against people that would wish to hurt us or take things from us it is understandable why some of the more sensible people among us may actually consider these options.

One of the Kubotans great strengths as a defensive weapon is that it isn't offensive (on the whole). It doesn't have a sharp point or blade. It doesn't have a serrated edge. It isn't large enough to be used as a concussive weapon. BUT.... in the right hands and with the right knowledge it can act as a great self defence aid.

Another great benefit of the Kubotan is that because it is less commonly known and not immediately obvious how to use the possibility of it being used against you if you drop it or have it taken from you during an encounter are greatly reduced. This certainly wouldn't be the case if your aggressor picked up a hammer or knife you dropped whilst trying to defend yourself. You can be sure that they would know exactly what to do with those weapons.

Lets not forget that the Kubotan is also a handy key ring, which we will almost always have with us. So if we have our keys with us, while we are out of our homes, we also have a socially acceptable defensive weapon with us.

Your Kubotan options

1. The Yawara bo

The Yawara bo is the weapon that Master Kubota based his Kubotan key ring on.

The Yawara bo is simply a short length of wood which was traditionally decorated or disguised to hide its intended purpose, much the same as the Kubotan which is “disguised” as a key ring.



The Yawara bo is probably the least offensive of the options listed. However, as its sole purpose is to be used as a weapon, it is illegal to carry.

One of the Yawara bo's strengths is its simplicity and cost. This can be made from a simple length of dowel.

2. The Traditional Kubotan Key Ring

The standard Kubotan is the most popular of the choices and is comes in wood, plastic and metallic versions. The Kubotan itself often has often has a ribbed body to aid the grip.



This style of Kubotan looks quite inoffensive and it is technically legal to carry as long as the carrier can display demonstrate that its primary function is as a key ring rather than a weapon.

3. The Bullet Pointed Kubotan Key Ring

This option of Kubotan is also a popular choice and its strength is when it is used as a striking weapon. However, it is considered a slightly more offensive option.

Note: 50Kgs of pressure applied using the tradition Kubotan with a 1.5cm diameter tip will result in around 33Kg per square cm of pressure, whereas 50Kgs of pressure being applied using the bullet pointed Kubotan with a ¼ cm point would result in 200Kg square cm.



4. The Finger Gripped Kubotan

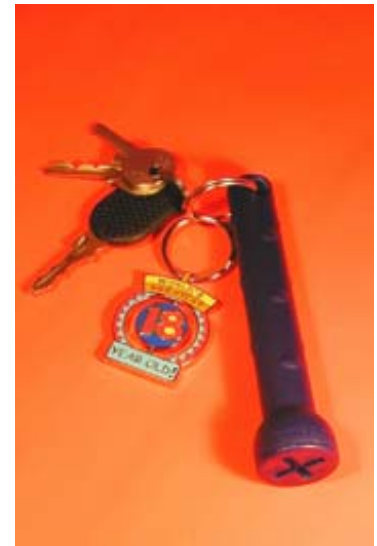
The finger gripped Kubotan's strength is that it is extremely hard to remove from the user's grip. It also has all the benefits of the bullet pointed Kubotan. However, this weapon looks very offensive and is often the choice of the "first time buyer".



Imagine trying to convince a jury that this spiky looking offensive weapon's primary purpose is to be used as a key ring! The legalities are stacked against the user of this style of Kubotan.

5. The Weeble ©

The Weeble is a relatively new innovation that is likely to take off as a popular self-defence aid. The Weeble has many of the strengths of other versions of the Kubotan such as the bulbous end and its primary function not being a weapon. The Weeble also has a removable end which enables the body of the device to be used to store things like emergency cash, emergency telephone numbers and also urine or drink samples in the event that the carrier believes their drink may have been spiked.



The Weeble is a good choice as a Kubotan, though I think its strengths lie in the storage space, which makes it a more suitable option for women.

If I have any complaints about the Weeble they would be it could be longer and that the screw top end comes loose and gets lost. This results in the body being less rigid and less effective when it is used as a weapon. However, I suspect this could be easily overcome.

6. The Mini Maglite!

I discovered the Mini Maglite as a suitable Kubotan alternative by accident. However, once I discovered it I realised it is a great alternative, which would be unlikely to be ever considered an offensive weapon.

The Mini Maglite is the same length as a Kubotan, has a gripped body, a bulbous end and a key ring end! All the important features plus its primary or secondary functions are not as a defensive tool or weapon. Primarily it is a key ring, secondly it's a torch and a final tertiary function could be as a weapon. It would be hard to prove that the Mini Maglite's intended function was a weapon.



7. Other options.

There is no reason why many household items cannot be adapted to be used as a Kubotan. Pens, pencils, cutlery and many other items are all suitable. I discovered the Mini Maglite by experimenting this way and now find that it is my first choice of weapon.

Which Kubotan?

Your choice of kubotan must be your own. Don't choose one Kubotan over another simply for looks. Experiment with the Kubotans and find which one you feel comfortable with. Weight, length, looks, primary function etc are all features you must take into consideration, as you will be carrying this weapon almost all the time.

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; width: fit-content;"> Legend Strength ✓ Weakness ✗ </div>	Primary Function	Gripped Handle	Bulbous End	Comfort	Offensive Appearance	Strong Striking Tool	Effective Locking Tool	Body Strength
Yawara Bo	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Traditional Kubotan	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bullet Pointed Kubotan	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓ ✓	✓	✓
Finger Gripped Kubotan	✓	✓ ✓	✗	✓	✗ ✗	✓ ✓	✓	✓
The Weeble	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
The Mini Maglite	✓ ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓	✗	✓	✓

Q1. Primary Function.

The primary function of the weapon is not as a weapon. A tick indicates its primary function is not as a weapon and a cross that it is.

Q2. Gripped Handle

The gripped handle is an important feature to many carriers. A tick indicates a good gripped handle and a cross a poor grip.

Q3. Bulbous End

The bulbous end helps strengthen the grip and makes it difficult for an aggressor to remove from your hand. A tick indicates a good bulbous end and a cross a lack thereof.

Q4. Comfort

Comfort of use is an important feature, but varies from person to person. A tick indicates that for me his feels like a comfortable weapon to use and carry and a cross that it is not.

Q5. Offensive Appearance

If it looks offensive, it is likely to be considered offensive. A tick here indicates it is not offensive looking and a cross that it is offensive looking.

Q6. Strong Striking Tool

Some of these options are better for but and tip strikes than the others. A tick indicates this is a strong striking tool and a cross that it is not as strong.

Q7. Effective Locking Tool

Some of these options are better at locking that the others. A tick indicates that this is an effective locking and seizing tool and a cross that it is not.

Q8. Body Strength

The strength of the body is important. I know this as I have broken wooden training Kubotans whilst using them. You don't want this to happen when you are using it for real! A tick indicates this is a strong option and a cross that it has a weak body.

Holding the Kubotan

There are four simple ways to hold the Kubotan for it to be used as a weapon.

1. Thrusting strike grip.

This hold is suitable for striking using the tip of the Kubotan in the punching or thrusting fashion. A gripped handle helps produce a stronger strike as the weapon does not slide back through your hand as you hit your target, which results in a stronger strike.



2. Downward strike grip.

This grip or hold is suitable for striking in a downward fashion as you might with a dagger. Again the grip for this attack is vital.



3. The press grip.

This grip is ideal for applying bar presses to an opponent's anatomy. Particularly useful for the elbow, knee and pilthrum.



4. The flail grip

This grip enables the holder to lash the keys attached to the Kubotan as you might with a flail. This is the most destructive of ways to hold and use the Kubotan. Again the grip is important as you are wielding the weapon at high speed and do not want to let go!



Carrying the Kubotan

Whatever your choice of Kubotan you will need to ensure it is always easily accessible. Its pointless having the most effective choice of Kubotan that you are competent at using if it is stored away deep in your handbag or sports bag.

When I am in public I always have my Kubotan either in my right hand or in my right hand pocket. This isn't because I feel at threat when I'm in public, but simply because it is good practice. I hold the Kubotan as you might a fork with the keys exiting from my hand between my thumb and first finger. I often also fold the keys back into my hand so they do not jangle and do not attract attention. Obviously you do not want someone to know you're intention of using a Kubotan before you use it! I have also found carrying the Kubotan in this way can act as a distraction tool. A simple jangle of the keys can distract someone for a fraction of a second while I hit them with something else.

Another option is to carry the Kubotan on a piece of thread around your neck or attached to your belt loops. Both of these options give you easy access to the weapon in the event that you need to use it quickly. Its cheapness also means its not a great loss if you lose it.

NOTE: Its important to remember when carrying a Kubotan that it isn't the only weapon you have. Don't forget all of your other skills simply because you have a weapon in one hand. On many occasions when I have run freeform and experimentation classes with the Kubotan I have seen students in excellent positions to land great punches, perform great throws and execute good chokes, but they didn't. They were focusing solely on the weapon in their hand and had forgotten everything else. This is why we sometimes practice ground fighting with a kubotan.

The major uses of the kubotan

1. Locks

As a locking tool the Kubotan is excellent. However many people know the Kubotan only as a locking and seizing tool. I feel after many years practicing with a Kubotan that it is only effective as a locking and seizing weapon when you are grabbed. I have seen many instructors teaching people how to put a wristlock on an opponent that has just punched you. I've tried this for real and it doesn't work.

So because it is only suitable to apply locks when grabbed then the only real suitable place to apply a lock is on the wrist. There are a few different ways and places locks can be applied to the wrist. Locks can be applied using an open grip or a crossed grip. Either of these grips can be used to apply pressure to the wrist from any angle depending on the technique being performed. Once a lock to the wrist is in place it can often be used to throw or take down an opponent.



The open grip.

The hands are placed either side of the wrist being attacked with the thumbs underneath gripping from underneath. This is the easier of the two grips to apply.

The crossed grip

This grip is more complex to apply but results in more pressure being applied to the area of the wrist you have decided to attack.



2. Strikes

Striking using either one of the ends or the bar of the Kubotan is simple and highly effective. Strikes are most easily performed against a large target like the trunk of the body or large muscles like the thigh. Another effective use for strikes with a Kubotan is to enable a release from a grab or hold like a bear hug (See Incorporating the Kubotan into existing techniques)

3. Presses

Using the Kubotan to press into cavities and against pressure points is very effective and excruciatingly painful. Obviously some knowledge of Tuite waza is beneficial, but this can be learnt quickly and easily. Techniques like attacking the shoulder cavity and the sternal notch are simple, easy to learn and devastatingly effective.

4. Lash/Flail

By using the keys attached to the Kubotan it is possible to lash the keys against your aggressors face or body as a strike or alternatively against a striking limb as a block. This use generally only works at longer distances and is not suitable for close range assaults where strikes, locks and presses are more effective.

Tuite Waza

Tuite waza is simply a series of techniques that like Atemi waza attack the body's natural pressure points, cavities and weak spots. However, Tuite waza differs from Atemi waza as the techniques are easier to perform due to the ease of accessibility of the parts of the body being attacked.

Generally speaking if a pressure point cannot be easily accessed and attacked then it cannot be considered Tuite waza, and probably falls within Atemi waza. It is probably fair to say that Atemi waza consist of Tuite waza, but not the reverse.

I have chosen to study just Tuite waza with the Kubotan and not, as yet anyway, Atemi waza as my main focus has always been simplicity and effectiveness, and progression to the latter is not quite as suitable a combination when used in conjunction with the Kubotan.

Tuite waza is common in many forms of Okinawan Karate and is a derivative of Atemi Jitsu. Tuite waza are painful techniques, which utilise various grabs, holds, presses and pinches. In traditional Tuite waza it is important to condition and strengthen the fingers, though with Kubotan based Tuite waza this isn't important. Tuite waza lends itself well to being blended into any fighting art and especially so Ju Jitsu as it is ideal for combining with escapes, joint locking and throwing techniques.

I have compiled a simple Kubotan Tuite waza chart to aid student's knowledge of successful application of Kubotan techniques, which follows.

Incorporating the Kubotan into existing techniques

As well as learning techniques using the Kubotan you can also experiment with incorporating it into techniques you can already perform. This applies to any style of martial art too regardless whether it is striking, grappling or throwing based.

There are many different possibilities to investigate and practice, but here are a few examples of how the kubotan can be incorporated into a few simple Ju Jitsu techniques to compliment them.

1. Hip Throw.
 - a. Perform the throw as normal with the Kubotan in your right hand up to the point where you have your right arm around your opponents back about to throw them.
 - b. At this point where you would usually straighten your legs lift and throw your opponent press one end of the kubotan into the opponents lower right side ribs. This will result in excruciating pain and they will almost lift and throw themselves.
 - c. Finish the throw with a thrusting strike to the lymph glands.

2. Double leg throw.
 - a. Start the double leg throw as you would usually up to the point where you would usually apply pressure to the cavity at the back of their knees to lift their legs and tip them backwards.
 - b. At this point pull the tip of the kubotan towards you into your opponents rear knee cavity or thigh muscle. Complete the throw with the forearm of shoulder into the stomach, dropping them backwards onto the ground.
 - c. Finish with a lash to the groin area.

3. Bear hugs (under and over, front and rear)
 - a. All of the escapes start with making your opponent release his grip before performing a throw, lock or take down.
 - b. Use the Kubotan to strike your opponent on the hands, face, thigh, ribs or groin to secure your release.
 - c. Continue the technique as usual and finish using a suitable Kubotan strike.

The Kubotan and the law

Carried alone without any keys the Kubotans sole purpose is a weapon and therefore illegal. Carried with keys its primary purpose can now be argued to be a key ring and therefore technically legal despite it now being capable of inflicting more damage due to the attachment of keys.

Like any situation where you have to defend yourself you are allowed to defend yourself to the best of your ability by using reasonable force. So it is perfectly legal to knock your attacker to the ground while defending yourself, but you must not exceed this. If you were to kick your opponent whilst on the ground technically after an assault had ended, even if you believed he may continue if he got back up, you would be committing a crime yourself. If you did exceed the bounds of "reasonable force" then it's possible that you would end up in court defending your actions and possibly risk a criminal record. If you used a Kubotan during that defence then its use would undoubtedly come into question and possibly change the focus of the whole incident. This adds weight to using a Kubotan that does not look offensive and can be explained as have a different primary and possibly secondary purpose. Your opponent might be able to deny his intentions for being in a fight with you, but you cannot deny you have an intended weapon in your possession.

I appreciate these are all "negatives", "ifs" and "possibilities", but anybody who carries a Kubotan should be aware of this as ignorance of the law is not an excuse.

If you do chose to learn how to use and carry a Kubotan consider one that does not look offensive and which you feel you could convincingly tell a jury of your peers that its intended purpose was not a weapon.

Sample techniques

1. From grabs
 - a. Single handed grab (Left and right)
 - b. Front strangle
 - c. Rear strangle
2. From grabs and punches (Left and right)
3. From bear hugs (Under and over, front and rear)
4. From punches (Blocking and counter striking)
5. Focus striking exercise