

(Fluff-Free) Keiko-gi and Hakama Buying Guide for Beginners at UofM (ver. 1.00)

This is a short buying guide intended for beginners who are considering purchasing a kendo uniform. Part of this guide also contains information specific to what our club considers appropriate. Please remember that standards vary between clubs and dojos, and that what is said here may not apply to your own situation.

I. Introduction:

The uniform used in Kendo is made up of two parts, a coat-like top (“keiko-gi” or often abbreviated to “gi”) and a skirt like divided pants called a “hakama”. Several other martial arts (iaido, aikido, judo, kyudo) use similar uniforms or similar parts of the uniform as kendo.

This guide is intended to show the differences between the uniforms across the martial arts, and the different options available between different kinds of kendo uniforms.

This information is given to help beginners make a more informed decision when buying a uniform for kendo.

II. Similarities and differences between kendo uniforms and other martial arts uniforms.

When shopping for a kendo uniform, you may see similar items for sale intended for iaido, kyudo, aikido, and judo. Beginners often have questions as to whether or not these uniforms are appropriate for use in kendo.

Iaido uniforms are generally black and consist of a hakama and a gi top. The fabric used in the gi top tends to be much thinner than the gi top used in kendo. Although it is possible to wear an iaido uniform while practicing kendo, it is generally not recommended for safety reasons.

Aikido uniforms are generally a white top and a black hakama. The major difference between an aikido hakama and a kendo hakama is the presence of a plastic “spoon” in the back of a kendo hakama. This “spoon” is used to hook the back of the hakama to the strings around the waist. An aikido hakama usually does not have this “spoon” because aikidoists take falls during their practice, thus hitting the “spoon” against their back. Also the aikido gi-tops tend to have longer length sleeves, as the kendo sleeve accommodates the kote.

If you use an aikido uniform with a white gi-top, please be aware that blue do himo (strings) will tend to stain the uniform blue.

Lighter uniforms such as those used in karate and taekwondo are generally not recommended past the beginner stage because they tend to be much thinner and provide less protection.

Some modern kumdo hakamas come with Velcro attachments instead of the traditional straps used in kendo. Velcro strap hakamas are considered inappropriate for our club.

Please be aware that once you are at the level of testing for a kendo rank, you must have an appropriate kendo uniform, as part of the testing grade depends on how well you wear the keikogi.

III. Factors in buying a keikogi and hakama.

a. Color:

i. Hakama color:

1. Traditional hakamas generally come in either a black or dark navy color. Both black and dark navy are used in kendo, although dark navy is exclusively used in only in kendo. Either is considered appropriate for our club.
 - a. See note for blue hakamas in the next section.
2. Red, light blue, white, American flag print and ying-yang print hakamas are considered inappropriate for our club and should not be worn.

ii. Keiko-gi color:

1. There are three traditional color/styles in keiko-gi tops, blue, white, and diamond pattern (Musashi style). Our club does not recognize any distinction between the styles or colors, so which color you get is up to you.
 - a. Blue keiko-gis and hakamas can either be dyed in a “natural” or “chemical” process.
 - i. Natural: A traditional indigo dye which is not colorfast and needs to be “set” prior to first use with a soak in a vinegar salt solution. Natural dyed items should only be washed by hand with very little detergent. These uniforms fade over time.
 - ii. Chemical: A newer process using a chemical dye that is colorfast and does not need to be “set” before first use. A chemical dye keikogi can be washed by machine on a cold cycle. If you are living in a dorm, you may want to consider getting a “chemically” dyed keikogi as it is easier to maintain.
 - b. White keikogi can be washed in a washing machine. They will show dirt and sweat faster than dark blue

uniforms, and will stain blue from the bogu himo. However, white keikogi can be bleached periodically.

- c. Diamond pattern (Musashi). This is a white uniform with a black diamond pattern. Traditionally considered a children's uniform, but recently this style has become more popular with adults.

b. Fabric

i. Keikogi

1. Keikogi are always made out of 100% cotton, and will shrink if dried in a dryer.
2. Weight - Keikogi come in various weights referring to how much fabric is used in its construction. A double weight gi is considerably thicker and heavier than a single weight uniform. Though much more important in grappling arts such as judo, in kendo the weight of the uniform increases its heat retention. There is also a small increase in protection as the weight increases. The cost of the uniform also increases as the weight of the fabric goes up.
3. Thread count – some resellers market their products with thread count. In general quality as well as the price increases as the thread count goes up
4. Special high performance fabrics – some high end keikogi have special high performance fabric liners which “wick” sweat and moisture away from the body. They are marketed under several different brand names such as “Fieldsensor”.

ii. Hakama

1. Polyester (Tetron): Low maintenance, machine washable, not shrinkable and permanent press, so you won't have to iron your pleats if they get wrinkled. Thinner and lighter than most cotton hakama. One disadvantage is that the Tetron doesn't absorb sweat as well as cotton, so your legs get sweaty.
2. 100% cotton: High maintenance, can only be washed by hand, shrinkable, and gets wrinkled if not folded correctly. Thicker and heavier than Tetron and can absorb sweat much easier than Tetron. However, considered to be much more comfortable to wear.