

Geiger Counter Kit Assembly Instructions

(2012-05-11)

To build this kit, you should know how to solder. And it will be much easier if you have made other kits before. But even if this is your first kit, do not despair! Just take your time and you'll be ok.

If you have never soldered before, Andie Nordgren, Mitch Altman, and I made a fun comic book that will teach you how. You can find it online, translated into many languages, at <http://mightyohm.com/soldercomic>

Ok! Let's get started.

1. First, check to make sure you have all of the parts.

You should have the following components:

Qty	Symbol	Name
1		Printed Circuit Board (PCB)
1	U1	ATtiny2313 Microcontroller (20 pin IC)
1	U2	555 Timer (8 pin IC)
1	X1	Ceramic resonator (orange or blue with 3 leads, marked 8.00M or 8.0MC)
1	LS1	Piezo speaker (round, black, with a hole in the middle)
1	Q1	FJN3303F transistor (marked J3303)
2	Q2,Q3	2N3904 transistors (marked 3904)
1	D1	1N4937 diode (the larger, black diode with a white stripe)
1	D2	1N914 diode (the smaller, reddish orange diode with a black stripe)
1	LED1	Red LED
1	R8	15 Ohm resistor (brown-green-black-gold)
1	R6	330 Ohm resistor (orange-orange-brown-gold)
1	R11	100 Ohm resistor (brown-black-brown-gold)
1	R5	1K Ohm resistor (brown-black-red-gold)
2	R3,R10	10K Ohm resistors (brown-black-orange-gold)
1	R4	22K Ohm resistor (red-red-orange-gold)
2	R1,R7	100K Ohm resistors (brown-black-yellow-gold)
1	R9	220K Ohm resistor (red-red-yellow-gold)
1	R2	4.7M Ohm resistor (yellow-violet-green-gold)
1	VR1	10 Ohm variable resistor (blue with a white screw in the middle)
1	L1	10mH inductor (the small black cylinder marked 103 on top)
1	C2	220pF capacitor (marked 221K)
1	C3	1nF capacitor (tiny, 5mm lead spacing, marked 102)
1	C1	0.01uF capacitor (the biggest disc, marked 103M)
1	C4	0.1uF capacitor (tiny, 2.5mm lead spacing, marked 104)
1	C5	100uF electrolytic capacitor (black cylinder marked 100uF)
1	S1	Slide switch
1	S2	Push button (microswitch)
2	J1, J2	Geiger tube holders (the clips)
1	B1	Battery Holder for 2xAAA batteries
1	J5	2x3 row header pins (for the ICSP connector)
1	J6,J7	a row of header pins (to break into 1x3 and 1x6, you may have some left over)

Qty	Symbol	Name	(continued)
1		IC socket – 20 pins	
1		IC socket – 8 pins	
1		Small screw for the battery holder	
1		Small nut	
<i>and, if you ordered a kit with a Geiger tube, you should also have:</i>			
1		Geiger-Müller Tube (cylindrical tube wrapped in foam or bubble wrap)	

2. Solder the resistors.

I recommend soldering one at a time unless you know what you are doing!

The resistors can go in either way – polarity doesn't matter.

Bend the leads of each resistor straight down and push them through the holes in the board, then bend them out at a 45 degree angle to keep the resistor from falling out.

Turn the board over, and solder each lead.

Then, cut off the excess leads with your wire cutters.

3. Solder the diodes.

They only go in one way, make sure the stripe lines up with the black band shown on the board!

D1 is larger, and black with a white stripe.

D2 is smaller, and reddish-orange colored, with a black stripe.

Both are labeled with the part number, although it can be hard to read.

4. Solder the slide switch (S1).

Make sure it sits flat on the board with the plastic lever sticking off the edge. I like to solder one of the end tabs, then reflow the solder and push it flat with my finger (don't leave the soldering iron on it too long, or you will say “ouch!”)

Be sure to solder both tabs on the ends as well as the three leads.

5. Solder capacitors C3 and C4.

Both of these capacitors are very small.

C4 goes next to U2 and is marked 104. It is the very tiny capacitor with narrowly spaced leads (2.5mm).

C3 is marked 102 and has wider leads (5mm spacing).

6. Solder the variable resistor (VR1).

This part is easy to find – it's blue with 3 leads.

7. Solder the transistors.

First, solder Q1. It is marked J3303. Make sure the flat spot of the transistor lines up with the markings on the PCB. You will need to bend the leads slightly to get them into the holes

Don't push the transistors all the way down against the PCB – leave a few mm gap.

Solder Q2 and Q3, marked 3904. Make sure you put them in the right way!

8. If you want to log data or hack the kit, install the headers J5, J6, and J7.

J5 is the double-row header (2 rows x 3 pins)

J6 and J7 are a single row – you can break the supplied header strip into 1 strip of 3 and 1 strip of 6 pins. You can break off the strips with pliers or use your wire cutters – be careful.

When soldering the headers, it's a good idea to solder one pin and then make sure the header is straight, then solder the rest of the pins.

9. Solder capacitor C2 and the ceramic resonator X1.

C2 is marked 221K and sits up above the PCB a little bit.

X1 is marked 8.00M or 8.0MC and has three leads.

Both of these can be installed in either direction – they are non-polarized.

10. Solder the IC sockets for U1 and U2.

These pop into place and are easy to solder. Make sure the notch in the socket aligns with the notch in the silkscreen on the PCB. You don't need to clip the leads, they are already very short.

11. Solder the push-button (S2).

Important: If you purchased your geiger counter kit with a case, use the push-button that comes with the case hardware (it has a long shaft) and solder it last, after all of the other components!

The push-button can go in either way. No need to clip the leads on this either.

12. Solder the inductor (L1).

L1 is the black cylinder marked 103. It can go in either way.

13. Solder the piezo (LS1).

This is the large, short cylinder with a hole in the middle. It can go in either way.

14. Solder the electrolytic capacitor C5.

C5 is the large, black capacitor with a white stripe on one side – that side is negative and goes away from the + symbol. Make sure you install this one in the right direction – it's polarized. Push it all the way down against the PCB – you might have to wiggle the leads a little bit.

15. Solder the tube holder clips (J1 and J2)

These are the small metal clips. J1 and J2 are the furthest apart, this is for the SBM-20 Geiger tube, which is longest. For other tubes, you can put the right clip into different positions.

I solder one lead of the clips, make sure it's straight, and then solder the other lead.

16. Solder the LED.

The LED only goes in one way. It will sit up a bit above the PCB.

The long lead goes into the hole marked +, and the flat spot on the side of the LED goes towards the other lead (just like the drawing on the PCB).

Solder one lead, check to make sure the LED is sitting straight, and then solder the other lead.

17. Solder C1, the large ceramic disc cap.

This one can go in either way.

18. Solder the battery holder (B1).

Make sure it's straight, cut off the excess leads (watch your eyes!), and insert the small screw into the hole in the middle. Flip the board over and install the small nut. You'll need a small screwdriver, but you can use your fingers to hold the nut.

19. Install the Integrated Circuits (U1 and U2).

You will need to bend the IC pins inward slightly to get them to fit into the sockets. Be careful! You don't want to push too hard and wind up with a pin bent and sticking out of the socket – maybe into your finger!

Very important! Make sure the notch and/or small dot on each IC goes towards the notch in the socket (on the left if you are looking at the board with the text right side up). The ATTiny2313 has a large dot and a small dot on top, the small dot goes closest to the notch (pin 1).

The TLC555CP goes into the socket for U1.

The ATTINY2313V goes into the socket for U2.

Handle these parts carefully, they are static sensitive.

20. Install the Geiger Tube

Important! First, use a pair of needle-nose pliers to bend the tube clips apart slightly, so they aren't so tight on the tube. Then **carefully** insert the tube. It is polarized! Make sure the + mark or CBM20 writing is on the left side of the board, closest to the tube clip marked +.

Don't push too hard on the tube, or drop it – it is **very** fragile. If the clips are too tight, stop and bend them outwards slightly, then try again. **Don't force the tube into the clips (you will crush it)!!!**

21. Test it!

Warning: This kit is capable of generating high voltages (300-600V). Don't touch any part of the circuit (particularly the bottom of the PCB) while it is on! The current is low, so while the potential for injury is low, it may startle you and cause you to drop your kit (and break your Geiger tube!)

Make sure the switch is off (away from the ON position).

Insert two AAA batteries in the battery holder.

Use a small screwdriver to rotate the adjustment on VR1 all the way to the left (CCW).

Turn on S1.

Listen for clicks and watch the LED. **SLOWLY** rotate VR1 clockwise until you hear clicks. Once you start to hear clicks, rotate VR1 about 45 degrees more and stop.

You're done!

If you have a multimeter with a very high input impedance (1GOhm), you can measure the voltage from ground to TP2 – it should be about 400V. If you have an ordinary multimeter, like me, you can get a 1GOhm resistor and put it in series with your DMM, then multiply the reading by the ratio [1000 / (the internal resistance of your DMM in Megaohms)]

How to use it!

Easy, turn on the switch and listen for clicks! Watch the LED, it will flash every time a beta particle or gamma ray hits the tube! (Note: The tube that comes with the kit is not sensitive to alpha particles.)

If you get tired of hearing the clicks, you can push the button S2 to MUTE the sound.

The PULSE connector (J6) has the following pinout:

1. VCC (nominally 3V)
2. pulse output – a short (100us) active high pulse every time the geiger tube fires
3. GND

More information, design files, source code: <http://mightyohm.com/geiger>

Logging:

To connect your computer to the serial port (J7), you will need a USB-serial converter that operates at 3.3V TTL levels. The serial header is set up to work with the common FTDI-232R-3V3 serial cable. Data is sent over the serial port at 9600 baud, 8N1.

The data is reported in comma separated value (CSV) format:

CPS, #####, CPM, #####, uSv/hr, ###.##, SLOW|FAST|INST

There are three modes. Normally, the sample period is LONG_PERIOD (default 60 seconds). This is SLOW averaging mode. If the last five measured counts exceed a preset threshold, the sample period switches to SHORT_PERIOD seconds (default 5 seconds). This is FAST mode, and is more responsive but less accurate. Finally, if CPS > 255, we report CPS*60 and switch to INST mode, since we can't store data in the (8-bit) sample buffer.

***** WARNING *****

This Geiger Counter kit is for EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY. Don't even think about using it to monitor radiation in life-threatening situations, or in any environment where you may expose yourself to dangerous levels of radiation. Don't rely on the collected data to be an accurate measure of radiation exposure! Be safe!

Case Assembly Instructions:

1. Check to see if you have all the parts

Empty the case kit on your work surface. You should have all of the following parts:

Qty	Name
1	Top Plate
1	Bottom Plate
4	Short hex standoffs
4	Longer round standoffs
8	Screws
8	Lock-washers
1	Push-button with a long (17mm) shaft

2. Install the standoffs

The longer round standoffs go on top of the board, and the shorter hex standoffs screw into them through the bottom of the PCB. Repeat for all four corners of the board. Finger tight is ok, just make them snug.

3. Remove the paper backing from the top and bottom plates

Use your fingernail, not anything metallic or sharp, because the acrylic scratches fairly easily.

4. Install the bottom cover plate

Secure the bottom plate to the hex standoffs with a screw and lock-washer at each corner. Tighten the screws until they are snug. Don't over-tighten the screws – if you do, you will crack the acrylic.

5. Install the top cover plate

Turn the kit over and install the top plate with the remaining screws and lock-washers. Don't over-tighten the screws!

You're done!

Cleaning the case:

Use a soft cloth (microfiber is best). Gently wipe the case clean, being careful not to scratch it. If necessary, you can remove the cover plates from the Geiger Counter and wash them in soap and warm water. Don't ever use alcohol or ammonia-based cleaners (Windex) as they will damage the acrylic and may cause it to crack.

If you need help:

First, please visit the support forums at <http://mightyohm.com/forum/> and do a search. Maybe someone else has seen your problem before? If not, post a new topic and ask for help!

If there is a problem with your order, send an e-mail to:
support <at> mightyohm <dot> com