

Chapter 5 Chords and Harmony

How chords are built

When you play a solo you usually play over chords right? To know what scales you can play over chords it helps to understand what those chords are and where they come from.

First most chords are actually built from the major scale. This is done using a simple formula: take a note from the scale, then add notes above it from that same scale in thirds, in other words stack every other note on top of it!

Example: the G major scale notes,

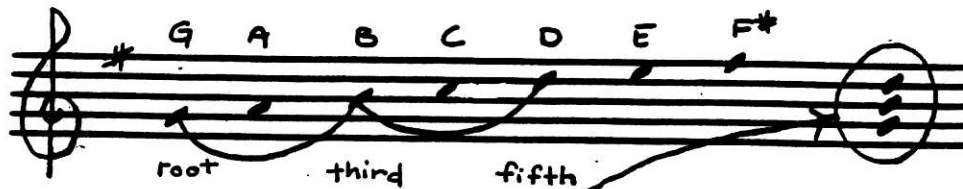
G A B C D E F# G.

Lets create a chord from the scale starting with the root note G, (we skip A the 2nd), then add B the 3rd, (skip C the 4th), then add D the 5th. The root, 3rd, and 5th. If you play these three notes G, B and D at the same time, on any instrument, you are playing a G major triad. Often major triads like this are called by their root just "G" or "G major". Chords are that simple.

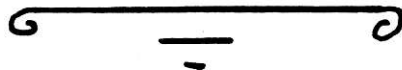
ⓐ A ⓑ C ⓓ E F# G.

the circled notes = the 3 notes that make up a "G chord"

- chords are built in thirds from the major scale -

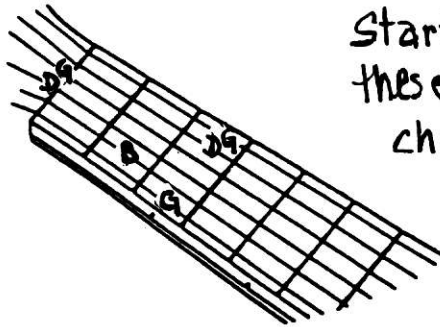


Every third note stacked up (played at the same time)
to make a "G major triad"



On guitar there are many ways to play those three notes. We often play some notes in two or more places within the same chord making the chord sound fuller. Look at the following G Major triad, starting with the lowest pitch there are notes: G, B, D, G, D, G. Notice a total of three Gs, two Ds, and one B.

Typical
G major
Triad



Starting with the lowest note these are the notes of the chord: G, B, D, G, D, G

A total of: three "Gs", two "Ds", and one "B"

This is a typical guitar chord voicing*, often repeating notes in different octaves. Even though we do this, the chord still remains a G major triad.

*(The term "voicing" refers to the way the notes, or separate "voices" of a chord are arranged.)

Ⓢ Chord building Exercise: Ⓢ

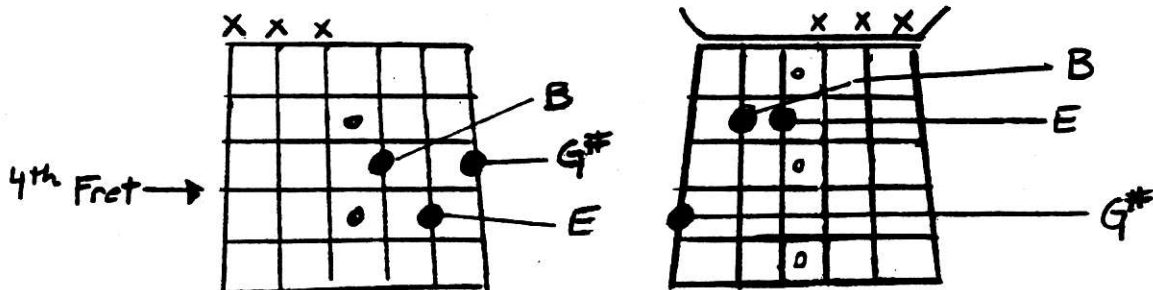
Build a triad with these scales starting from the root. First write down the three notes in the space provided to the right of the scale notes. Then figure out some new places you can play those three notes anywhere on your fretboard creating your own chord voicings. Go ahead and play notes in more than one octave if you wish. (You may end up with some familiar looking chord shapes).

Again if you don't know the names of the notes on the fretboard these exercises will be painful and slow, but as a compassionate teacher and nice guy I've included a chart showing all the notes on the fingerboard on page 27 (so you can cheat).

Here is an example of how to do this exercise:
(Notice I've circled the Root, 3rd and 5th)

Ⓢ F# Ⓢ G# - A Ⓢ B C# D# - E Triad = E, G#, B

Here are my two examples of ways to play this E major triad:



You do the rest

Circle the notes that make up the triad starting on the root, write them down in the space on the right, then locate ways you can play the chord anywhere on the neck. You may use the fingerboard chart below if you have to.

Sharp keys

- 1) D E F# - G A B C# - D _____
- 2) A B C# - D E F# G# - A _____
- 3) B C# D# - E F# G# A# - B _____
- 4) F# G# A# - B C# D# E# - F# _____

Flat Keys

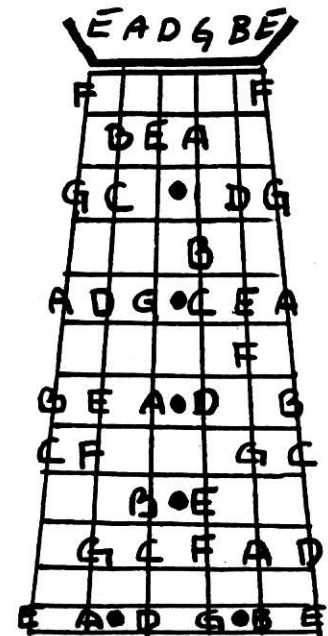
example: (Eb) F (G) - Ab (Bb) C D - Eb Triad= Eb, G, Bb

- 1) F G A - Bb C D E - F _____
- 2) Ab Bb C - Db Eb F G - Ab _____
- 3) Db Eb F - Gb Ab Bb C - Db _____
- 4) Bb C D - Eb F G A - Bb _____

If you can, try to create versions of the chords doing this exercise without the chart.

To find the "sharp" and "flat" notes from the chart on the right just raise a lower notes where necessary.

Notes on the finger board →



As you should be able to see from this exercise there are many ways to play any chord on a guitar!