

approachable music

THE 16 MOST IMPORTANT GUITAR CHORDS

The ones you'll be expected to know

by Joshua Espinosa



introduction

While learning guitar chords is essential for beginners, because there are so many, it also helps to know which chords to learn first, and how many total to focus on in practice.

So, here it is: if you learn just four chords, you can probably play hundreds of songs. Eight? A few thousand.

The little secret about all your favorite songs is that they can typically be played from a pool of about 16 chords, using 3-5 at a time. Plus, if you couple these chords with a capo, you easily have all the tools necessary to play just about any song in every key. This is the foundation every guitar player must have.

how to use this guide

Here are a few tips that can help you make the most out of this guide.

Learn the Chords in this Guide in the Following Order

- Learn these concurrently first: G, C, D, Em
- Then learn: Am
- Start fiddling with F, and concurrently learn A, E, Dm
- As they come up in songs: B7, G7, E7, A7, Bm, D7
- Last: F#m

A Word About the F Chord

The F chord is by far the most difficult chord for beginners to learn, and it's every guitar player's rite of passage. It's so common that it's completely unavoidable, so it's best just to accept the challenge and tackle it head on. **Don't avoid practicing it.**

The F chord takes a little palm leverage, hand strength and practice. Once you can play it, you'll be surprised how many songs you can play with just the key of C and the key of G.

The Key of E

While songs in the key of E are very common, the guitar chords can be relatively difficult to play.

Here are a couple of the best solutions for playing in E:

- If it's a blues song, use E or E7, A or A7 and B7. There isn't usually a minor chord in blues.
- For any other style of music, either use D chords with a capo on the second fret or C chords with a capo on the fourth fret.

Using the Practice Progressions

The practice progressions will help you get used to landing chords from a variety of different places. One of the best ways to improve going from one chord to the next is to place a chord, play one downstroke and then move on to the next chord. Try to place the chord and play the downstroke simultaneously. When you reach the end, repeat.

Making Song Chords Easier

A lot of songs utilize slight variations of these chords for a variety of reasons.

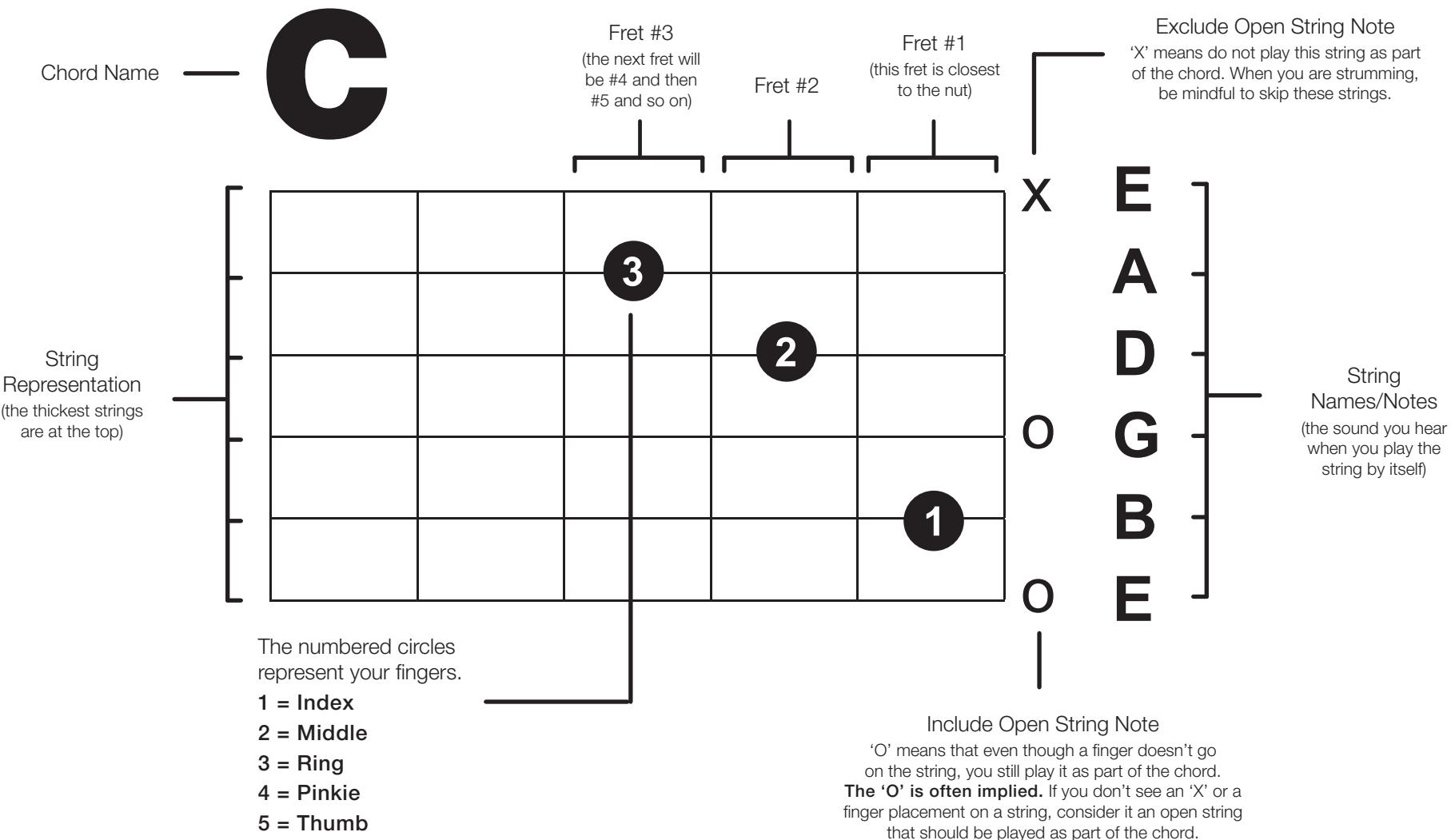
It's perfectly fine to make chords easier on yourself to play. If you see D/F#, Asus, Gadd9, Em7 or C7, you can just as well play D, A, G, Em and C respectively and typically, no one will ever notice.

Don't do this with the 'b' or '#' sign though. That means flat or sharp and is a whole different chord.

Of course, you could always learn those chords, but usually it's not that critical, especially if you're just playing for fun.

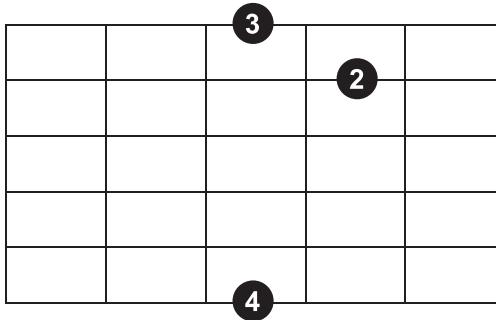
how to read a chord chart

The first step in playing guitar chords is knowing how to set your fingers. A chord chart shows you **which fingers go on which strings** and **on which fret to press** in order to play a chord. Study this chart religiously.



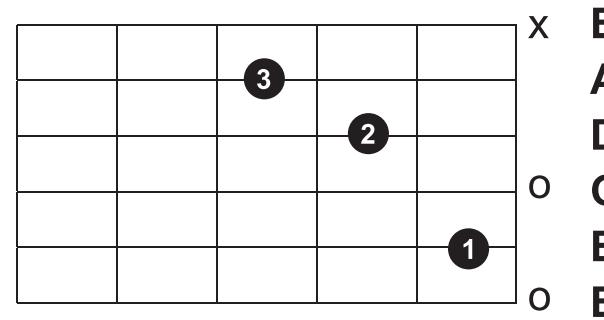
chords from the key of 'g'

G



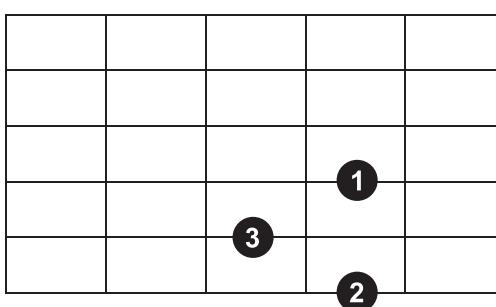
E
A
D
G
B
E

C



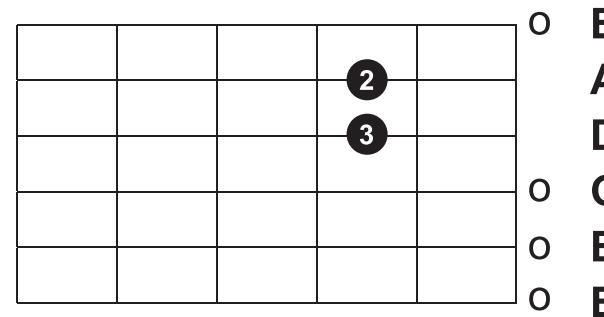
x
E
A
D
G
B
E

D



x
E
A
D
G
B
E

Em



x
E
A
D
G
B
E

PRACTICE
PROGRESSIONS:

G-C-G-C

D-C-G-Em-C

G-D-C-G

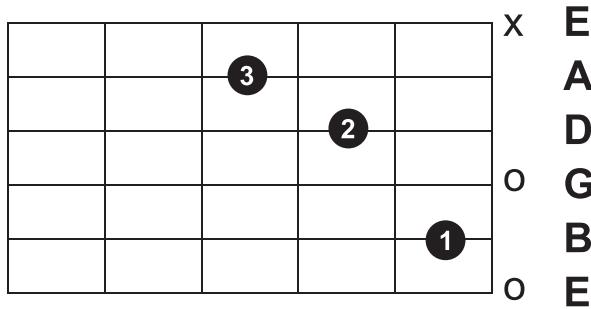
G-C-D-C-G

G-D-Em-C-G

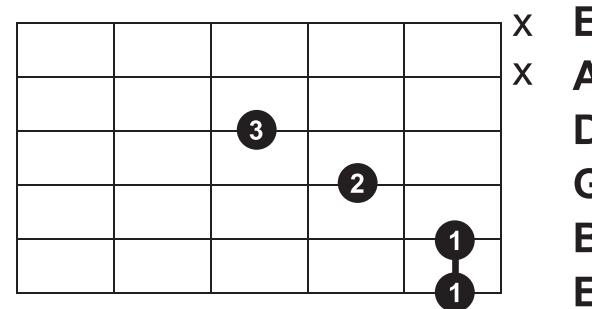
C-Em-G-D

chords from the key of 'c'

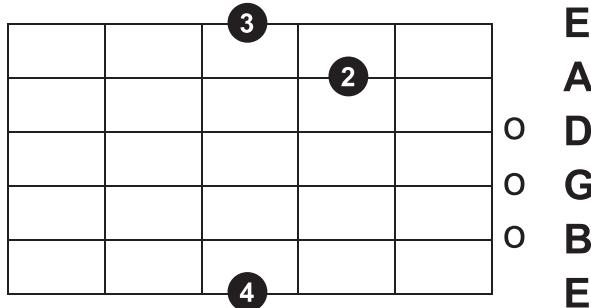
C



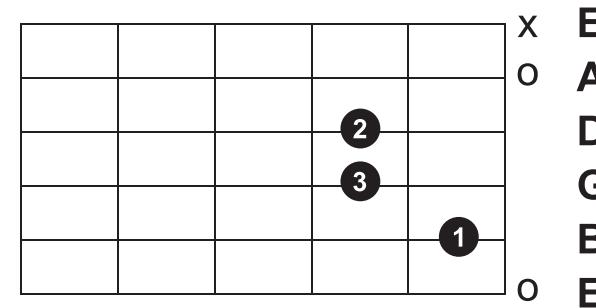
F



G



Am



PRACTICE
PROGRESSIONS:

C-F-C-G

C-F-Am-G

F-C-G-C-F

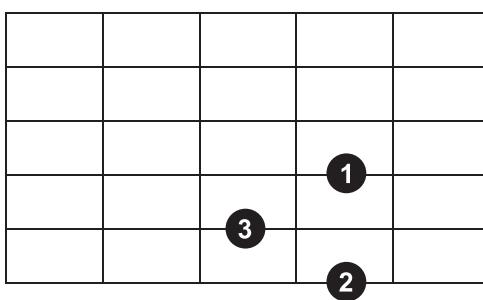
Am-G-F-C

F-Am-F-Am

Am-F-G

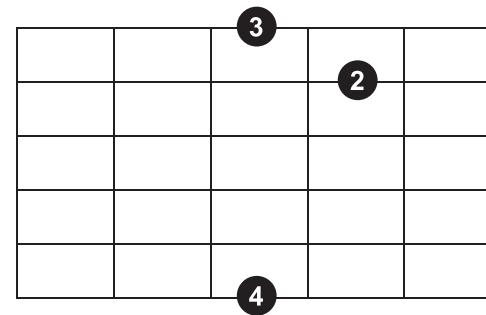
chords from the key of 'd'

D



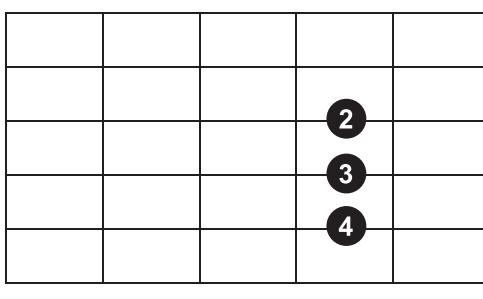
x E
x A
o D
G B
E

G



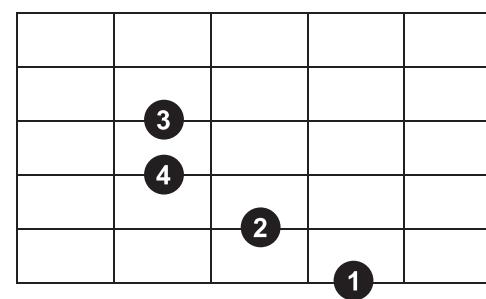
E
A
D
G B
E

A



x E
o A
D G B
E

Bm



x E
x A
D G B
E

PRACTICE
PROGRESSIONS:

D-A-D-G

D-A-Bm-G

Bm-A-Bm-D

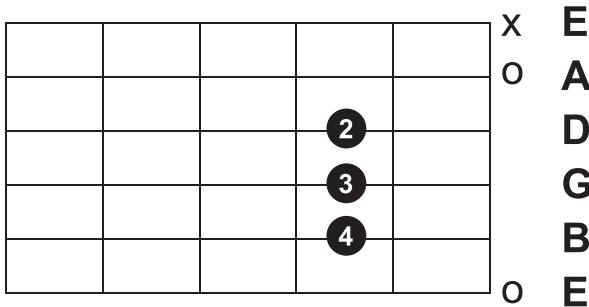
D-G-A-G-D

G-A-Bm-A-D

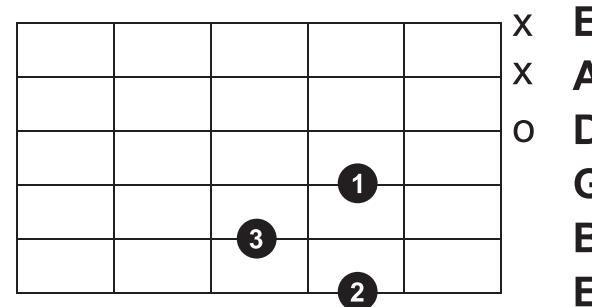
G-A-D

chords from the key of 'a'

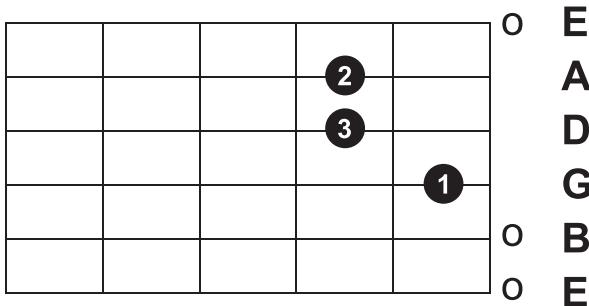
A



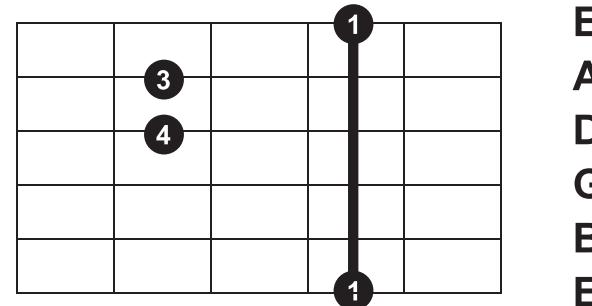
D



E



F#m



PRACTICE
PROGRESSIONS:

A-D-A-E

A-D-F#m-E

A-E-D-E-A

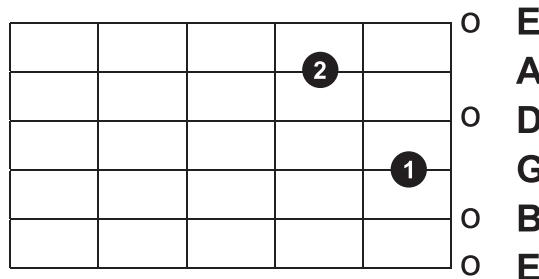
A-D-E-D-E-A

D-E-A-F#m-E

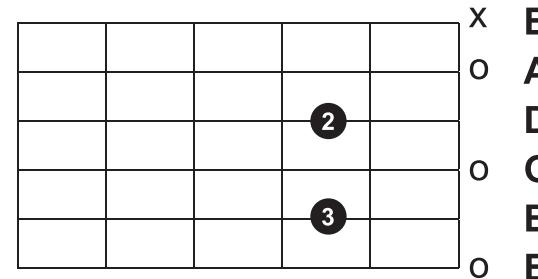
F#m-D-F#m-E

other common chords

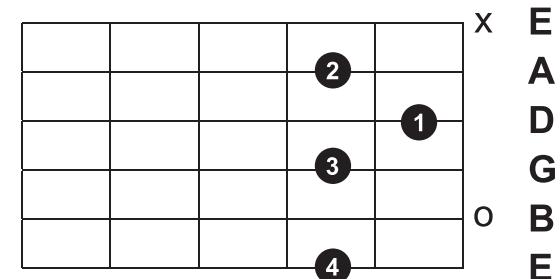
E7



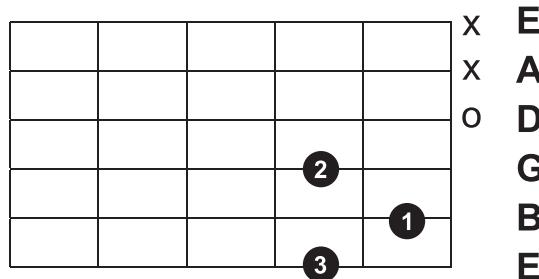
A7



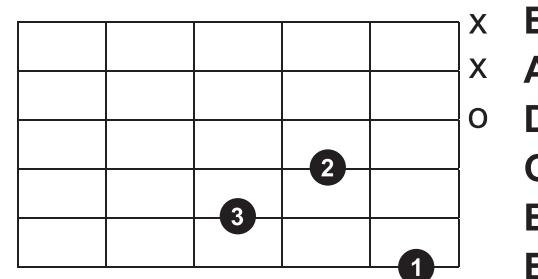
B7



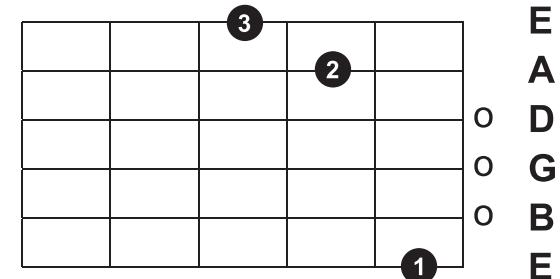
D7



Dm



G7



next steps

Of course, learning the basic guitar chords is only the first step to learning guitar. You also need to gain a rock-solid strum and learn how to use a capo.

But once you learn all those things, you don't really need to learn anything else unless you want to. If you just get really good at strumming your 16 chords and using a capo, you are well on your way to enjoying a lifetime of playing music on the guitar.

For help getting there, [click here for more PDF guitar guides](#).

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