



approachable music

THE 16 MOST IMPORTANT GUITAR CHORDS

The ones you'll be expected to know

by Joshua Espinosa

introduction

There are certain, basic guitar chords that you simply have to know, and for good reason — if you learn just the most common chords, you can play almost every song.

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. These are the 16 chords that all beginner guitar players have to learn like the back of their hands — no excuses.

how to use this guide

Here are some tips about the basic chords that can help you as you [learn how to play guitar](#).

Learn the Chords in this Guide in the Following Order

- Learn your first four chords 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. [Practice it consistently every session](#).

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 the key of E:

- If it's a [blues song](#), use E or E7, A or A7 and B7. There isn't usually a minor chord in the blues.
- For any other style of music, [transpose the song](#) to 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.

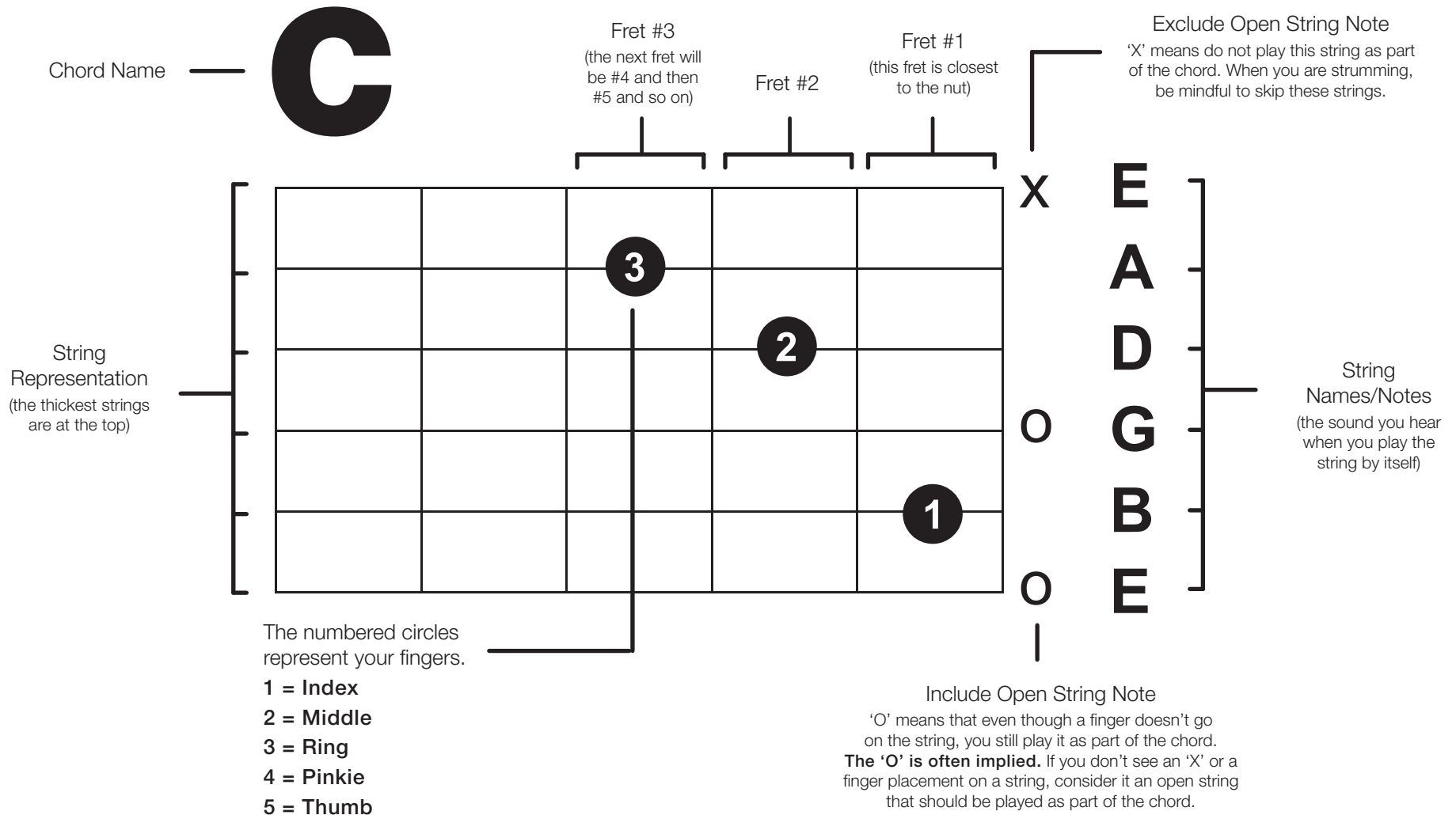
Of course, you could always learn those chords, but usually it's not that critical, especially if you're just playing for fun.

Printable Beginner Guitar Chords

Whether you're learning how to play the basic guitar chords or teaching them to a student, this PDF is designed so that you can have a printable guitar chord chart for each one you need to know. Plus, they're all organized by key. There's also a chart for how to read guitar chords, so beginners can gain the ability to learn any chord they come across.

how to read a chord chart

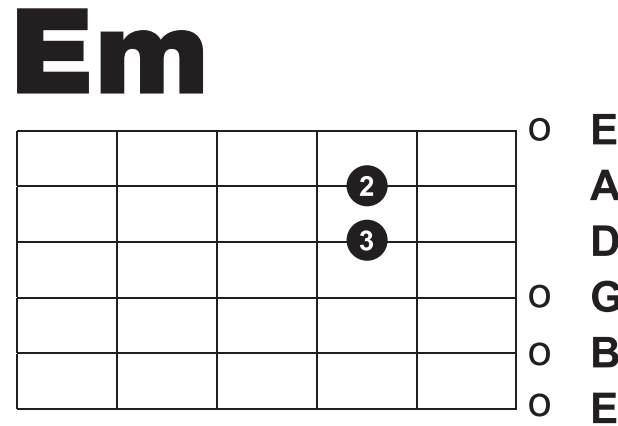
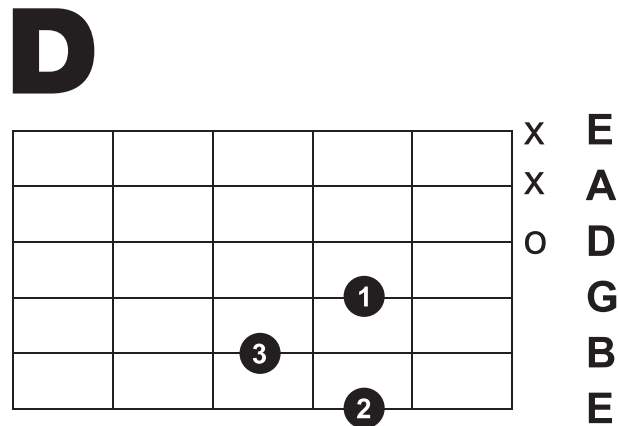
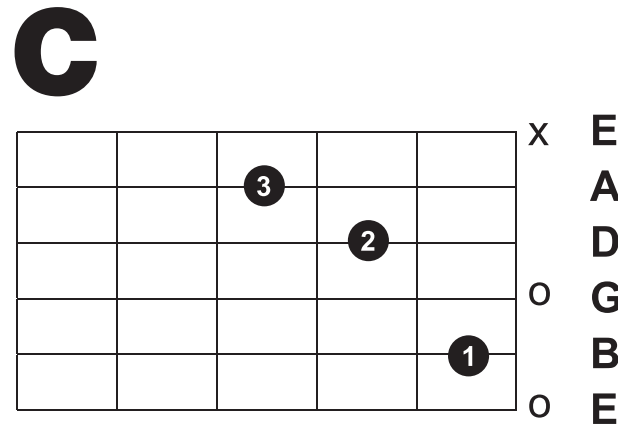
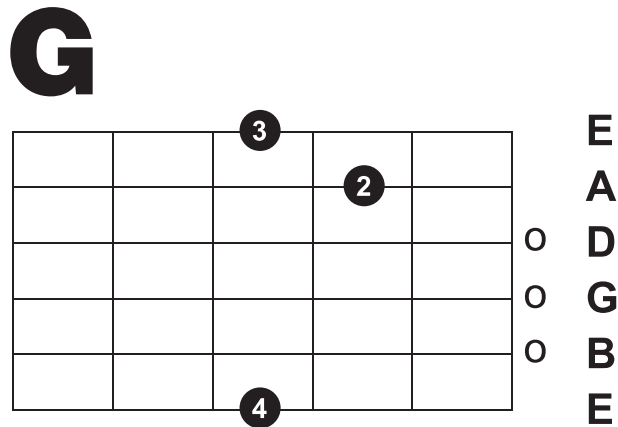
The first step in playing the basic guitar chords is knowing how to set your fingers for each one. A chord chart shows you **which fingers go on which strings** and **on which fret to press** to play a chord. Study this chart religiously.



Note: While chord charts are often rotated counterclockwise, these are shown in a way that depicts how the chord would look in pictures and video tutorials. If this bothers you, just rotate it counterclockwise...

chords from the key of 'g'

Of all the chords, G, C and D are the 3 basic guitar chords that you'll use the most often.



PRACTICE PROGRESSIONS:

G-C-G-C

D-C-G-Em-C

G-D-C-G

G-C-D-C-G

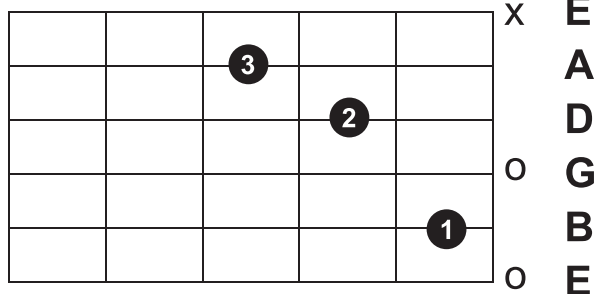
G-D-Em-C-G

C-Em-G-D

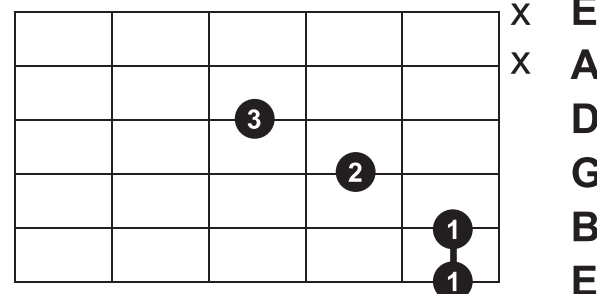
chords from the key of 'c'

The F and the Am are also very common guitar chords that you'll see everywhere. Between the key of G and the key of C alone, you probably have enough to play millions of songs.

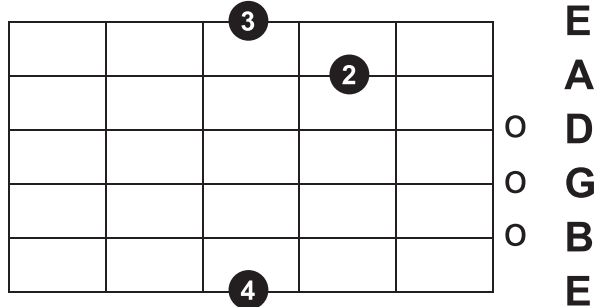
C



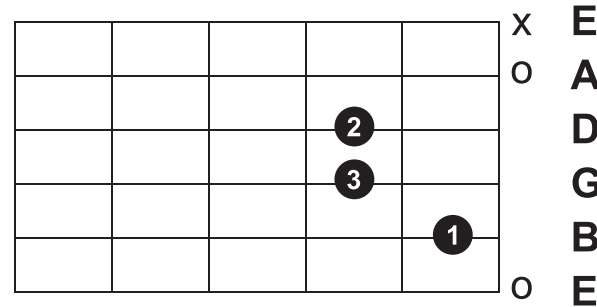
F



G



Am



PRACTICE PROGRESSIONS:

C-F-C-G

C-F-Am-G

F-C-G-C-F

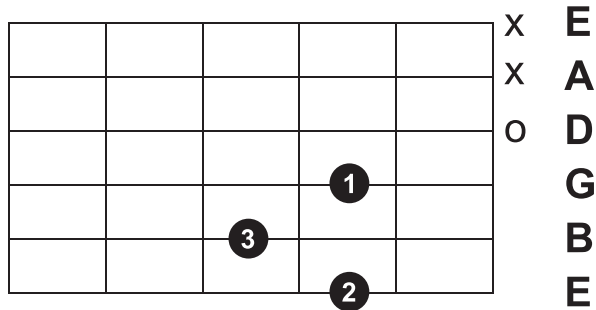
Am-G-F-C

F-Am-F-Am

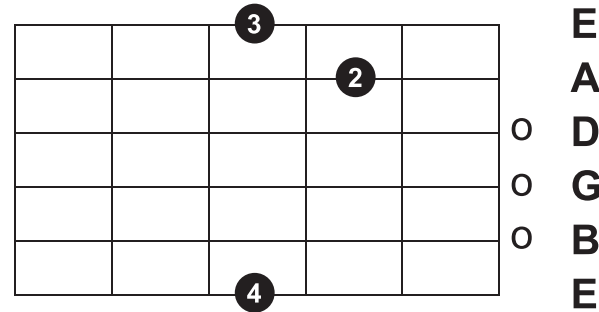
Am-F-G

chords from the key of 'd'

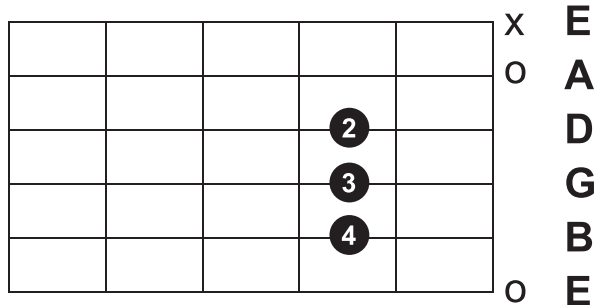
D



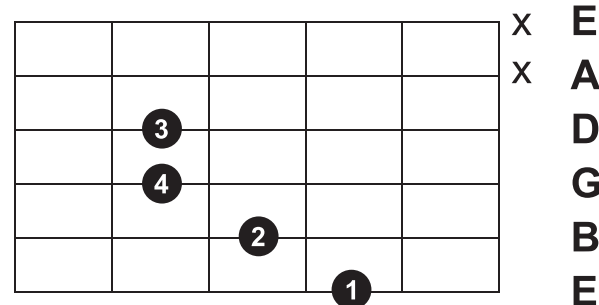
G



A



Bm



PRACTICE
PROGRESSIONS:

D-A-D-G

D-A-Bm-G

Bm-A-Bm-D

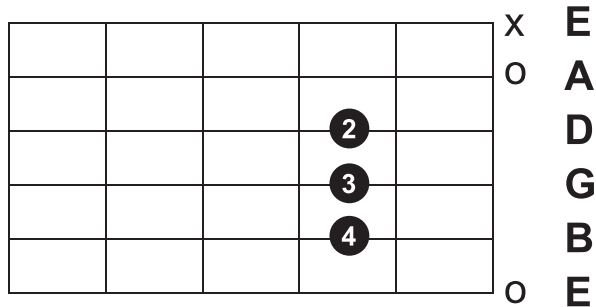
D-G-A-G-D

G-A-Bm-A-D

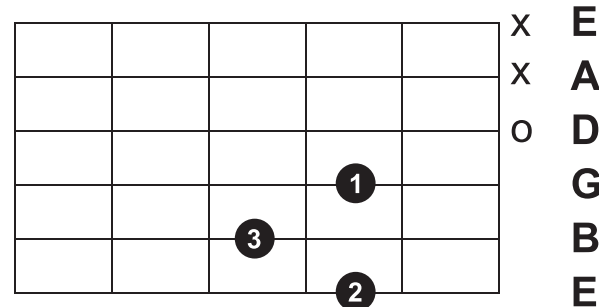
G-A-D

chords from the key of 'a'

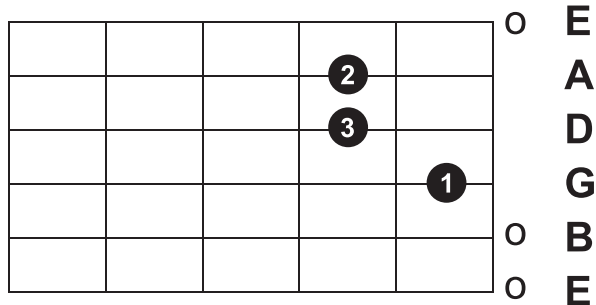
A



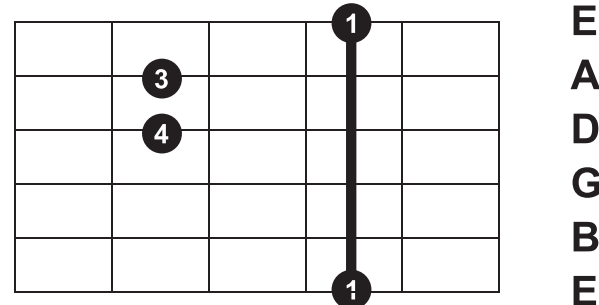
D



E



F#m



PRACTICE
PROGRESSIONS:

A-D-A-E

A-D-F#m-E

A-E-D-E-A

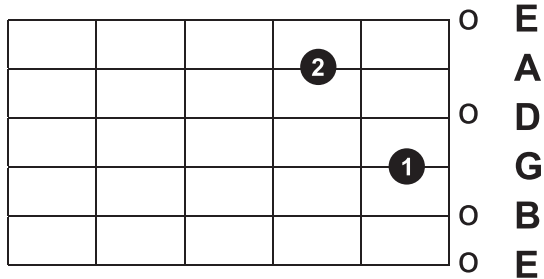
A-D-E-D-E-A

D-E-A-F#m-E

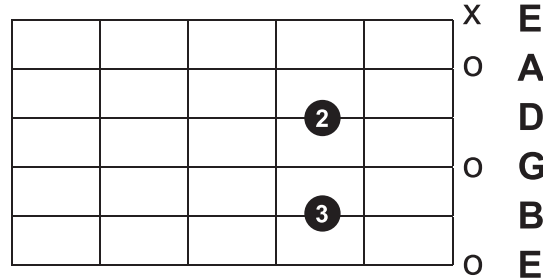
F#m-D-F#m-E

other common chords

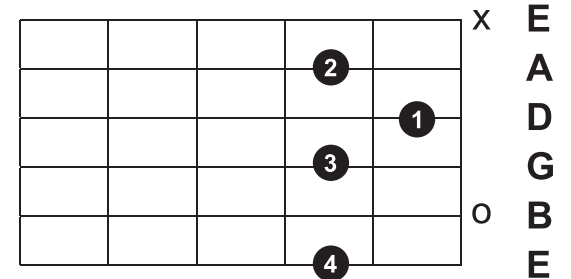
E7



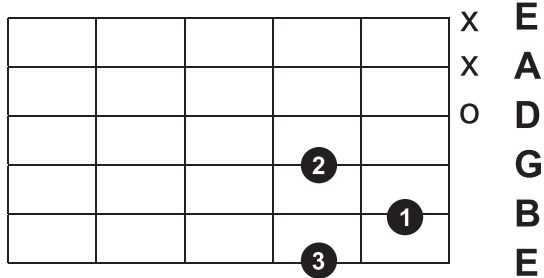
A7



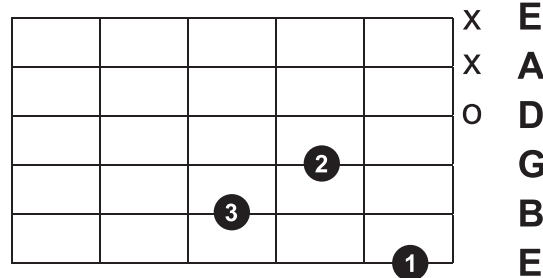
B7



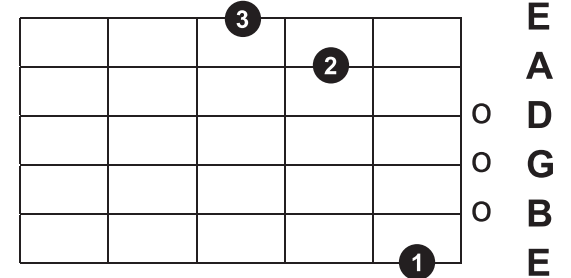
D7



Dm



G7



next steps

Of course, learning the basic guitar chords is only the first step to learning guitar. To **take your guitar playing to the next level**, 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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