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18 CRUCIAL CHORDS FOR UKULELE

The ones you simply have to know

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introduction

Learning the basic ukulele chords is essential for beginners, but because there are so many, it also helps to know which chords to learn first, and how many total to focus on in practice.

The little secret about most songs is that they can typically be played from a pool of about 18 basic chords, using 3-5 at a time. Certain ones will come up all the time, and others you'll see just often enough that you'd better be prepared.

All said and done, eventually, you'll simply be expected to know these 18 chords without fail. No excuses.

how to use this guide

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

Learn the Basic Ukulele Chords in the Following Order

- Learn these concurrently, first: C, F, G, Am (a lowercase “m” in a chord name is short for “minor”)
- Then learn: Dm, Em
- Start fiddling with B7, and concurrently, learn A, D7, E7, D
- As they come up in songs or in any order: A7, G7, E, Bm, Bb, Gm, F#m

A Note About the B7, Bm and Bb Chords

The B7, Bm and Bb chords require you to use one finger to hold down multiple strings. They’re called barre chords (the word is French.) Barre chords are really useful chords on the ukulele, and most beginners tend to avoid them because they are somewhat difficult. But really, you should actually accept the challenge and tackle them head on. **Don’t avoid practicing them. In fact, make them a big part of your everyday practice until you feel comfortable playing them.**

Barre chords take a little palm leverage, hand strength and repetition. Once you can play them, you’ll be surprised at how easy it is to play other chords that sound really complicated.

You’re Free to Slightly Modify Chords

A lot of songs utilize slight variations of the 18 basic chords, but it’s perfectly fine to ignore the slight variations because most of the time, they are only embellishments of the basic chords.

If you see chords such as D7, Asus, Em7 or Cmaj7, you can just as well play D, A, Em and C respectively, and no one will probably ever notice. Of course, you could always learn those chords, but usually, it’s not that critical, especially if you’re just playing for fun. Don’t do this with the ‘b’ or ‘#’ sign though. That means “flat” or “sharp” and is a whole different thing.

How to Practice New Chords

There are multiple ways you can practice new chords. The best way is to choose songs that require you to play them.

Another way is to pick a couple and play one downstroke each, going back and forth in that fashion multiple times.

You could also put them into chord progressions and switch chords on each 1 beat of a repeating four count.

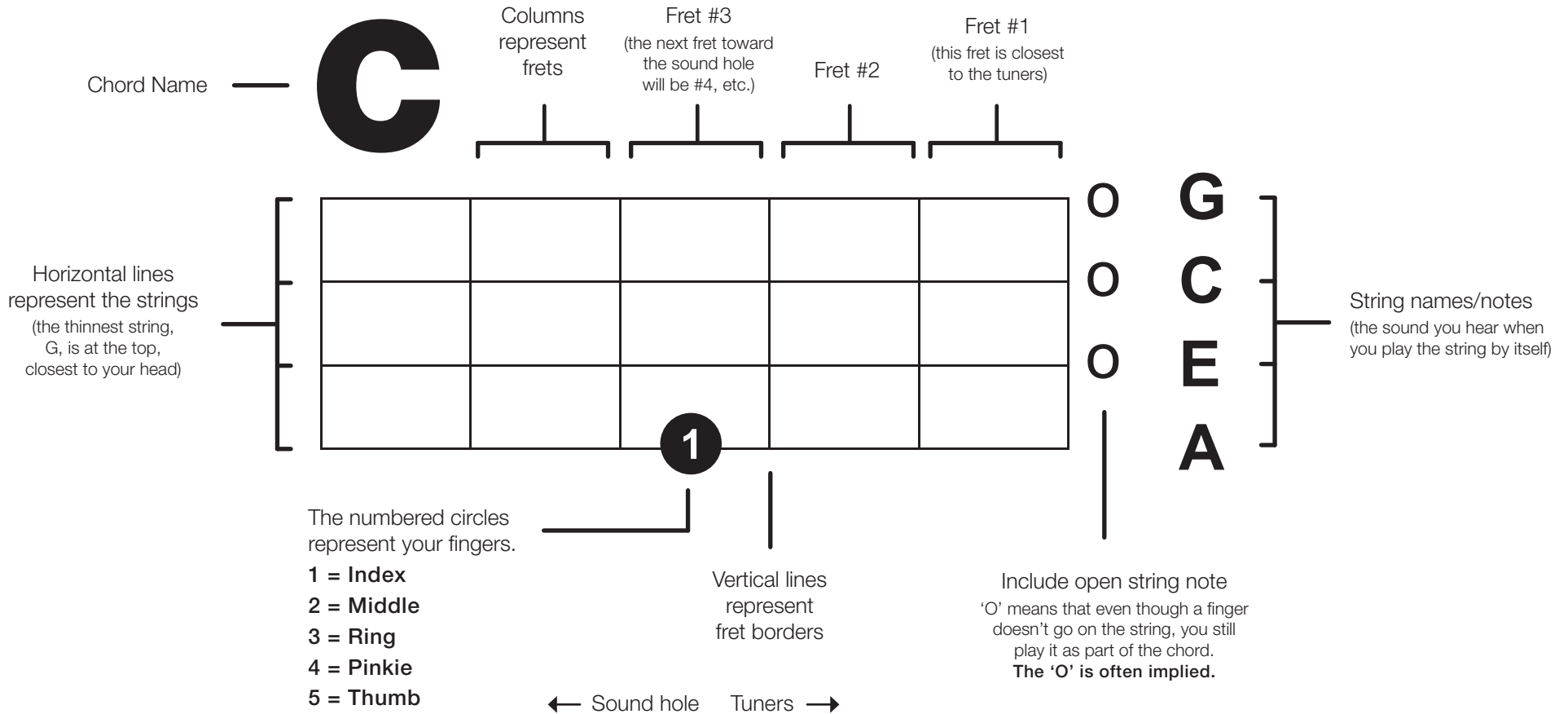
Avoid Overusing the G7 Chord

In general, ukulele players tend to overuse the G7 chord, which sounds somewhat contrived in most situations.

There are really only three instances to use the G7 chord in the key of C: after a Dm chord, when the melody note is an F, and as an embellishment after a G chord. When in doubt, default to a basic G chord. If it just doesn’t sound right, try the G7. This concept should be transposed to other keys as well.

how to read a chord chart

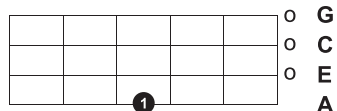
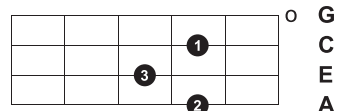
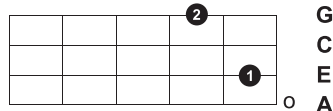
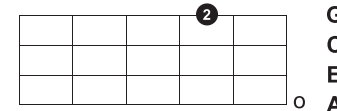
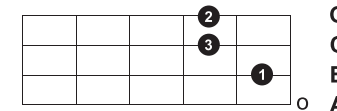
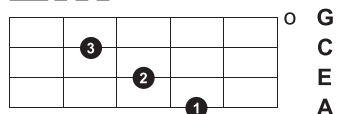
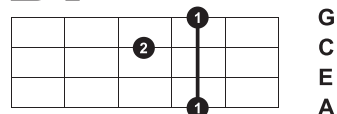
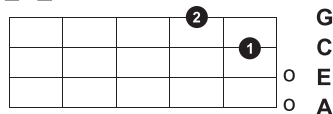
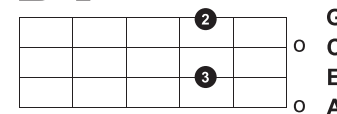
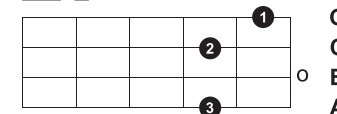
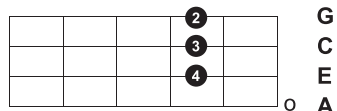
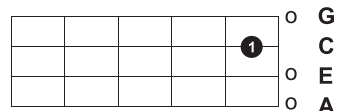
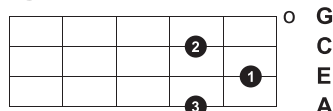
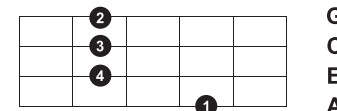
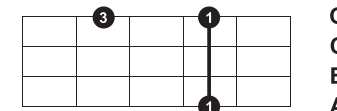
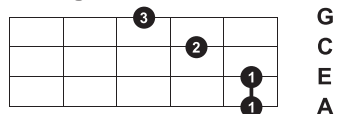
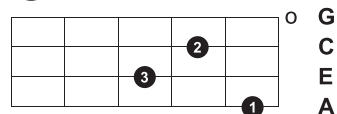
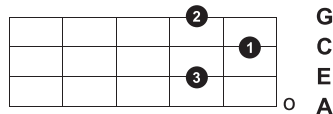
The first step toward playing the basic ukulele chords is learning how to set your fingers for chords. A chord chart shows you **which fingers go on which strings** and **on which fret to press** in order to play a chord. Study this chart religiously.



Note: You often see chord charts rotated counter-clockwise. I always found this to be a little counterintuitive because nobody plays ukulele vertically. If you print this out and hold it up to your ukulele, this is how your fingers would land. Plus, this is how the chord will look in pictures and video tutorials. But if the rotation bothers you, just rotate it counterclockwise...

the 18 crucial ukulele chords

The next step is to learn the rest of the chords. It's perfectly okay to learn them as they come up in songs, but eventually, you should know all of these like the back of your hand. Including the four you already know, there are 18 total that are absolutely essential to ukulele playing.

C**G****F****Am****Dm****Em****B7****A****D7****E7****D****A7****G7****E****Bm****Bb****Gm****F#m**

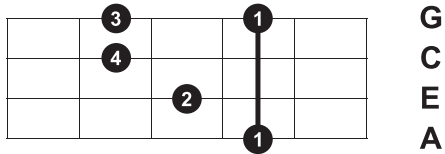
Note: The barbell-looking lines on B7, Bm and Bb mean to use one finger to press down multiple strings at the same time. These are called barre chords. For Bb, use the fingerprint on the your index finger. For B7 and Bm, use your whole index finger on the palm side.

notable alternate fingerings

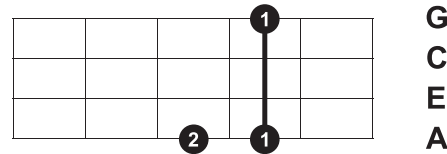
As you gain comfort with the basic chords, especially the barre chords, there are a few chords that have alternate fingerings that are really common: Em, D7 and Bb. Here are the fingerings, along with notes about how to approach each one.

Alternate Fingerings

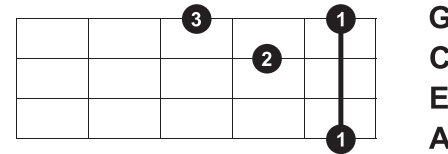
Em



D7



Bb



Notes

- The Bm and B7 chords follow Em a lot. This version of the Em chord is a barre chord that makes it so that you don't have to move your barre finger to play those chords, which in general, is more smooth and natural.
- This D7 is a lot less subtle than the other one. Most experienced players tend to prefer this version.
- The only difference between this version of the Bb chord and the other is that instead of using the index finger to cover only two strings, it covers all four. This makes it more like every other barre chord, which makes it more natural. It also makes it easier and more intuitive to move it around the ukulele neck to create more chords.

You might have noticed that these alternate fingerings are all barre chords, which can be intimidating if you're a beginner. But really, the hardest part about barre chords is getting over the hump of learning the first few. Essentially, you need to build the hand strength first. Putting in the work to get there pays off big time on the ukulele. Ultimately, barre chords make everything easier.

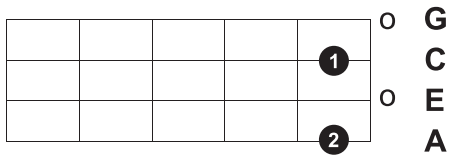
diminished chords

Diminished chords are often associated with jazz, but they do come up enough in other popular styles that you should know how to handle them. In total, there are 17 different diminished chords, but the great thing about them, though, is that the music theory behind them makes it so we only need two chord shapes to cover all 17 instances.

Use the following reference whenever a "dim" chord comes up in a song you're trying to learn.

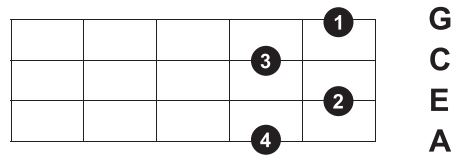
PLAY THIS SHAPE FOR:

**A#dim, Bbdim, C#dim,
Dbdim, Edim, Gdim**



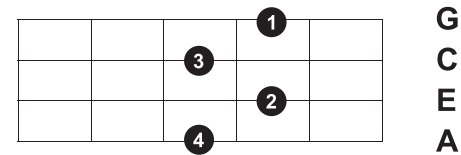
PLAY THIS SHAPE FOR:

**Abdim, Bdim, Ddim,
Fdim, G#dim**



PLAY THIS SHAPE FOR:

**Adim, Cdim, D#dim,
Ebdim, F#dim, Gbdim**



next steps

While learning the basic ukulele chords is an essential step toward proficiency on the instrument, you also need to gain a rock-solid strum and know how to change song chords to suit your needs and skill set.

But once you learn those things, you don't really need to learn anything else unless you want to. If you just get really good at strumming through songs, you can enjoy a lifetime of playing music on the ukulele.

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

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