



LearnCigarBoxGuitar.com

The Chord Book - for 3 string guitar

Prepared for: 3 string fretted cbg
Prepared by: Patrick Curley



Forward

This short ebook will help you play chords on your 3 string guitar. I'm tuned to G, if you're not then I'll leave it you to transpose.

A chord has three notes in it and there are three strings on your guitar, two of them generally tuned to the same note. This leaves us with two options.

1. Play chord fragments that don't contain all three notes

2. Learn more complex shapes and accept that you'll have less of them at your disposal

Some of the chords in this ebook fall into the first category, most however are in the 2nd. As you work through them you're encouraged to listen closely to the sound they make and to the effect of individual notes within the chords. From there you can make your own decision about which category you prefer.

Having said that there are many possible combinations of notes that are often presented as chords that I haven't included here. I prefer instead to present fewer chords that I know will work. To play other combinations you should refer to the first appendix, it presents a simple way to conjure any chord or chord fragment you like. I'd encourage you however to make your final choice by ear and not by some mathematical formula.

Finally don't be put off by the complexity of some of the shapes. If you can't grab them at first you may need some work on your technique and should seriously consider investing in the Starter Pack at LearnCigarBoxGuitar.com where you're guided through a process that will help you voice any of the chords in this ebook.

Happy Pickin'

Patrick Curley *B. Cont. Mus. B. Ed. B Hlth Sc.*



The tonic space

About the tonic space

You probably already know however that there are things called keys and scales and for some reason they're important. Theory explains in words what you can hear and in the process makes the music easier to understand and work with. It can be hard to teach but needn't be hard to learn.

All of your understanding of music should be based around what you hear so let's start there.

- Play all three strings open and listen closely.
- Now barre down the 5th fret and listen closely again. Can you hear how essentially the same sound has simply moved up into a new space. A space where a particular sound resides can be called a tonic space.
- Listen closely again as you move the bar to other positions on the neck.

In each position you'll hear the basic tones, we call them the 1 and the 5, that outline different tonic spaces. Let's mess with this idea of a tonic space a little further.

- Play all three strings open again and listen closely
- Now with that same keen ear fret the note on the 4th fret top string and play all three
- And then all three this time fretting the top string at the 3rd fret

This time the tonic space didn't move but it did change shape. The first change, with the 4th fret top string, added another important note, the third note from the major scale and created a major chord. After that you added the minor third and therefore made the chord minor. Without this note the first open chord was neither major or minor (it's not really even a chord).

As you play the chords in this ebook listen closely for the quality of the various voicings (a voicing is simply a way of arranging the notes). Read the explanations of which notes are in, which are missing and how they are arranged and above all listen closely to how the different notes affect the shape of the tonic space.



The anatomy of the tonic space

The 3 string presents a number of challenges when playing chords. You'll meet those challenges a lot easier, and get a lot more out of this ebook, when you understand a little of how you can manipulate the sounds you are making.

A tonic space is defined by the set of notes that live in it. Most people will call this set of notes a scale. Notes of the major scale create a particular shape, a minor scale a different shape.

They manage this because notes in one scale are arranged differently to those in another. The two chords you played earlier were from different scales.

- Play the major chord again - top string, 4th fret.
- Now the minor chord - top string 3rd fret.

What is important is not the scale but the location of any particular note compared to other notes around it. The minor and major thirds have a different effect because of their different distances from the open string, their position in the tonic space.

You can get through this ebook without knowing where the major third or minor seventh or augmented fourth is, you're told all of that. Concern yourself instead with what they sound like.

Did I mention that you need to listen?

Closely!!!!



Open Chords

The open 'chord'

When you play all three strings open you're playing the 1 and the 5. It's neither major or minor and so can be used in place of either. Be aware though that if you're after a major sound you won't get it from this chord. Likewise if you want your chord to sound like a minor chord this won't do it for you.

It's not actually a chord because it has only has two notes but for the sake of simplicity we'll call it one anyway

The barre

When you play any finger, usually your first, across all three strings on the one fret you create a barre. The barre simply moves the open chord up to a new position on the neck. It will create a chord with a different letter name but it will have the same characteristics as the open chord. It is the same shape, it is neither major or minor, it simply starts from a different place. The chord to your right is an A chord.



The table below will help you name the chords barred across all 12 frets in the key of G

fret	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
chord	G#/Ab	A	A#/Bb	B	C	C#/Db	D	D#/Eb	E	F	F#/Gb	G

A sharp # sign means that you move a fret higher

The flat b sign means you move a fret lower

That's why C# is the same sound as Db

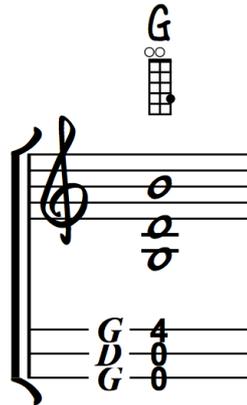


More open chords

Generally speaking chords that use open strings are open chords. On a 3 string many, but not all, open chords have missing notes. Here are a few simple ones to get started.

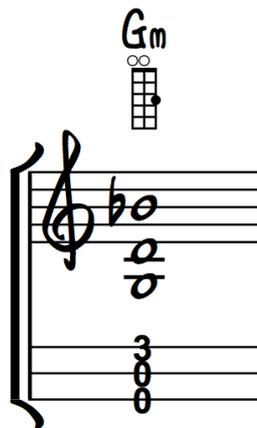
G major

This voicing uses the 1 in the bass, the best place for it and the major 3rd on top, the best place for it as well. Try swapping the notes on the top and bottom strings, that is play the top string open and the 4th fret in the bass. They are the same notes but which one will you be using?



G minor

This voicing is similar to the previous except that it's the minor chord you played earlier. Again swap the notes on top and bass strings and see what you think.





Open 7th chords

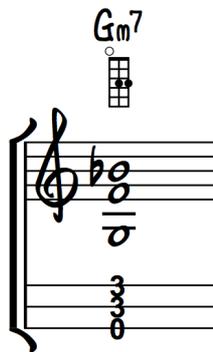
G7

The 7th chord adds the flattened 7th note to the major chord above. In G that note is on the 3rd fret on the middle string. Play this chord and then take your finger off the top string to play it open. You still have the flat 7 on the middle string but without the major third on top it sounds a lot different and is no longer a seventh chord. This second voicing is on the 'don't bother' list.



Gm7

The Gm7 adds the flat7 to the minor chord, no surprises there. Try the trick from the G7 chord again, replace the minor third on the top string with the open string on top. It's not a Gm7 now because there's no minor 3rd.





Other open chords

G chords are easy because you're tuned to G, things get a little trickier when you want to change chords.

C major

This is a common voicing for C major. It's used for the major chord because the note on the middle string is an E, the major 3rd in C. The 1 note is missing though which means you could also confuse this chord for a G6 or an Em or an A7 or any number of other more complex chords with these two notes in it.



C7

This voicing for C7 is based on the C major above. It adds the b7 on the 3rd fret top string. This one, although it has no root is much less ambiguous given the strong relationship between the major 3rd and the flat 7. The 5 on the bass works.





C minor

Here's the minor version of the chord above. The minor third is one below the major again (it always is) this time on the middle string 1st fret. Again no root though so it might be an Eb or an A diminished 7th etc.



C minor 7th

This Cm7 chord is built from the Cm chord above, it adds the flat 7 on the 3rd fret top string. Again there's no root but the b3 and b7 act together to define the chord and the 5 in the bass help too. This chord is much less ambiguous than other rootless voicings.



Bb7

This Bb7 chord puts the 1 on the bass, the best place for it. It also has the 3rd on the middle string and the flat 7 on top. These two notes define the 7th chord and are an important part of a moveable 7th chord that you'll learn later





D

Here is a common open voicing for D. This one does not have the root, it's the open string D, it doesn't however have the third so it's not major or minor. That doesn't mean you can't play it though.



E minor

This Em chord includes all three notes, the 5 note is in the bass and the 1 is on the middle string and the minor 3rd is on top. The 5 can be effective on the bass, particularly if the 1 is not too far away. It's called a 2nd inversion chord. This one has the added advantage of having the defining minor 3rd on top.



E minor 7th

Here you replace the 1 on the 2nd fret middle string with the flat 7 open string. This one has exactly the same notes as the G major chord and demonstrates why it's so important to know what you're doing when choosing chord voicings on a 3 string instrument.





Moveable chords

You looked at moveable chords earlier with the barre chords. Any shape can move up and down the neck like this and give you different ways to play chords.

2nd inversion major chord

The 2nd inversion chord has the 5 in the bass, this one has the 1 on the middle string and the 3 on top. The table below will help you name this shape in different positions. These positions are named for the fret your first finger is on. For example the first one is an E, it has your first finger on the first fret top string.

E



fret	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
chord	E	F	F#/Gb	G	G#/Ab	A	A#/Bb	B	C	C#/Db	D	D#/Eb

Root position 7th chord

This voicing takes advantage of the tritone that defines the 7th chord, the major third on the middle string and the flat7 on the top string. Here it's voiced as a D7 chord in the 4th position

D7



fret	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
chord	G#/Ab	A	A#/Bb	B	C	C#/Db	D	D#/Eb	E	F	F#/Gb	G



2nd inversion major chord without the root

This one is a lot easier to play but it doesn't have the root, it'll have it's uses though. The 5 is in the bass and on the top while the 3rd is on the middle string. Here I've voiced it in D in the 2nd position.

D



2nd inversion minor chord without the root

This one is related to the major chord above, it simply flattens the third to make it a minor chord. Again it has no root. You can use the table above to move the chord around the neck.

Dm



fret	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
chord	C#/Db	D	D#/Eb	E	F	F#/Gb	G	G#/Ab	A	A#/Bb	B	C



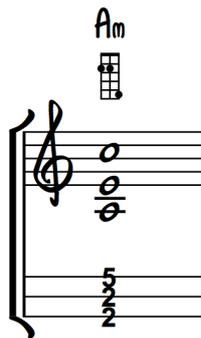
Root position major chord

This shape puts the root note on the bass string. It is the same shape as the open G with all three chord tones. The chords to follow are based on this shape and all can be moved around using the table below.



Root position minor chord

This is the minor chord again based on the open G shape. It contains all three chord tones. This one is easier to grab with the smaller reach to the minor third.



Root position 7th chord

This is the 7th chord again based on the open G shape. It the bass on the bottom and the tritone on top. This takes a bit of a stretch but is more than makeable with your hand in the right spot.



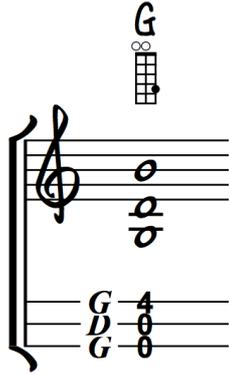
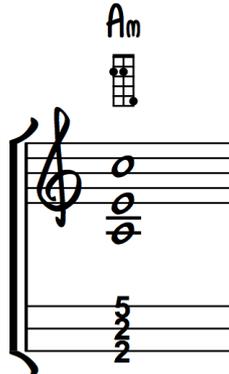
fret	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
chord	G#/Ab	A	A#/Bb	B	C	C#/Db	D	D#/Eb	E	F	F#/Gb	G



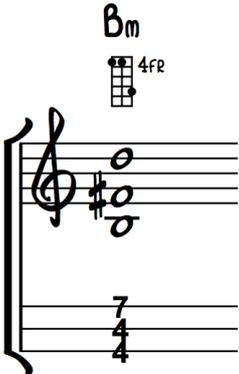
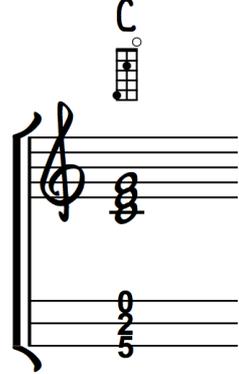
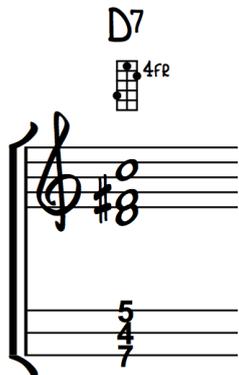
Diatonic chords

Diatonic just means that all of the tones are in the same key, so diatonic chords are chords built from notes that are all in the same key. Because of the way that the scale is constructed some of these chords will be major and others will be minor. Some will have a flattened 7th others won't.

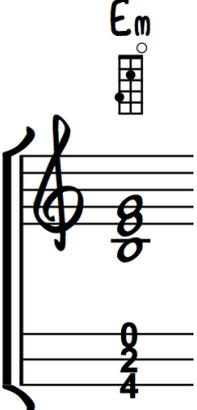
In the major key you have seven diatonic chords, they are listed below in the key of G. .Any song that stays in the key of G will only have these chords in it (*usually, seventh chords can pop up in a song without necessarily changing the key*).

<p>I</p>	<p>G major</p> <p>I prefer this voicing because you've got all three notes of the chord. Important too is how the notes are arranged you generally prefer the 1 on the bass, if not then the 5 is OK. The 3 is better on top and that is exactly what you have here.</p>		
<p>ii</p>	<p>A minor</p> <p>This will be a bit of a stretch at first but it's worth it. Again the 1 and then the 5 are on the bottom and the chord defining minor third is on the top. It's also a moveable shape which you'll see in the next chord.</p>		



<p>iii</p>	<p>B minor</p> <p>As this is the same moveable shape as the previous Am it has all the same advantages tonally. This chord is in the 4th position because the finger closest to the nut, in this case the 1st finger, is on the 4th fret.</p>		
<p>IV</p>	<p>C major</p> <p>This is a closed voicing, you can see from the musical notation that all the notes are close to each other. There's a different quality to this chord with the notes so close and the 5 note on top now. We've still got the tonic in the bass though.</p>		
<p>V7</p>	<p>D seventh</p> <p>This is another important moveable shape. To make way for the flattened 7th note the 5 has been left out and that's OK, a much better option than leaving out the tonic</p>		



<p>vi</p>	<p>E minor</p> <p>You could have moved the Am/Bm shape up to the 9th fret but this shape allows you to get a full sounding chord in the open position where the strings tend to ring a little easier. The trade off is having the 5 on the bass which is not such a big deal given the 1 is in the middle and you've still got the important minor third note on top.</p>		
<p>vii</p>	<p>F# diminished</p> <p>This is a rarely used chord in the major key but worth looking at just to complete the set. It has a tonic (F#) on the 2nd string, the minor third (A) in the bass and the flattened 5th (C) on top. The b5 gives it its name.</p>		



Appendices

Building your own chords

Building your own chords is not as hard as it may seem at first. Hopefully the previous pages have given you some idea of how chords are constructed.

This table will give you the 1, the minor 3rd, the major 3rd, the 5 and the flat 7 for all 12 keys. All of the chords in this book only use these notes.

1	Minor 3rd	Major 3rd	5th	flat7
A	C	C#/Db	E	G
A#/Bb	C#/Db	D	F	G#/Ab
B	D	D#	F#	A
C	Eb	E	G	Bb
C#/Db	E	F	G#/Ab	B
D	F	F#	A	C
D#/Eb	F#/Gb	G	A#/Bb	C#/Db
E	G	G#	B	D
F	Ab	A	C	Eb
F#/Gb	A	A#/Bb	C#/Db	E
G	Bb	B	D	F
G#/Ab	B	C	D#/Eb	F#/Gb

Remember how the chords are built

Major = **1 3 5**

Minor = **1 b3 5**

7th = **1 3 5 b7**

m7 = **1 b3 5 b7**

The table and examples on the next page will help you translate this stuff to your fretboard



Use the fretboard diagram below to find the notes.

fret	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
G	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A
D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D	D#	E
G	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A

So for example to find an Eb major chord

- From the table on the previous page the notes in Eb major are Eb G and Bb
- Eb is the same as D#
- Bb is the same A#

A# is on the 3rd fret top and bottom and D# is on the 1st fret middle string so you could use that. Just ask yourself a few questions.

- **Which notes are missing?**
- **Does it sound any good?**
- **Can you include the G as well?**

Then all that remains is to determine how to arrange them. The final test is your ear but generally try and put the 1 or the 5 in the bass, the 1 usually works better.



Transposing

To transpose a chord or melody is to simply transport it to a new key or tonic space. Here's a foolproof way to do this.

1. Identify the relative name of the chord from the diatonic chord chart below
2. Rewrite the song using these relative names. Capitals for major, small letters for minor and diminished.
3. Identify the chords in the new key that match these relative names
4. Replace the relative names with the chord names from the new key

Relative name	A	A#/Bb	B	C	C#/Db	D	D#/Eb	E	F	F#/Gb	G	G#/Ab
I	A	Bb	B	C	Db	D	Eb	E	F	Gb	G	Ab
ii	Bm	Cm	C#m	Dm	Ebm	Em	Fm	F#m	Gm	Abm	Am	Bbm
iii	C#m	Dm	D#m	Em	Fm	F#m	Gm	G#m	Am	Bbm	Bm	Cm
IV	D	Eb	E	F	Gb	G	Ab	A	Bb	Cb	C	Db
V	E	F	F#	G	Ab	A	Bb	B	C	Db	D	Eb
vi	F#m	Gm	G#	Am	Bbm	Bm	Cm	C#m	Dm	Ebm	Em	Fm
vii	G#dim	G#dim	A#dim	Bdim	Cdim	C#dim	Ddim	D#dim	Edim	Fdim	G#dim	Gdim

Example

You've found the chords for Knockin' on Heavens' Door, G, C, D and Am and the singer needs it in Eb. You can retune your guitar to Eb and play the shapes for the **I**, **ii**, **IV** and **V** chords or:

1. You look down your chart and find that the only key with this combination of chords is G.
2. So you redo the chord chart replacing the G with a **I**, the C with a **IV**, the D with a **V**, and the Am with a **ii**.
3. From the table above you can see that in Eb the **I** chord is Eb, the **IV** chord is Ab, the **V** chord is Bb and the **ii** chord is Fm.
4. Now you can rewrite the chord chart, this time replacing the numbers with the chords from the new key.
5. Then you just need to be able to play all these flat chords on your guitar tuned to G, we'll get to that.

Of course you can always just scan laterally across the table to the new key but rewriting the chart with the numbers will help you to eventually do this without the help of the table.



Another way to think about chords on a 3 string guitar.

So we all love 3 string guitars, that's a good thing. That needn't mean however that we shouldn't accept their limitations and even seek ways to work around them. The most obvious limitation is that with only 3 strings it's not possible to play a variety of chords in every position.

We've also discovered that there are ways to work around these limitations.

- If you understand chord construction you can make better choices about which notes to select
- If your technique is up to it you can grab more complex shapes

There's another option.

The magic missing note

I've read on various internet forums that your ear will magically fill in the missing notes. While this may be a convenient out for some it's entirely wrong. There is no tooth fairy and there is no magic missing note.

Let's say that you play a G and a E note. Does your ear magically produce a C to make it a C major chord? Or a B and make it an Em or G6? Or does it conjure an A to make in an A7? Hopefully by listening closely to the various chords and voicings in this ebook you'll have heard for yourself the difference between playing a full chord and a chord fragment.

But all is not lost. There are ways to suggest a tonality (chord) without explicitly playing it. The missing note devotees will cite some of the great classical composers or jazz guitarists who use small 2 and 3 note voicings to play complex harmonies. These things are true but it's a mistake to use this as proof of a magic missing note without looking at how it all works.

Making music is about connecting sounds in a particular way and exploring how they work together. Musicians will often choose to surround a chord fragment, either harmonically or melodically, with other notes that help suggest the tonality/ chord they want.

And these connections are not always straightforward. I certainly won't be going into them here. The Starter Pack Course at LearnCigarBoxGuitar.com begins this process while the upcoming advanced 3 string course will focus heavily on it. I'm also planning a book of arrangements of classic songs for 3 string guitar that will use many of these advanced concepts.

I hope you've gained something from this ebook. I have a particular philosophy on playing 3 string guitars that is probably obvious but I feel that I've backed it up and also offered you plenty of opportunities to play, listen for yourself and come to your own conclusions about how to approach this most intriguing of instruments.

Happy Pickin'

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