

Chord Families

Knowing killer chords is one thing, but knowing where to use them is the trick. That's why we're going to spend a little time in this lesson learning about chord families. Most people might not realize it, but songs and scales have their own built in chord families. By using the notes from the major scale we can make up 7 different chords. These chords made from the scale will work perfectly with the scale. Each chord constructed from a scale plays a different role and knowing how they interact with each other will make you a better player and songwriter. [well type=""]

For example, for a song in the key of C, we can use the C major scale to determine what chords will work (and how) in the song.

[/well] We can decode the chord system of a scale by building triads. Remember, triads are simply 3 notes that make up a chord ("tri" means 3, like in tricycle). The actual process of determining the chords is easy. All we have to do build them is to take every other note of a scale until we have three. The key signature can be any note, but for our example we'll use the key of C. Since we're in the key of C, we'll use the C major scale. In figure 1 you'll see the C major scale tabbed out in it's extended form (were we repeat the notes at a higher pitch).

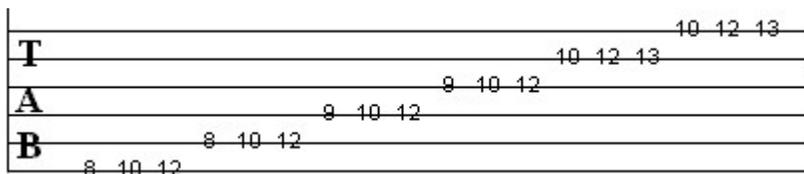
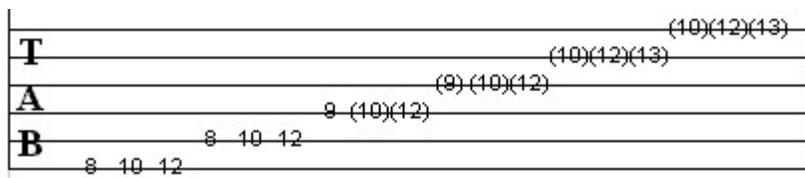


Fig. 1: The Extended Major Scale

The major scale is a diatonic scale which just means it has 7 scale steps. Therefore, in the 1st position of the scale all notes past the first 7 are just repeat notes. You can see them in the picture below in parenthesis.



Now if we have our key signature of C and the notes that we can play with the C major scale, how do we know what chords we can use? Keep reading!

Built In Chords

We can build a triad off of each scale step for a total of 7 chords. Start with the first note of the scale step and take out every other note until you have three notes to form a triad as in the picture below.

Constructing The 1st Triad

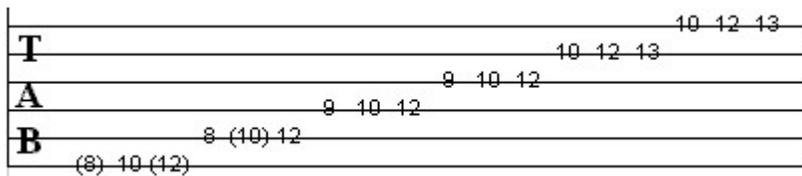


Fig. 3: Constructing The 1st Triad

This is the triad we end up with:

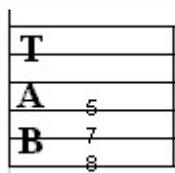


Fig. 4: The 1st Triad

Note: To show the triads in a form that you can play them in we have to often times move a note to the next string as in this case.

Constructing The 2nd Triad

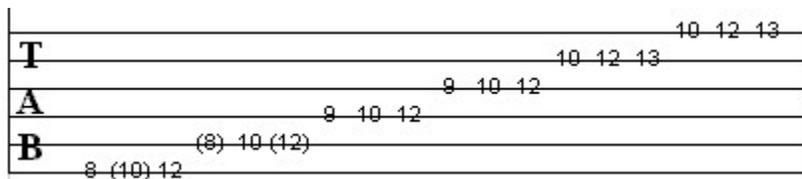


Fig. 5: Constructing The 2nd Triad

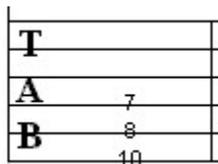


Fig. 6: The 2nd Triad

Constructing The 3rd Triad

A musical staff with three lines. The top line (T) has notes 10, 12, and 13. The second line (A) has notes 9, 10, and 12. The bottom line (B) has notes 8, 10, and 12. The note 10 on the bottom line is enclosed in parentheses.

T	
A	9
B	10 12

Constructing The 4th Triad

A musical staff with three lines. The top line (T) has notes 10, 12, and 13. The second line (A) has notes 9, 10, and 12. The bottom line (B) has notes 8, 10, and 12. The notes 8 and 10 on the bottom line are enclosed in parentheses.

T	
A	9 7
B	8

Constructing The 5th Triad

A musical staff with three lines. The top line (T) has notes 10, 12, and 13. The second line (A) has notes 9, 10, and 12. The bottom line (B) has notes 8, 10, and 12. The notes 9 and 10 on the second line, and the note 8 on the bottom line, are enclosed in parentheses.

T	
A	7
B	9
	10

Constructing The 6th Triad

T				10	12	13
				10	12	13
A			(9)	10	12	
			9	(10)	12	
B		8	10	(12)		
	8	10	12			

T	
A	9
B	10
	12

Constructing the 7th Triad

T				10	12	13
				10	12	13
A			9	(10)	12	
			(9)	10	(12)	
B		8	10	12		
	8	10	12			

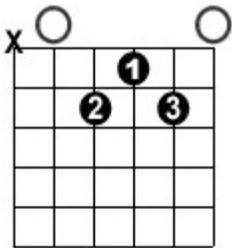
T	6
A	7
B	9

After we build all 7 triads, we know 7 chords that we can use in the key signature with no problems. Below are the 7 triads that we built (the 8th triad is the 1st triad repeating).

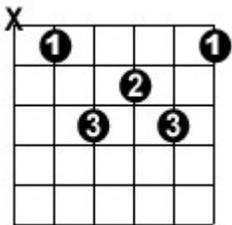
T						6	8
			5	7	9	7	9
A	5	7	9	7	9	10	9
B	7	8	10	8	10	12	
	8	10	12				

The names of the chords that these triads form are named: **1.) C Major** **2.) D minor** **3.) E minor** **4.) F Major** **5.) G Major** **6.) A minor** **7.) B diminished**

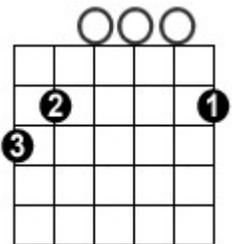
AMaj7



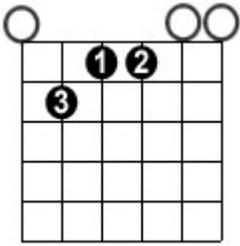
A Shape Major 7th Barred



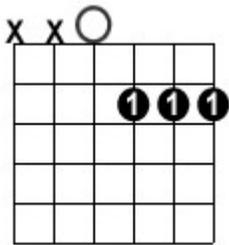
Gmaj7



E Major 7th



DMaj7



This chord is very easy to play. Just place your 1st finger across the 2nd frets of the G, B, and high E strings. To sound the chord just strum the D, G, B, and high E strings. This shape is easy to barre:

