

Creating Chords from the Major Scale

The Diatonic Triads of C Major

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Chords are built from scales. Three note chords are called “triads” and we need at least three notes to make a chord, so triads are the simplest form of chords. We can build chords from any type of scale but right now we are going to concentrate on the key of C Major.

Below is the C Major scale starting on middle C:

1

C D E F G A B C

T
A
B

3 0 2 3 0 2 0 1

What we are going to do is build 1 chord from each scale tone. We'll make a C chord, a D chord, an E chord, etc.

And here's how we do it:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

First of all, a chord needs to have at least 3 notes. So to build the first chord we will start on the first note and then just skip every other note.

We now have a C Major chord. These three notes are referred to as the 1 (or Root), 3rd, and 5th of the chord. The note we started on is 1 and we simply count up the scale.

Of course, on guitar, they end up looking a little bit different because when we play chords on guitar we usually double at least one note just to make it easier to play. Like this:

T
A
B

0
1
0
2
3

In this chord we actually have two C's and two E's and one G but there are no other notes than these.

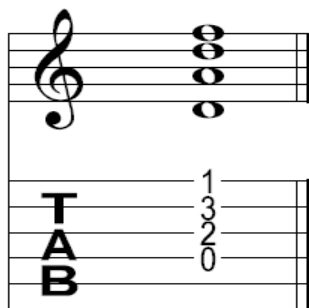
Let's try another one. This chord is going to be a D chord. Actually it's going to be D minor. We'll do it like this:



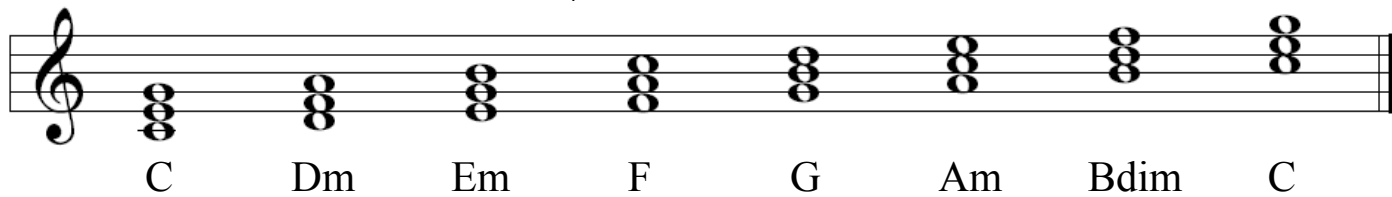
So here's our Dm chord. The 1 (or Root) is D, the 3rd is F and the 5th is A. Notice this time we counted from the D instead of from the C because that is the first note of the chord.



And the guitar version looks like this:



So here are the seven chords built on the seven notes of the Major scale, also known as "Diatonic Triads". Diatonic means "of the Tonic" and the tonic in this case is C because that's what key we are in:



Or, in guitar language:

