



Ukulele Beginner Guide

Contents

Welcome.....	3
About the Ukulele	4
How to Tune Your Ukulele	6
How to Hold Your Ukulele	8
Your First Ukulele Chords	9
Your First Strumming Pattern.....	11
Your First Song	13
10 More Really Important Chords to Know	15
More Advanced Strumming Patterns.....	22
Where Do I Go From Here?	25



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Welcome

Are you ready to dive into the world of ukulele? Maybe you already have but you've not gotten that far. Wherever you're at, after going through these lessons, you will not only have the skills to play a large handful of chords and be able to hold down a solid strumming pattern, but you'll be able to play some of your favorite songs.



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The ukulele will bring a lot joy to your life. It's consistently been a centerpiece instrument around family gatherings and celebrations. The cool thing is you don't really need a musical background to play ukulele.

These lessons are designed for the beginning or relatively new ukulele player to get you started on your path towards ukulele success. However, even if you've played for a little while, I encourage you to keep reading because you might just pick up some new tricks.

With that being said, let's get started!

About the Ukulele

The ukulele is a four stringed plucked instrument that originated in the 19th century from Hawaii. The most popular sizes of ukuleles are: soprano, concert (alto), tenor, and baritone.

Soprano ukuleles are the smallest ukes and tend to be the most common as they can be had for a pretty low price (great for beginners). They are known for their bright, jangly sound. As you go to the opposite end of the spectrum, baritone ukes are larger and are tuned like the bottom four strings of a guitar. They sound warmer and deeper in comparison to a soprano.

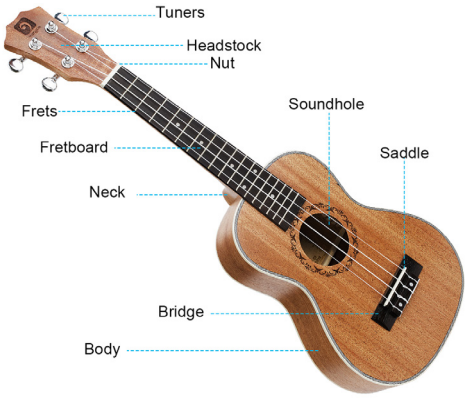


Sound is created whenever you pluck a string. The string vibrates the saddle, which is the white piece of plastic or bone supported by the bridge on the top of the ukulele. The energy produced vibrates the top of the ukulele which resonates in the body of the instrument and is projected out of the soundhole.



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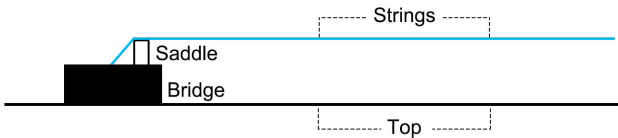
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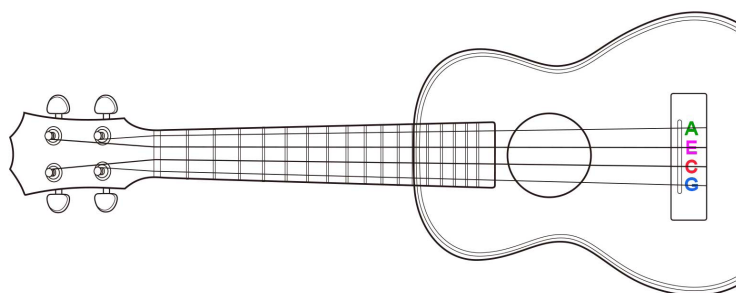
The most important thing you need to know for the purposes of this lesson is how to identify the neck, fretboard, and frets. Frets are the vertical pieces of metal that lay across the fretboard. You press your fingers between the frets and pluck a string to produce a sound. The higher you go up the fretboard the higher the pitch.



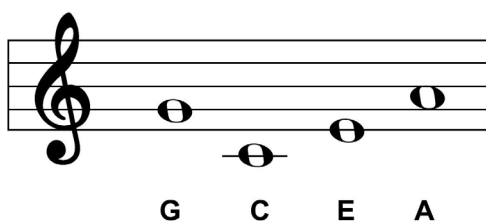
How to Tune Your Ukulele

The most common type of tuning is standard tuning. Soprano, concert, and tenor ukuleles are typically tuned this way.

As you can see, the top string or fourth string of the ukulele is tuned to a G. The third string is tuned to a C. The second string is tuned to an E, and the first string or bottom string is tuned to an A.



You can see how the ukulele is tuned on the music staff:



and on the piano keys:



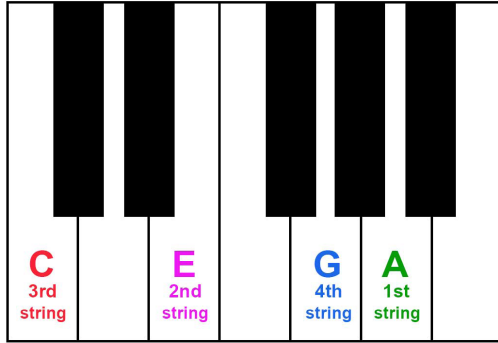
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Using a Chromatic Tuner to Tune Your Ukulele

The easiest way to tune your ukulele is by using a chromatic tuner, which will be originally included in the box. As you pluck each individual string on your ukulele, this little device will detect the pitch and display it back to you. It will indicate if you are sharp or flat (above or below the pitch), so you can get an accurate tuning. Every ukulele player should have a chromatic tuner.



TIPS

Always, I mean always, tune up your ukulele before you play it. Strings stretch as you play them and can go out of tune from humidity and temperature. As a ukulele player, you will be more inspired by a ukulele that's in tune and so will your listeners

How to Hold Your Ukulele

How you hold your ukulele can vary depending on what size of ukulele you have. Typically though, you want to cradle the body of the ukulele in your right arm, while the part of your forearm, closest to the elbow, applies a little pressure to the top of the ukulele, so it is held snug against your body. Then, you support the neck of the ukulele in the crevice of your left hand where your thumb meets your index finger.



Your strumming hand should be loose and relaxed with the fingers perpendicular to the 12th to 14th fret of the ukulele. Most of the time you'll want to strum in this area and not directly over the soundhole. The closer you get to the bridge and soundhole the brighter the sound becomes (sometimes this is desirable though).

Some people might also strum with their index finger, so the nail of their finger strums across the strings on their down strum, and the bottom of the finger strums across the strings on their up strum.

However you choose to strum, the most important thing to remember is to keep a loose, relaxed hand and wrist.



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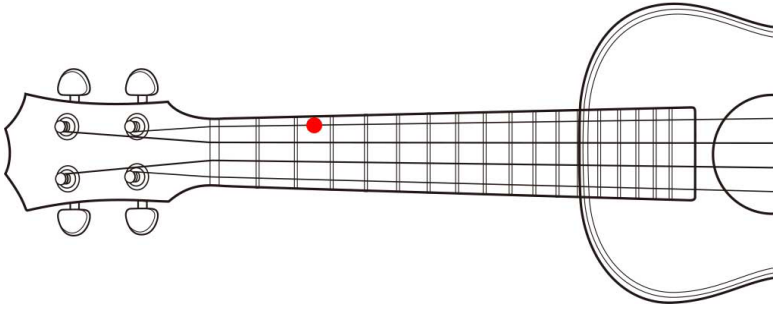
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Your First Ukulele Chords

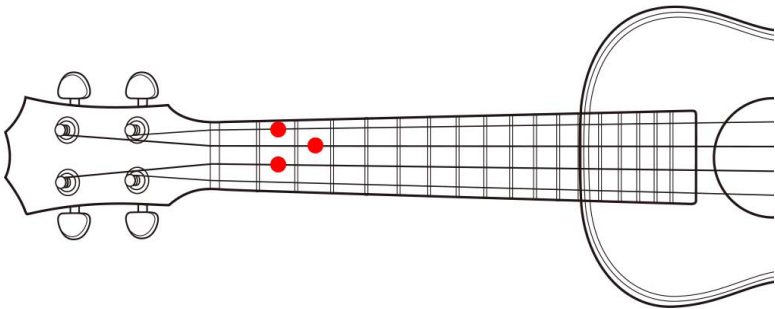
It's time to actually learn how to play something. We'll be learning three chords to start off: C major, G major, and F major.

C major



To play a C major chord, place your ring finger on the 3rd fret of the bottom string. The remaining strings ring completely open.

G major



To play a G major chord, place your middle finger on the 2nd fret of the bottom string, your ring finger on the 3rd fret of the second string, and your index finger on the 2nd fret of the third string. The top string rings completely open.



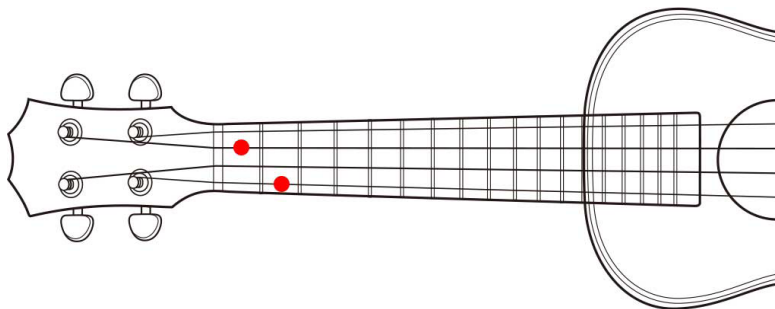
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F major



To play an F major chord, place your index finger on the 1st fret of the second string and your middle finger on the 2nd fret of the top string or the fourth string. Let the first and third string ring completely open.

How to Practice These Chords

Practice the fingering for each of these chords and practice changing between chords. At first, it's difficult and frustrating to get your fingers to go where you want them. Through time and practice, you'll build muscle memory where changing chords becomes second nature. You might also notice that the ends of your fingers start to feel sore after awhile. This is very normal. Eventually, your fingers will build callouses on the ends of them, which will prevent the tips of your fingers from hurting. After a week of dedicated practice, you should start to notice this to get better. Amazingly enough, you can play hundreds of songs with just these three chords. Before we learn a song though, let's take a look at some strumming patterns.



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Your First Strumming Pattern

Strumming can feel very awkward at first and a bit of a juggling act. Not only are you trying to switch chords but you're also trying to keep the strumming pattern going while you're doing this. This can be really hard.

I've noticed the tendency might be to jump right in and start learning a strumming pattern. Before we do this, we really need to cover some important thinking that goes behind strumming. If we understand this, strumming becomes easier.



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The Basis of Strumming

Strumming is a form of rhythm. Rhythm depends completely upon good timing and consistency. Strumming is not about how complicated or how fast you can play. If you're not keeping good time and consistency, you've completely defeated the purpose of strumming.

This is why as we learn our first strumming pattern we need to be very intentional about counting out loud. Eventually, we will build an internal "clock" of sorts where it becomes easier to keep time without thinking much about it.

Strumming Pattern #1: Down, Down, Down, Down

For this first strumming pattern, we're going to take our C major chord that we learned and strum all down strums.

We're going to do this to a count of four, which means we will count out loud "1, 2, 3, 4" and repeat this at a very consistent, but not too fast pace. We will strum down on each count. A count of four (4/4) is a very common time

signature in most popular music.

The image shows a musical exercise in 4/4 time. It consists of two measures. The first measure is labeled with a 'C' above it, indicating a C major chord. Below the 'C' are the words 'down down down down' and four quarter notes, each with a number below it: 1, 2, 3, 4. The second measure is also labeled with a 'C' above it, with 'down down down down' and four quarter notes numbered 1, 2, 3, 4. The time signature '4/4' is written vertically on the left side of the first measure. The piece ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Practice counting out loud and strumming all down strums at a consistent and moderate tempo. It might seem boring to count out loud and just do down strums, but it's important to develop this sense of time.

As you start to feel comfortable with this, try adding a chord change. Here's where it gets a bit harder. Let's change from a C major chord to a G major chord while keeping the same tempo.

The image shows a musical exercise in 4/4 time. It consists of two measures. The first measure is labeled with a 'C' above it, indicating a C major chord. Below the 'C' are the words 'down down down down' and four quarter notes, each with a number below it: 1, 2, 3, 4. The second measure is labeled with a 'G' above it, indicating a G major chord. Below the 'G' are the words 'down down down down' and four quarter notes, each with a number below it: 1, 2, 3, 4. The time signature '4/4' is written vertically on the left side of the first measure. The piece ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Practice this until you can switch between the two chords without hesitating between the chord changes. The count should remain consistent and steady through the chord change.



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Your First Song

After you've practiced keeping a steady tempo and changing chords with all down strums, you're pretty well equipped to play a lot of songs with just those three chords and that strumming pattern, but let's first take a look at an easy song--an oldie but a goodie: "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star."



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Again, keep going with the down strums. The changes in this song are pretty quick, so start off slow and think about anticipating the next chord.

C Twin - kle Twin - kle | **F** li - ttle | **C** star :||
1 2 3 4 | 1 2 etc...

F How I | **C** won - der | **G** What you | **C** are :||

C Up a - | **F** bove the | **C** world so | **G** high :||

C Like a | **F** dia - | **C** mond | **G** in the | sky :||

<p style="text-align: center;">C</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Twin - kle Twin - kle</p> <p style="text-align: center;">4/4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">  </p> <p style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">F C</p> <p style="text-align: center;">li - ttle star</p> <p style="text-align: center;">4/4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">  </p> <p style="text-align: center;">1 2 etc...</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">F C</p> <p style="text-align: center;">How I won - der</p> <p style="text-align: center;">4/4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">  </p>	<p style="text-align: center;">G C</p> <p style="text-align: center;">What you are</p> <p style="text-align: center;">4/4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">  </p>

Practice this till you can sing and play it at a steady tempo without having to hesitate between your chord changes.

If you are having trouble, slow it down. Practice counting out loud and just going through the chord changes without singing. As you get more comfortable, start humming under your breath in combination with your counting. And then, as this becomes more comfortable sing it out, and sing it strong!

Again, we're not trying to be "fancy" here ("fancier" stuff will come in the next part). Right now, we want to focus on being steady and consistent. Once you're ready, let's move on and learn some more important chords.



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10 More Really Important Chords to Know

By now, you should feel pretty comfortable changing between your C, F, and G chords. Your fingers should feel used to switching and changing chords. It's time to learn some other really important and common chords. If you know these like the back of your hand, you'll be half way to learning about every song out there.



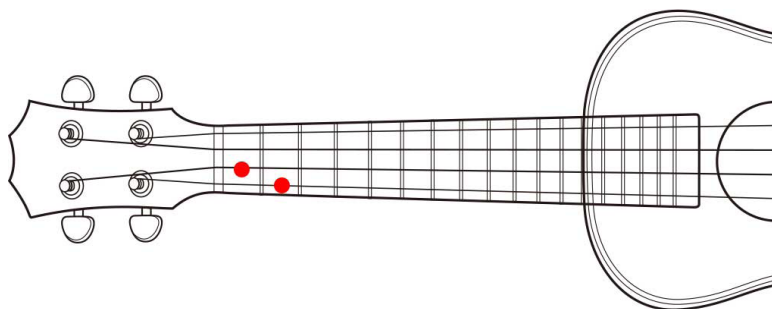
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Major Chords

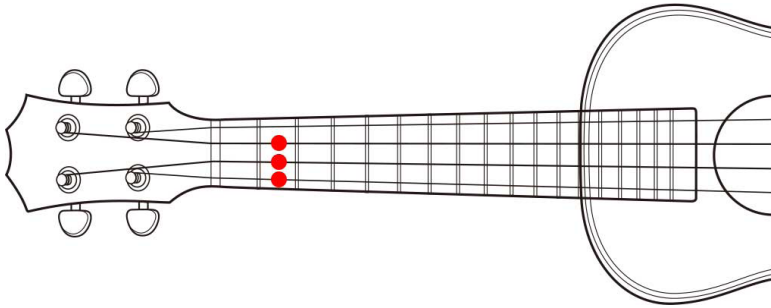
Here are some other common major chords you should know.

A major



To play an A major chord, place your index finger on 1st fret of the third string, and place your middle finger on the 2nd fret of the fourth or top string. The bottom two strings ring completely open.

D major

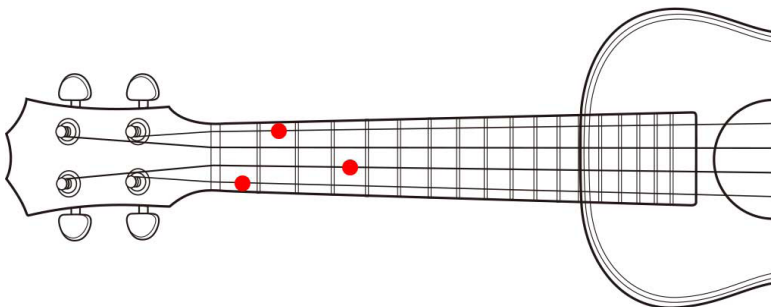


There are a couple ways you can play this chord. The first way is to place your pinky on the 2nd fret of the second string, your ring finger on the 2nd fret of the third string, and your middle finger on

the 2nd fret of the fourth or top string. For people with smaller fingers, this might work well.

However, those of us with large fingers, the other common and recommended way to play this chord is to barre the top three strings on the 2nd fret with your ring finger. This means your ring finger lays across the three strings while bending enough to allow the bottom string to ring open. Sometimes I will even use my index finger to do this. This is hard to do and takes some practice, so experiment with both ways to see which one comes easier.

E major



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This chord is a bit of a stretch. Place your middle finger on the 2nd fret of the first or bottom string. Place your pinky on the 4th fret of the third string. Place your index finger on the 1st fret of the fourth or top string.

Minor Chords

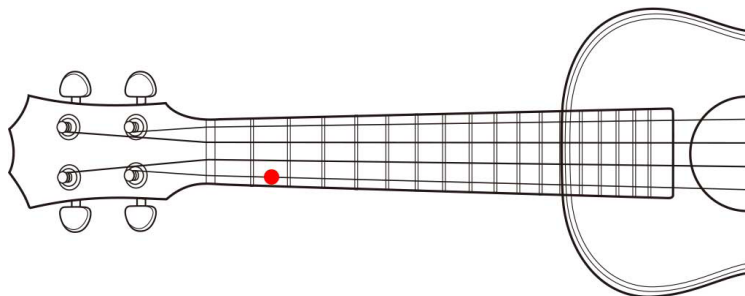
The next set of chords we're going to learn are minor chords. Minor chords are like major chords, except you change one note of the chord to make it minor. Minor chords tend to have a "sadder" sound to them. [Click here to read a more in-depth explanation on the differences between major and minor chords.](#)



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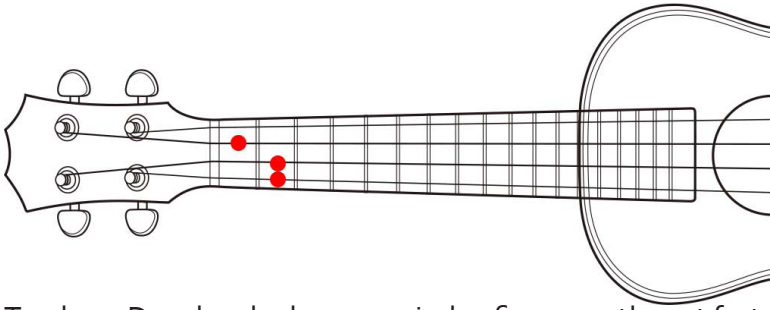
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A minor (Am)



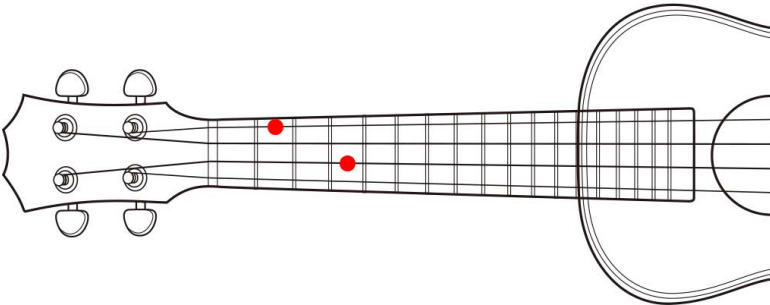
This chord is really easy to play. Simply place your middle finger on the 2nd fret of the fourth or top string and let the bottom three strings ring completely open.

D minor (Dm)



To play a Dm chord, place your index finger on the 1st fret of the second string, your ring finger on the 2nd fret of the third string, and your middle finger on the 2nd fret of the fourth or top string. Let the bottom string ring completely open.

E minor (Em)



To play an Em chord, place your index finger on the 2nd fret of the first or bottom string and your ring finger on the 4th fret of the third string. Let the second and top string ring completely open.

Dominant 7th Chords

Major and minor chords only have three notes that make up the sound of the chord. Seventh chords are essentially



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major or minor chords with an added note called the “seventh,” which refers to the seventh or last note of a scale. You find seventh chords a lot in blues and jazz styles.

There are different types of seventh chords (major 7th, minor 7th, dominant 7th, diminished 7th), however, we’re just going to learn some dominant seventh chords, which tend to show up a lot.



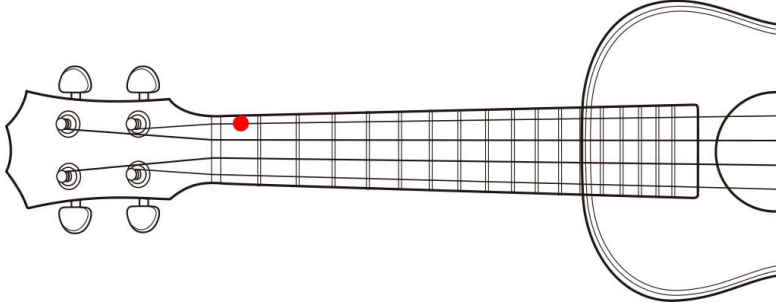
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C7

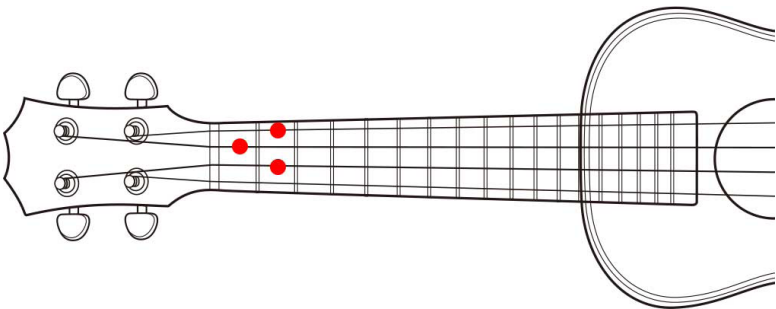
To play a C7 chord, simply place your index finger on the



1st fret of the first or bottom string. Let the other three strings ring completely open.

G7

To play a G7 chord, place your ring finger on the 2nd fret



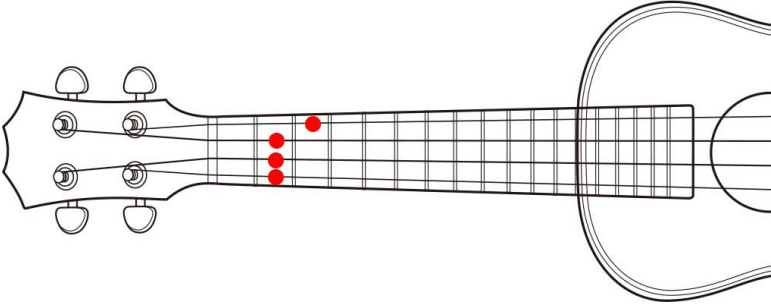
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of the first or bottom string. Place your index finger on

the 1st fret of the second string. Place your middle finger on the 2nd fret of the third string. Let the top string ring completely open.

D7

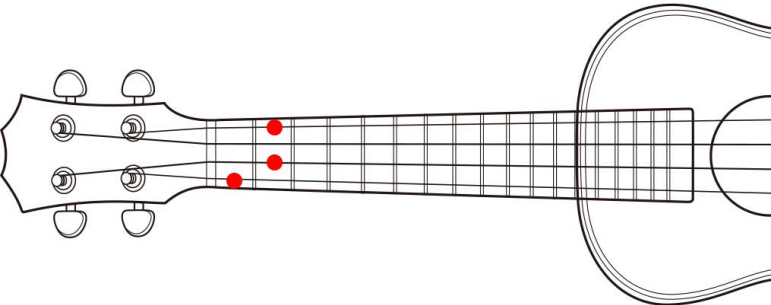
This is another chord you want to barre. To play a D7 chord, lay your index finger across all four strings on the



2nd fret. While these strings are barred, place your middle finger on the 3rd fret of the first or bottom string.

E7

To play an E7 chord, place your ring finger on the 2nd fret



of the first or bottom string, your middle finger on the 2nd fret of the third string, and your index finger on the 1st fret of the fourth or top string. Let the second string ring completely open.



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Be sure to check out my video of “11 Must-Know Chords for Beginners” to see how many of these chords are played.



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Once you're feeling comfortable, you can try adding a chord change for this third strumming pattern.

C **G**

down down up down up down up | down down up down up down up



1 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 2 & etc...

TIPS

Want to take your rhythm to another level? One really great way to practice your strumming is to use a metronome. A metronome does not lie so it will force you to practice developing a solid and consistent sense of rhythm.



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Where Do I Go From Here?

While I've given you quite a bit to work on and practice, eventually you'll become a master of all this. The beginning stages of something can always be the most difficult, but I know for a fact through your hard work and discipline you'll hit your stride in no time. Here are some ways you can "speed" this process up.



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Develop a Practice Plan

When you create a plan for practice, you're creating a plan to get to the place where you want to be. What songs do you want to be able to play on the ukulele? What techniques do you want to master? Answering these questions can provide you a direction for how you want to structure your practice times and what things you work on.

Setting up a practice plan also forces you to carve out time in your busy schedule. Even if you can only spare 15 minutes a day towards practice, doing this consistently is better than spending a couple hours once every couple weeks.

Right now would be a perfect time to jot down a couple goals and find a regular time in your schedule to practice the ukulele. The goals don't have to be extensive. It could be something as simple as "I want to be able to play the song titled ' _____ ' by next month."

Seek Out Inspiration

I've noticed in my own life that I'm most motivated to push forward in my growth as a musician if I'm surrounding myself in ways I can be inspired. Sometimes

these are totally unrelated to ukulele, but there are a few things that can help.

First, listen to ukulele players that you really enjoy on a consistent basis. This might be a CD of an artist or someone you subscribe to and watch on YouTube. I know for myself listening and watching to someone play is really helpful. Over time, you'll notice yourself picking up different parts of their style that you really dig, even unintentionally.

This goes a little bit with the first point, but secondly, go see some live concerts. There is something inspiring about seeing someone play who has a mastery of the ukulele. One guy that really inspires me whenever I watch him is Jake Shimabukuro.

Lastly, surround yourself with other ukulele players and musicians that can support and speak into your passion. One great way to do this is to try to find a ukulele group in your local area that meets. If you can't find anything like this, start one up.



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Mahogany



	Acoustic	Acoustic Electric
Soprano 21"	UK-21M	UK-21ME
Concert 23"	UK-23M	UK-23ME
Tenor 26"	UK-26M	UK-26ME



KOA



	Acoustic	Acoustic Electric
Soprano 21"	UK-21K	UK-21KE
Concert 23"	UK-23K	UK-23KE
Tenor 26"	UK-26K	UK-26KE



Zebra Wood



	Acoustic	Acoustic Electric
Soprano 21"	UK-21Z	UK-21ZE
Concert 23"	UK-23Z	UK-23ZE
Tenor 26"	UK-26Z	UK-26ZE



Spalted Maple



	Acoustic	Acoustic Electric
Soprano 21"	UK-21S	UK-21SE
Concert 23"	UK-23S	UK-23SE
Tenor 26"	UK-26S	UK-26SE



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