



Chords 5: Chord Theory

YOU CERTAINLY DON'T need to know Chord Theory in order to play chords, so

this sheet is only for those who wish to expand their knowledge of music theory and harmony.

What is a Chord?

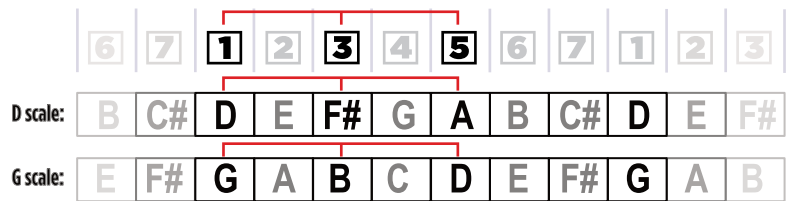
Chords and harmony are linked. In fact the process of adding chords to a melody is called "harmony". Whereas harmony can consist of two notes played together, a chord must have at least three notes played simultaneously.

The three types of chords you will come across are *major chords*, *minor chords*, and

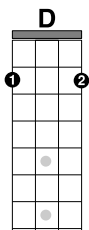
seventh chords. All chords are based upon the major scale: a *D major* chord will be formed from notes in the D scale, while a *G major* chord will refer to the G scale. (*n.b.* "major" chords are referred to without qualification, so a "D chord" is a *D major* chord; an A chord is *A major*, and so on.)

Major Chords

Major chords are made from three notes: the *first*, *third*, and *fifth* steps of the scale. D major therefore consists of **D**, **F#** and **A**. The order doesn't matter, as long as these three notes (and *only* these three notes) are

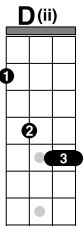


played. Because the mandolin has four strings,

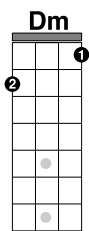


one of these notes will be repeated, so let's look at what's happening when we play the D chord. First note is second fret on the G string: the **A** note; second is open **D**; third is open **A**, fourth is second fret on the E string, the **F#**. So this voicing of the

D chord satisfies the requirement for playing **D**, **F#** and **A**, and the **A** note is repeated. Another way of playing a D chord is shown right: the notes this time are **A**, **F#**, **D** and **A**. No matter how a D chord is played, the same three notes (plus one repeated) will be heard.



Minor Chords

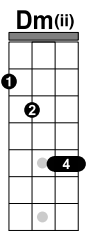


Minor chords are made from the same three notes as the major chord (the *first*, *third*, and *fifth* steps of the scale) but with a *flattened third*. To "flatten" a note on the mandolin you just take it down one fret. The third step of the D scale is **F#**, so to make the *D minor*

chord, that becomes **F natural**, and the three notes become **D**, **F** and **A**. The **F#** on the first D major chord is on the E string, 2nd fret, so

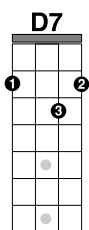
take it down to the **F**, the 1st fret. That gives you the *D minor* chord.

In the second voicing, the **F#** is on the D string, 4th fret, so scoot it down to the 3rd fret to give an **F natural**.



To get any minor chord, play the three notes of a major chord, but flatten the note which is the third step of the scale (called "the third").

Seventh Chords



To get a seventh chord, you need four notes. Start off with a major chord and then add a *flattened seventh*: that is, the seventh step of the scale taken down one fret. In the D scale, the 7th step is **C#**; that becomes **C natural**, and we play it on the A string, 3rd fret.

The four notes being played are **A**, **D**, **C** and **F#** - all the notes which make up the D7 chord.

For a G7 chord, take the three notes of the G major chord (**G**, **B** and **D**), and add the flattened seventh (7th step of the G scale is **F#**, 2nd fret on the E string; that becomes **F natural**, 1st fret on the E string). The notes now played are **G**, **D**, **B** and **F**.

