Music Theory

Triads

Introduction to harmony and chords

Harmony

Harmony : the combination of simultaneously sounded musical notes to produce a pleasing effect. In music, when we think about harmony we think about chords. Harmony has to be distinguished from melody.

Melody : a sequence of single notes that is musically satisfying; a tune.

Guitar is a harmonic instrument because you can play multiple notes at the same time to produce chords like you would on a piano. On a flute you can not produce multiple notes at the same time so it is an example of a melodic instrument.

Triads

Harmony is a huge theme. However in order to make things simple, playing at least two notes at the same time produce a chord. However a two notes chord is weak.

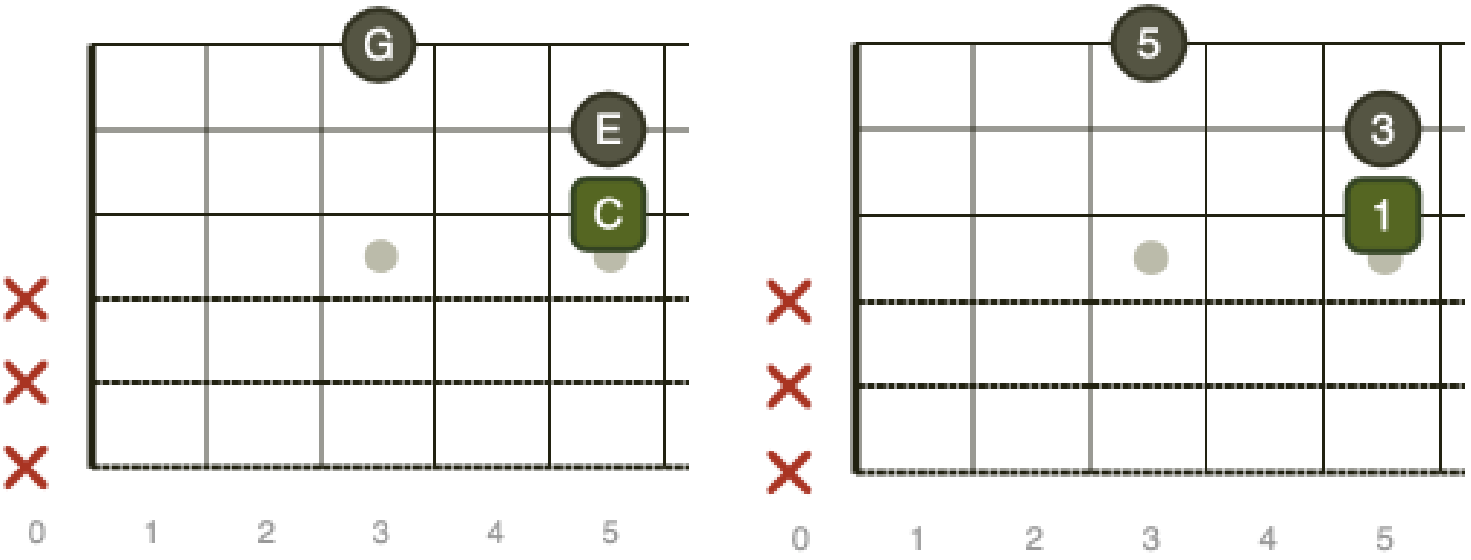
In reality the most basic chords are composed of at least three different notes : a **root**, a **third** and a **fifth**. This is why we call these most basic chords triads. Really **triads just means three** because it is made out of three different notes.

There are four different types of triads : Major & Minor triads that are **consonant** and Diminished & Augmented triads that are **dissonant**.

In the two next pages you will find examples of the four C triads and one way to play them on the guitar fretboard. The numbers indicate the roles of the notes (1 = root, 3 = third and 5 = fifth).

Major and Minor Triads

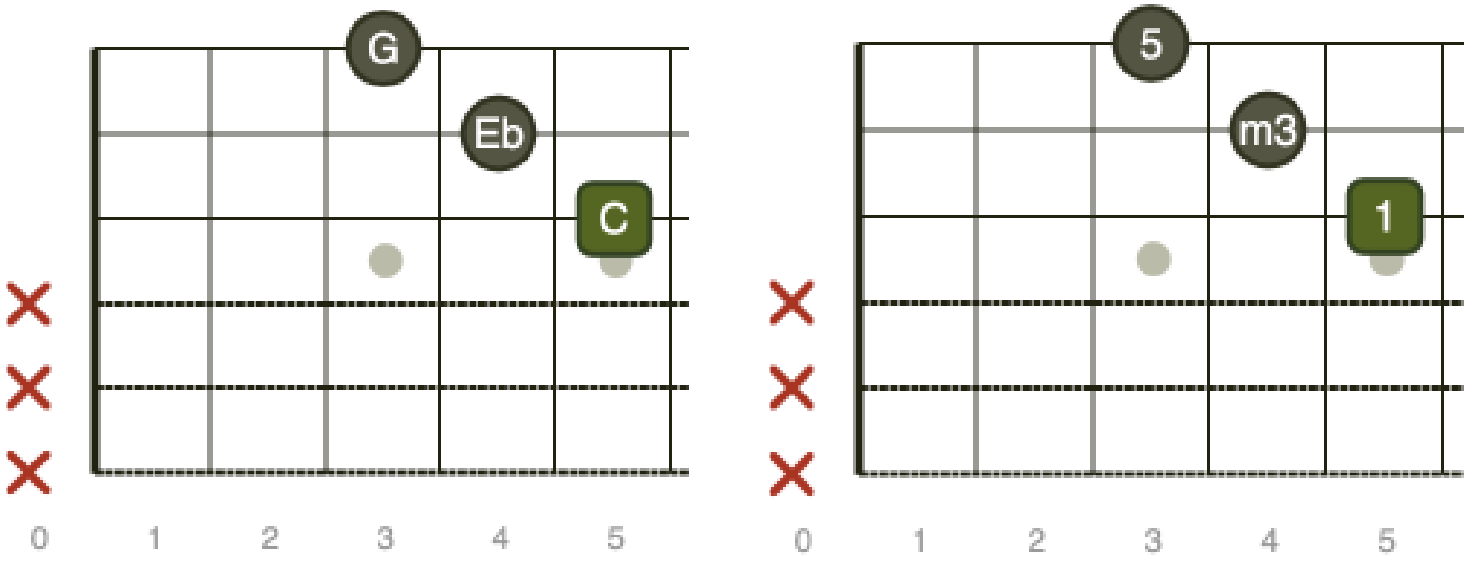
C



A **Major Triad** is composed of : a root, a major third and a perfect fifth

---

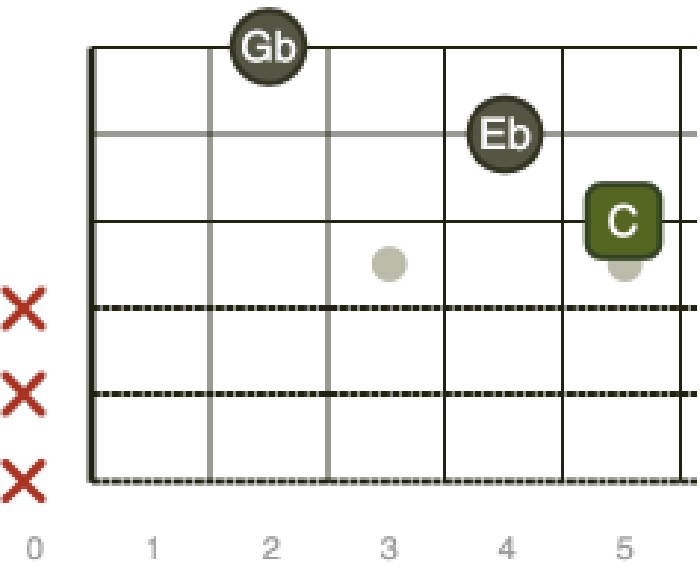
Cm

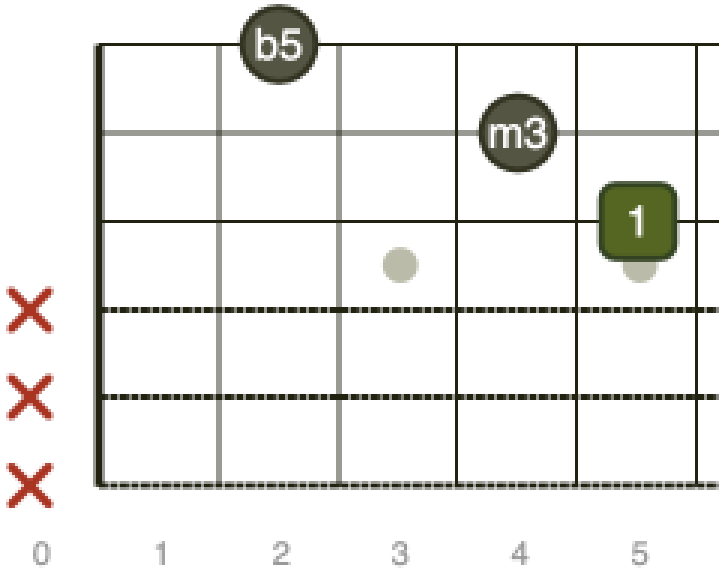


A **Minor Triad** is composed of : a root, a minor third and a perfect fifth

Augmented and Diminished Triads

Cdim

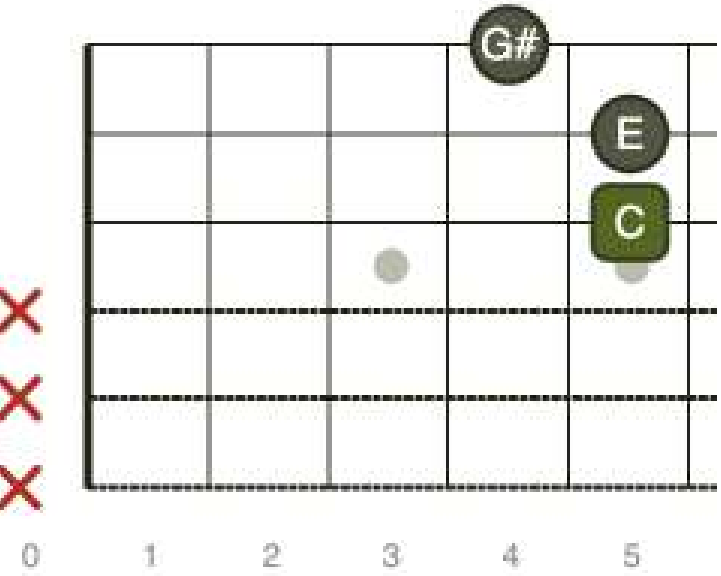


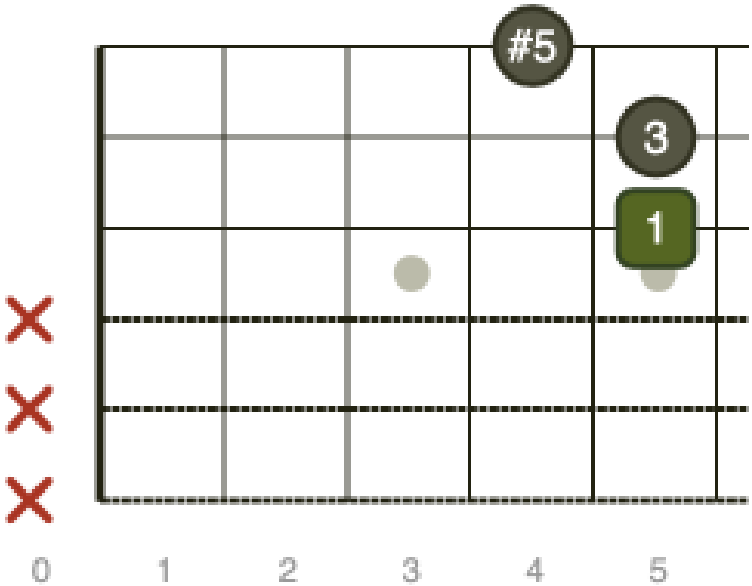


A **Diminished Triad** is composed of : a root, a minor third and a diminished fifth

---

Caug





A **Augmented Triad** is composed of : a root, a major third and a augmented fifth

Chords

One you have understood the way to construct triads we can now build common chords and get a grasp on how to actually build and play chords on the guitar.

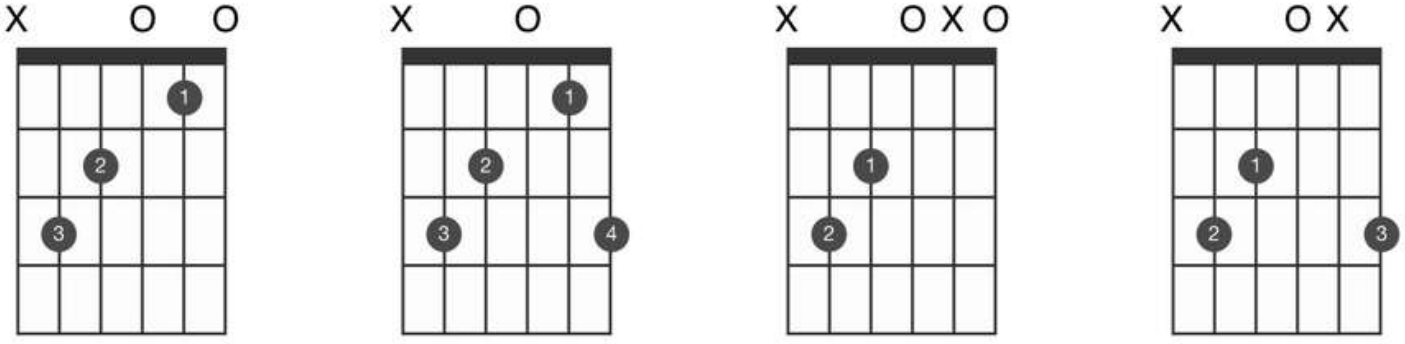
The important thing to understand is this : **the root, the third and the fifth in a triad could be played or repeated on any octave**. What makes the color of the chord is the fact that each of the three different notes have a role in it (root, third and fifth).

In practice what this means is that if I take a triad, I can add low or high octaves of the root, third and / or the fifth without actually changing the quality of the chord.

However, what is really common is to have the **root on the lowest note of the chord**.

The way to arrange the notes in a chord can alter the sound of the chord without actually changing its inner quality (major, minor, diminished, augmented). In music theory, **voicing** refers to the placement of notes in a chord structure.

The following image represent different voicings of a C major chord (open chord). The numbers indicates the finger number that has to place on each string.



These four apparently different chords actually ring out the "same chord" : a C major. This is because all of these chords are composed of the same three notes C - E - G, respectively the root, third and fifth.

The concept of voicing is very important to understand in order to fully understand chords and their construction.