

Creating Solo Ukulele Arrangements

Creating a solo ukulele chord arrangement is as simple as harmonizing a melody by playing a chord or partial chord with the melody note as the top note of the chord. This style of playing is called “Chord Melody” or “Melody and Chord”. The hard part comes with – what chord voicing? When should I play a chord? When are single notes OK? And a few other issues usually pop up, especially with only having four, three, two and sometimes no string to harmonize a melody.

Luckily we don’t have to wait for monster chops, a massive chord vocabulary or endless hours of practicing scales and chords to play the ukulele. Although practice is a good idea and never hurts, all we need are a few chords and single notes to have hours of ukulele fun. What you already know can get you started.

Learning Tips from a Piano

We can take our cue from the Piano. The piano is a color coded instrument, black & white keys. Notes move horizontally only along the keyboard. Higher notes move to the right and lower notes move to the left. Each individual key, white or black is a unique pitch or note - *no duplicates*.

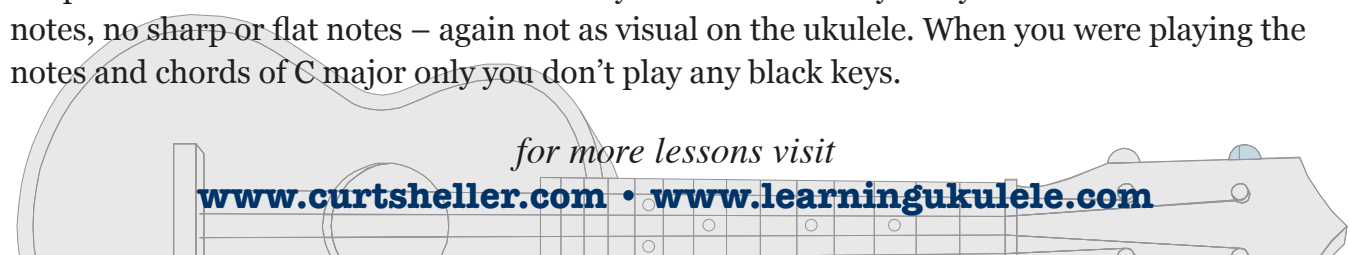


The ukulele is not so lucky. It’s not a color coded instrument. We only have one hand to play the melody and the accompaniment at the same time. Notes can move both across and along the fingerboard. There are duplicate notes, with the same note available in alternate locations on different strings.

The Key of C Major - The Learning Key

C D E F G A B C’

Sometimes called the learning key, the key of C Major is an easy key to explore this style. On the piano the notes and chords for these keys are the white keys only. These are called natural notes, no sharp or flat notes – again not as visual on the ukulele. When you were playing the notes and chords of C major only you don’t play any black keys.



This is the same approach that we are going to take with the ukulele. We'll find these natural note and the chords for the key of C major on the ukulele.

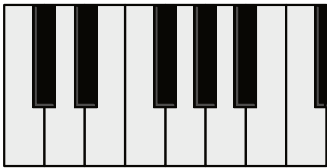
C Major Scale:

C D E F G A B

Key of C Major Basic Chords:

C Dm Em F G G7 Am Bdim

The White Keys of the Ukulele



The natural notes or white keys on the ukulele are not a symmetrical pattern as the piano's black and white key. The open strings and two additional frets are the only frets on the ukulele

with *only* natural notes A, B, C, D, E, F or G. These are *key frets* which can be used for reference and locate the other natural notes.:

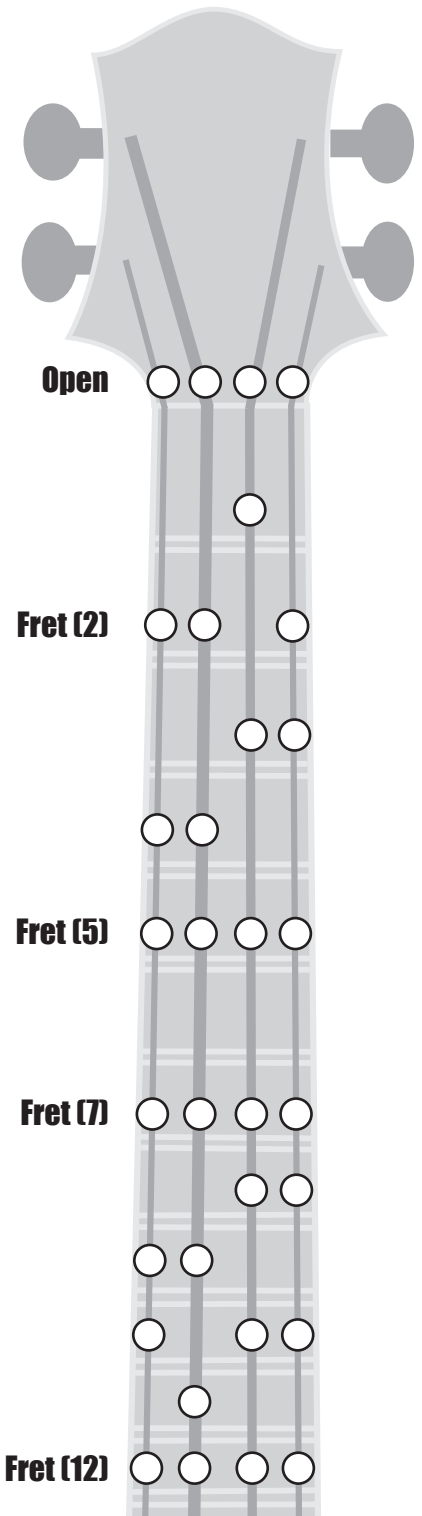
open strings	G	C	E	A
fret (5)	C	F	A	D
fret (7)	D	G	B	E

fret 12 are the same letters one octave higher.

From these natural notes (white dots, white keys), you can fill in the rest of the natural note names. If we only deal with strings one and two, we can get a lot of the notes to use for harmonizing with chords or partial chords when crafting melody and chord arrangements.

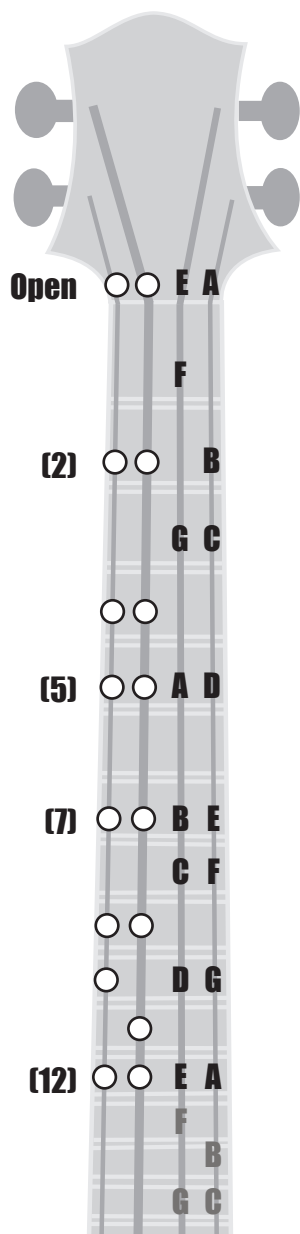
Sticking with the common key of C Major we can limit the amount of information that we initially need to learn, to these *natural notes*. Most melodies can be played on strings one or two. Allowing you to add harmony notes lower than the melody.

NOTE: When using a low G string you have that string four available. When using a high G string you need to be aware of whether the added note on string four is higher or lower than the melody.



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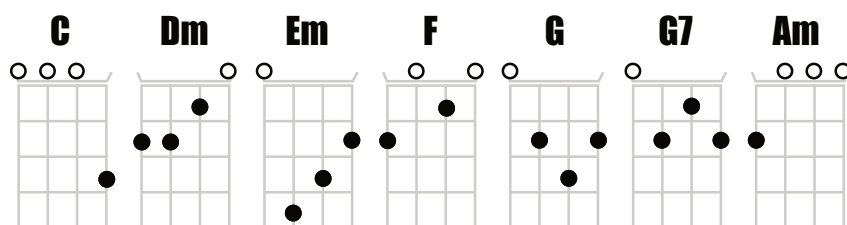


Notice that along a single string, the F note is always the next higher fret, 1/2 step above E and C is the next higher fret, 1/2 step above B. These are the white keys of the piano without a black key between them.

The Open Position Chords in the Key of C Major

C Dm Em F G G7 Am B°

As the B Diminished chord (*B° or Bdim*) is not very common in progressions for the key of C, we'll skip that chord. But all the other chords are very common and easy to play open position chords.



None of the above chords uses all four fingers. So this gives a free finger or two to make some music and explore the key of C.

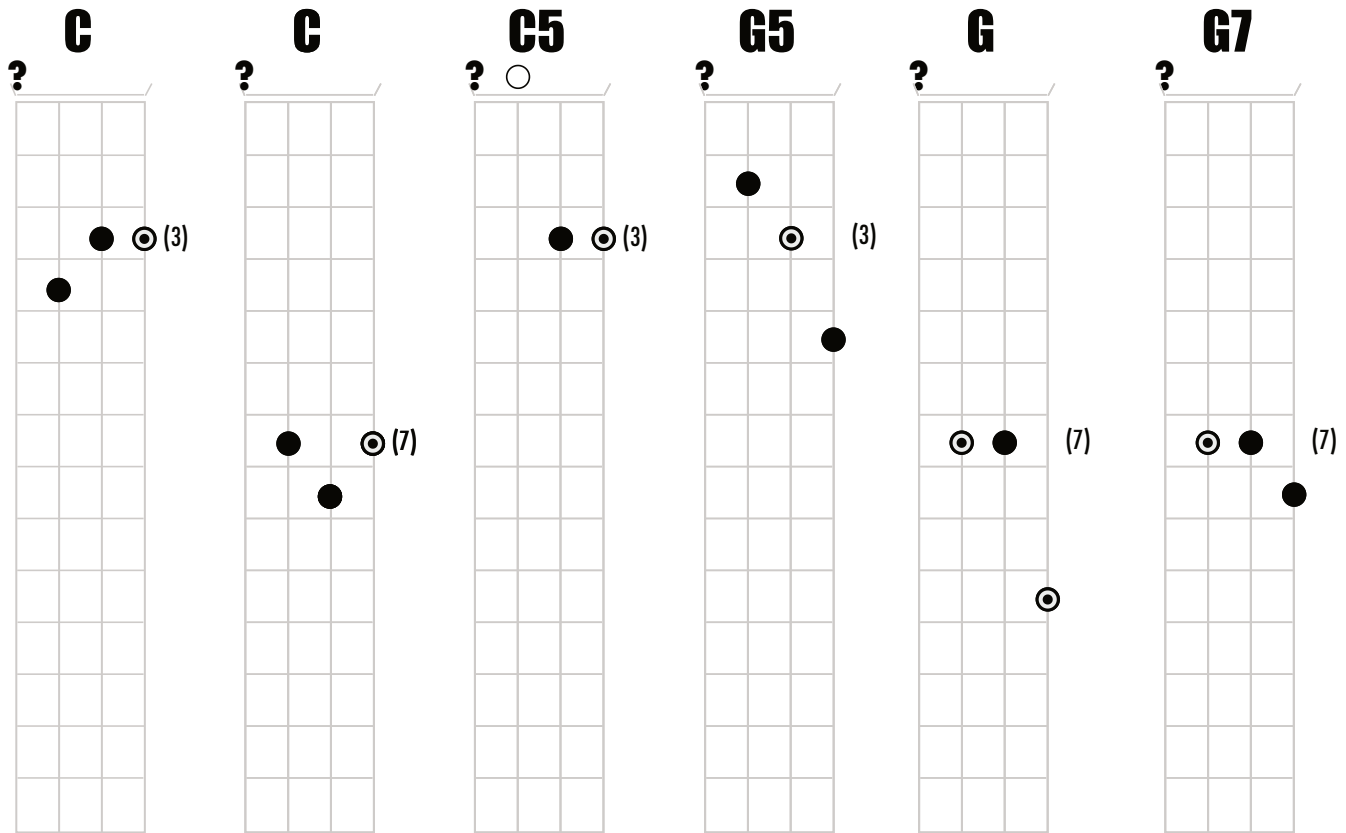
Primary Chords - C, F, G, G7

The primary chords in the key of C are: C, F and G, G7. A lot of songs in the key of C use these chords, some just C and G.

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Here are some additional C and G chord voicings. Both C and G contain a G note so the open string four can be used in voicings higher up the neck.

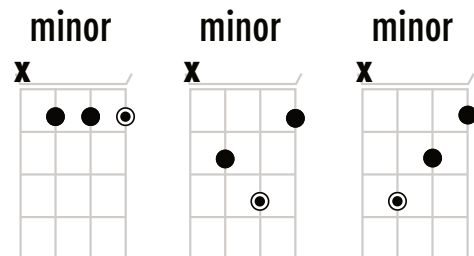
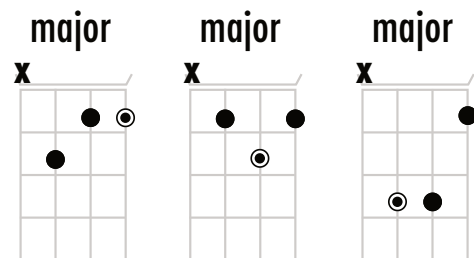


Triads

Here are the *major* and *minor* triads that can be transposed up and down the fingerboard to harmonized a given melody.

⊙ The Root, Letter Name of the Chord

If the open string four, G is part of you harmonization of the melody it can be incorporated. In the case of the chords above. The G is a chord tone and can be included.



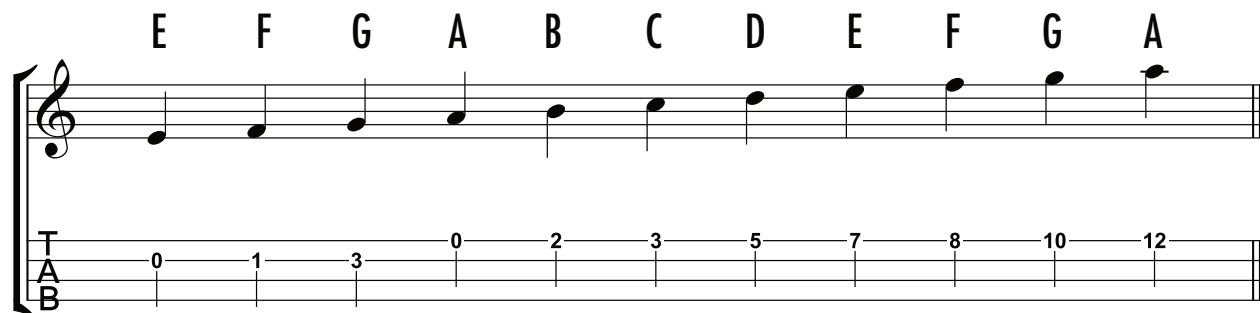
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Linking the Notes to the Standard Music Notation

Knowing the names of the notes of the ukulele fingerboard and what the standard notation is for that note, is a starting point for creating your own solo ukulele arrangements.

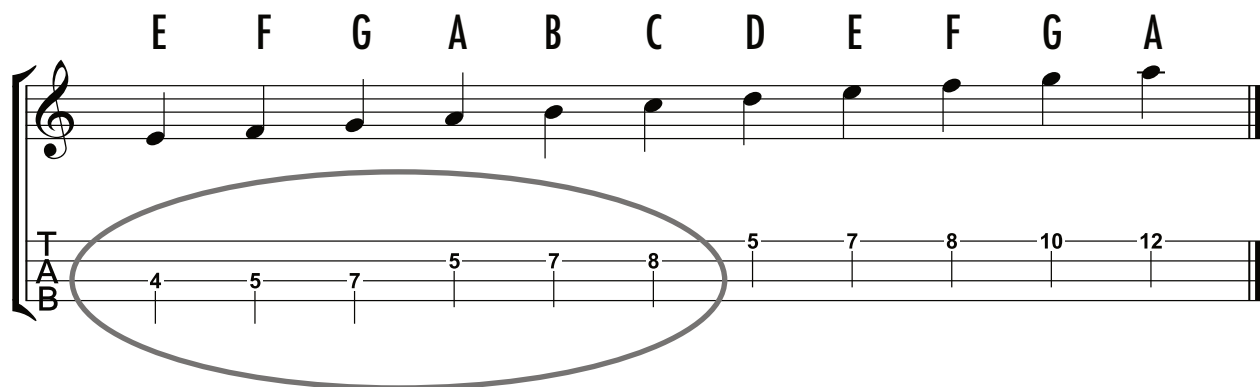
Most melody notes can be found on strings one and two of the ukulele. This is where we will start.



Alternate Note Locations

The ukulele is capable of playing the same pitch at alternate locations on the fingerboard.

Here are some of the same notes available on string three and on string two.



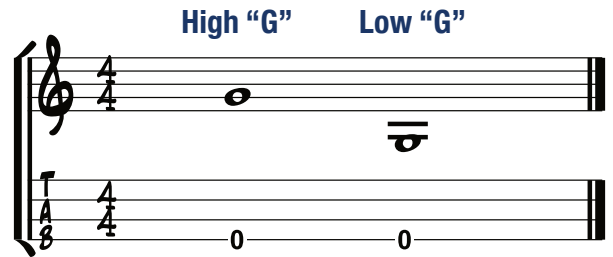
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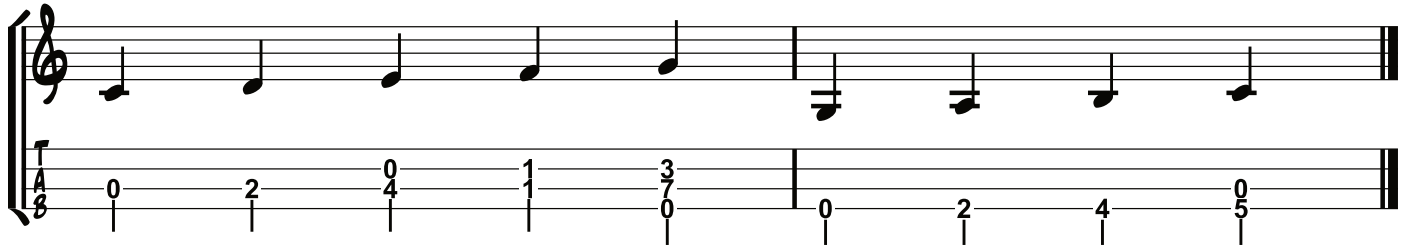
High G / Low G ?

High “G” refers to the pitch that string four is tuned to. Low “G” is tuned one octave lower.

What tuning you used is simply a personal preference. However low G tuning does extend the ranges of notes available to crafting your melody and chord arrangements.



Alternate Note Locations



Using TAB notation the above image shows were the ability to play the same pitch is introduced. This flexibility can and will influence your arrangements.

Guidelines for Creating Melody and Chord Ukulele Arrangements

- You do not have to play a chord for every melody note.
- Chords can also played before or after the melody.
- Play chords for dotted quarter notes and long duration notes and when there is a chord change.
- Add melody notes if needed and wanted.
- If melody is an arpeggio, sustain notes to a get chord sound.
- If only one melody note is changing in a chord play the changed note while sustaining the previous unchanged notes of the chord.
- Change all diminished (°) chords to dim 7th chords.
- Augmented (+) chords to can be played as a 7#5.
- Do not avoid triads
- Use Chord Substitutions to fit the style.
- Double Stops, Octaves, Intervals, Arpeggios, Sequences and Chord Scales.
- Chromatic Passing Chords and Fills.
- Close Chord Voicings. The re-entrant tuning, high G of the ukulele gives you this automatically. Low G is a bit more work.
- Incorporate open strings into chord voicings
- Free Form Chord Voicings. Chords that do not fall into the open position, movable form or 4-part categories.
- Use Alterations, Upper Partial (chord extensions) and substitutions to support the melody.
- Embellishments - slurs, hammer-ons, pull-offs, tremolo, etc...
- Idiomatic cCliches - These are things like bends and glissandos (slides) in blues.
- Adopt a chord to a situation where the melody is not a chord member.

My Thoughts on Reading Music

Knowing, really knowing the notes of the Ukulele fingerboard and learning to read and write standard music notation is helpful to be successful in creating your own melody and chord arrangements. It is well worth the effort to learn to read standard music notation.