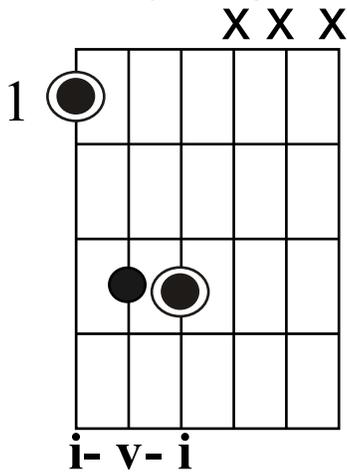


A Study of Secondary Chords

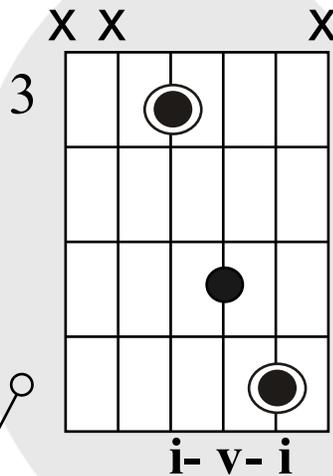
Sam Masich

An understanding of secondary chords can quickly advance a guitar player's ability to create movement while playing accompaniment. While these chords are not quite "jazz" or extended chords, they do enable players to step beyond the somewhat static patterns of basic open and barre chords to create richer textures in folk, pop and blues.

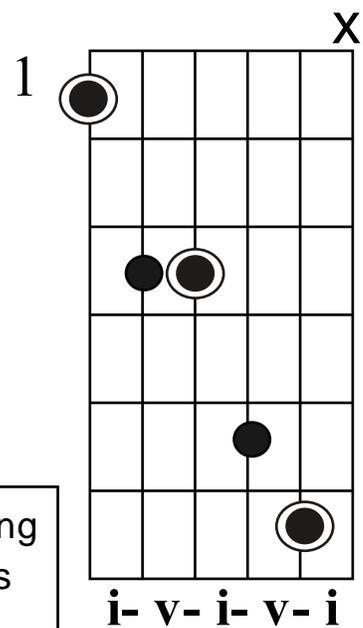
F5 (aka. F powerchord)



F5

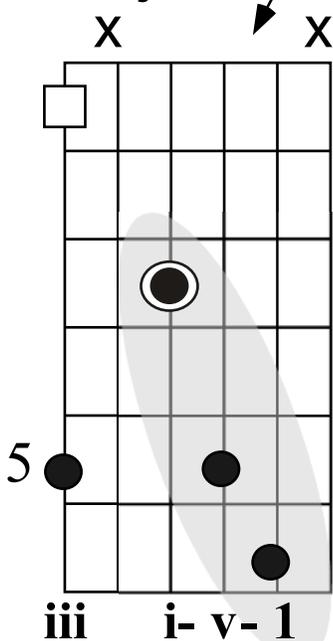


F5 over 2 octaves



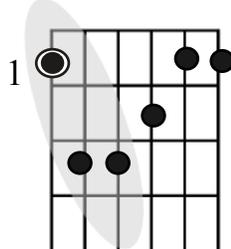
The first basic piece of information we need is an understanding of the tonic (i), the fifth (v), and the octave (i also). These degrees of the major scale are very visually laid out on the guitar.

Fmaj/A

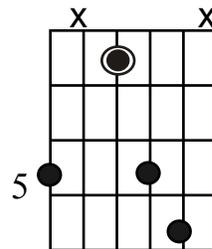


Now it is fairly easy to see the relationship between the Fmaj. barre chord with the root on F (the tonic) at the first fret and this new Fmaj. chord with the A (iii or 3rd) in the bass.

Fmaj

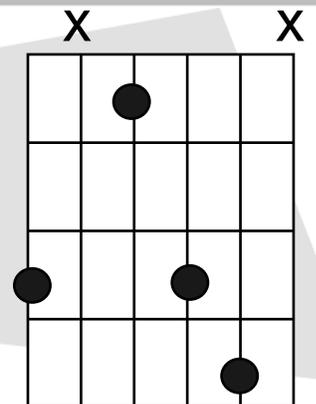


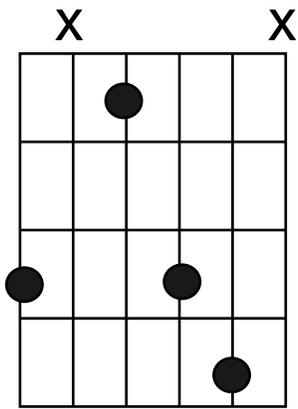
Fmaj/A



Practice alternating between the major barre chord and its first inversion, the major/iii.

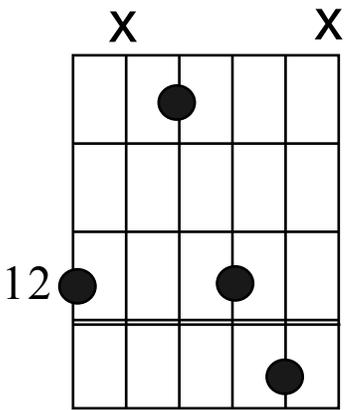
The shape that we make for the F maj/A is fairly natural and comfortable for the left (fretting) hand. With only a little practice the shape should come quickly to be a part of your chordal repertoire. It is important to grasp this structure since it has several other uses.



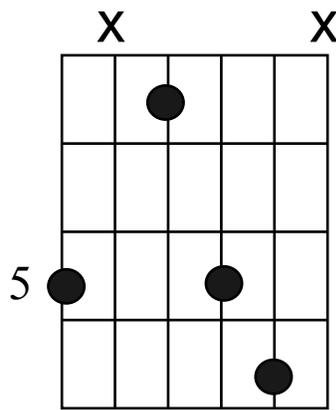


This shape can be used with any of the major chords in any key built from the low E string. For example in the key of C major the major chords are C maj, F maj and G maj. With the 3rd in the bass the chords would be C/E, F/A and G/B.

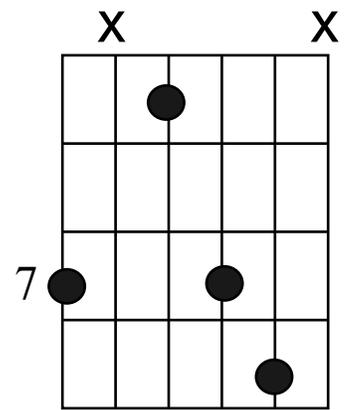
Cmaj/E



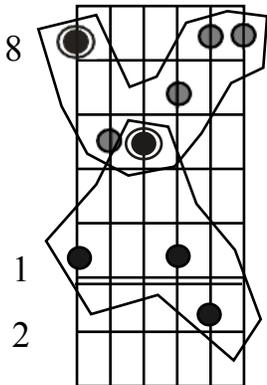
Fmaj/A



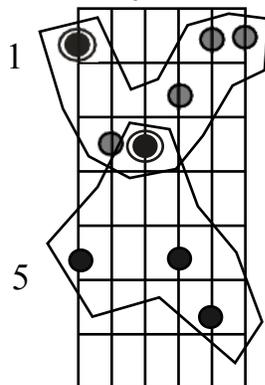
Gmaj/B



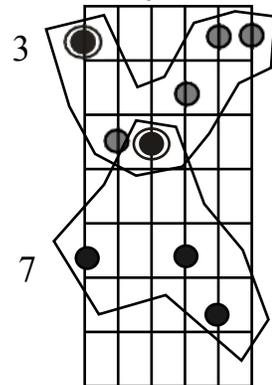
C maj/E



F maj/A



G maj/B



Suddenly we have three new major chords in every key! Of course playing the Cmaj/ E is a little bit of a reach but don't worry, we'll soon find a solution for that. In the meantime practice alternating between all three major chords in a chord progression you are familiar with.

An important note about strumming, muffling and pinching:

While this secondary chord shape is fairly easy to form with the left hand, the way it is played with the right hand needs some attention since there is a potential for unwanted strings to ring (the A & E strings). If you intend to strum this chord you must use the tip of your left hand index finger and the flat pad of your pinkie to muffle the open strings. Another way to play this chord cleanly is to "pinch" with the right hand between the thumb (low E string) and the index, middle and ring fingers (D, G & B strings). Depending on the style and feel of the music one way will sound better than the other so learn both.

Let's take a look now at our G chord variation in the key of C, the Gmaj/B (or G/ B). It is very common in most types of music to move frequently between the I chord (C major) and the V chord (G major). Notice now that when the third (B) is in the root of the G major (as it is with our new shape) we have some very smooth movement between the I and the V chords.

A common way of continuing this progression would be to move to the A minor (VI min.).

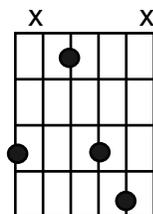
The diagram shows three guitar chord diagrams. The first is Cmaj with a circled 8th fret on the first string. The second is Gmaj/B with 'X' marks above the first and fifth strings. The third is Amin with a circled 5th fret on the first string. An arrow points from the Gmaj/B diagram to the Amin diagram.

Practice this three chord progression a lot as you may find it very useful.

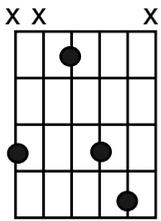
When we play the **G maj/B** in this progression we can think of it in two ways. The first, as we have been discussing, is as an inversion of a G major chord, as if the chord progression was Cmaj- Gmaj- Amin. The chord can be thought of as an inversion or even a substitution for the Gmaj. But there is another important way of thinking of this chord.

Most players understand how to make the appropriate major and minor chords for each degree of the major scale. They know for instance that the major chord choices in the key of C are **Cmaj**, **Fmaj**, and **Gmaj** and that the minor chords available are **Amin**, **Dmin**, and **Emin**. But this only accounts for six degrees in the scale C, D, E, F, G, and A. But what about the **B**? This hangs a lot of players up! But here we have a solution to the problem. Another way of thinking of this shape is based on the **root of the chord**, the **B**. Now technically this chord, when named from the B root, would be a Bmin6#5 and would replace the B half-diminished or Bmin7b5 chord (Don't worry if this sounds technical, its not that important for our purposes). In fact although it is very useful to think of this chord as a B chord (or a chord on the seventh degree of the scale), there is no really good name for this chord when thought of in this way. Probably the best we can do is to call it G/ B but think of it mostly in terms of the B. Whew!

As you experiment with this three chord progression it will start to make a lot of sense.

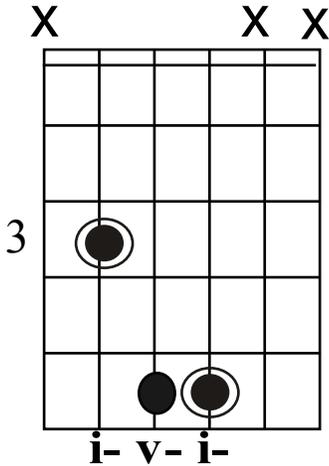


You could name it Bob!

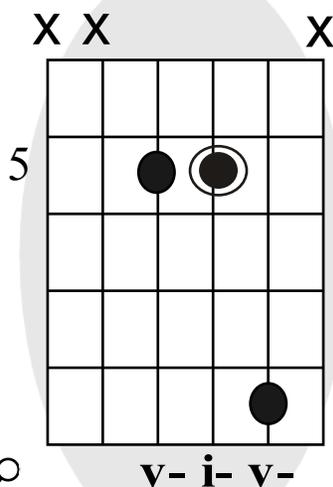


By now you're probably getting tired of seeing this shape and wondering if and how you can apply the same idea to major chords with their root on the A string. A similar principle applies.

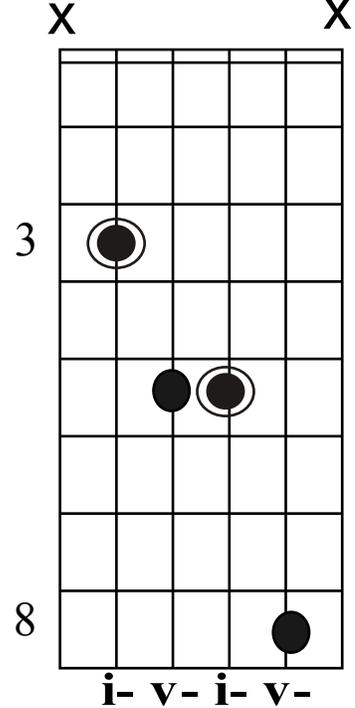
C5



C5

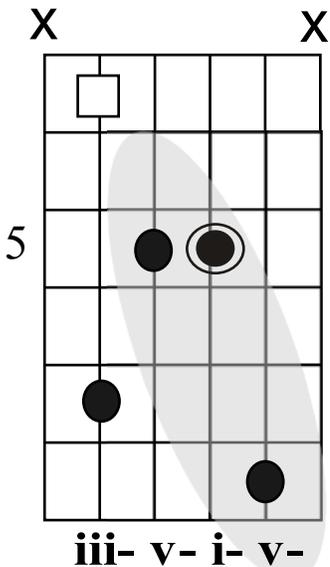


C5 over 2 octaves



The difference here is that our **i-v-i** becomes a **v-i-v** rather than repeating itself exactly. Once again we can add a third (E) to the bass to create an inversion of the major chord.

Cmaj/E



Once again it is easy to see the relationship between the Cmaj barre chord with the root on C (the tonic) at the third fret and this new Cmaj chord with the E (iii or 3rd) in the bass.

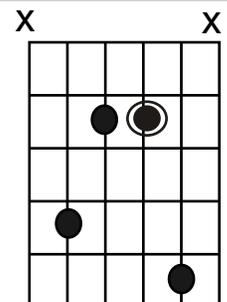
Cmaj

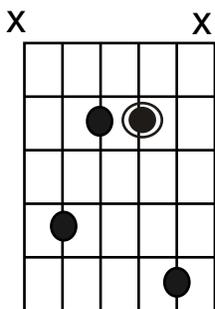
Cmaj/E

Practice alternating between the major barre chord and its first inversion, the major/iii.

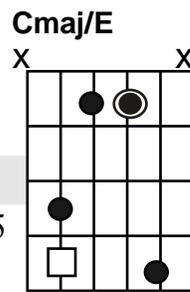
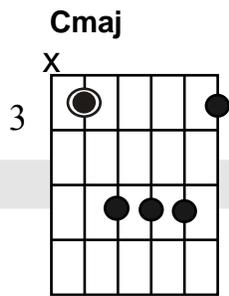
To play this chord shape try barring the G and D strings with the index finger, using the ring and pinkie to play the A and B strings.

So here we have a second chord shape to explore. And again it can have more than one function.

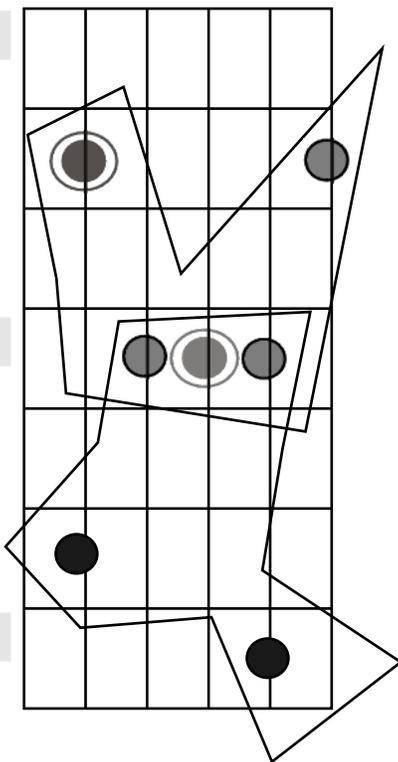
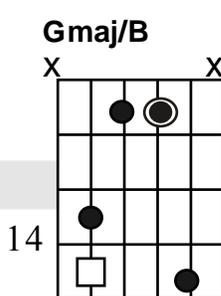
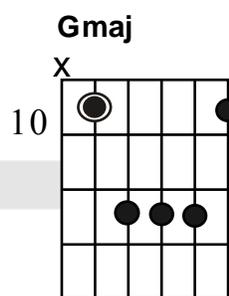
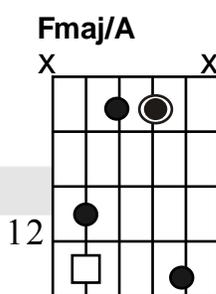
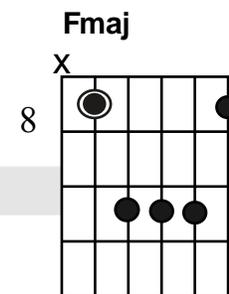




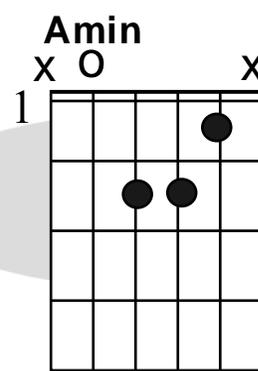
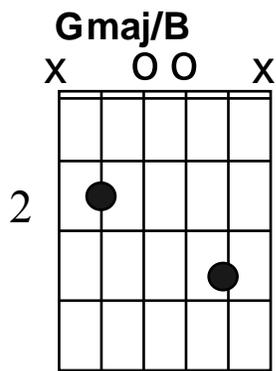
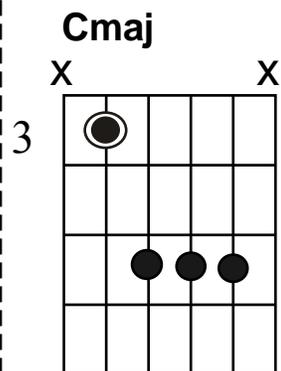
Once again (as with "Bob"), this shape can be used with any of the major chords in any key, this time built from the A string. With the 3rd (iii) in the bass the chords would again be C/E, F/A and G/B.



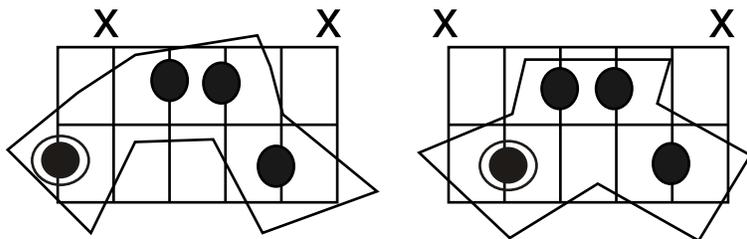
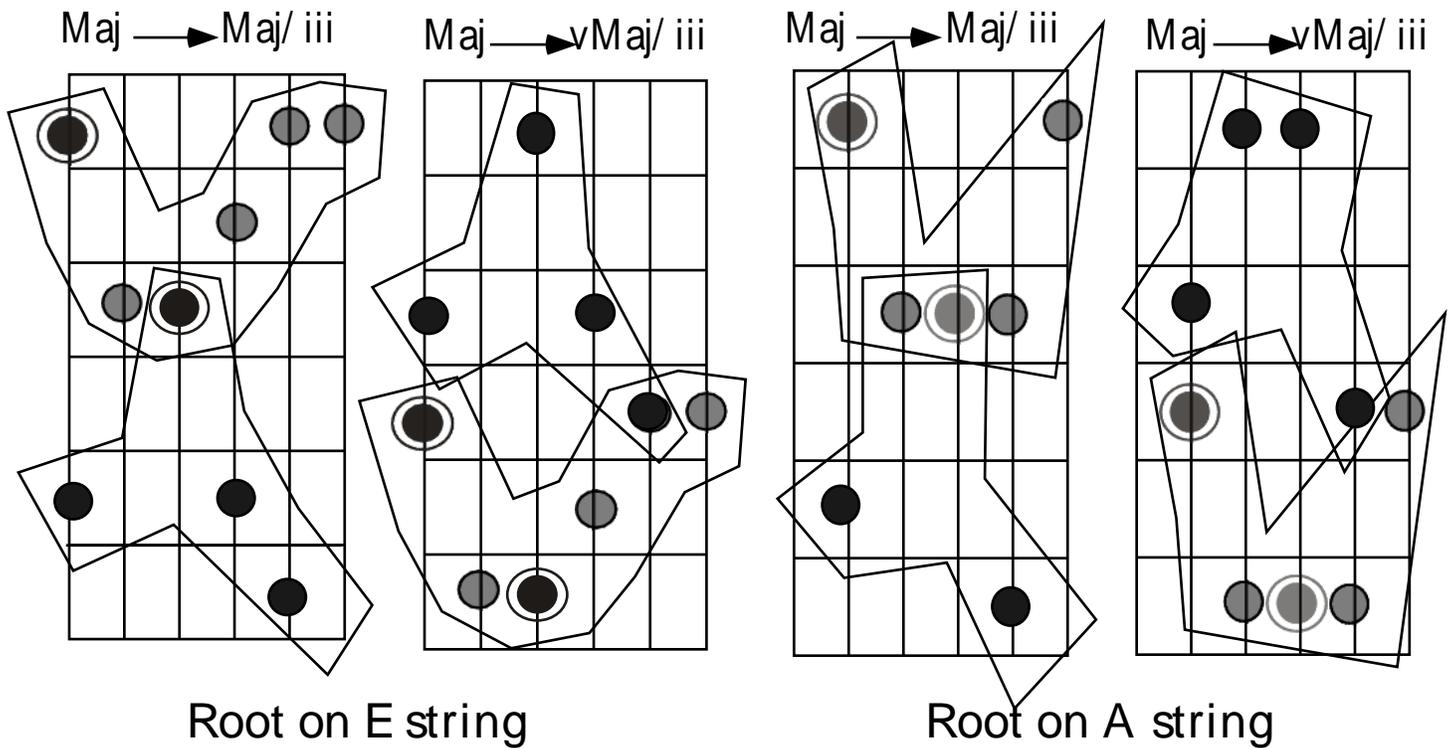
Maj → Maj/ iii
X



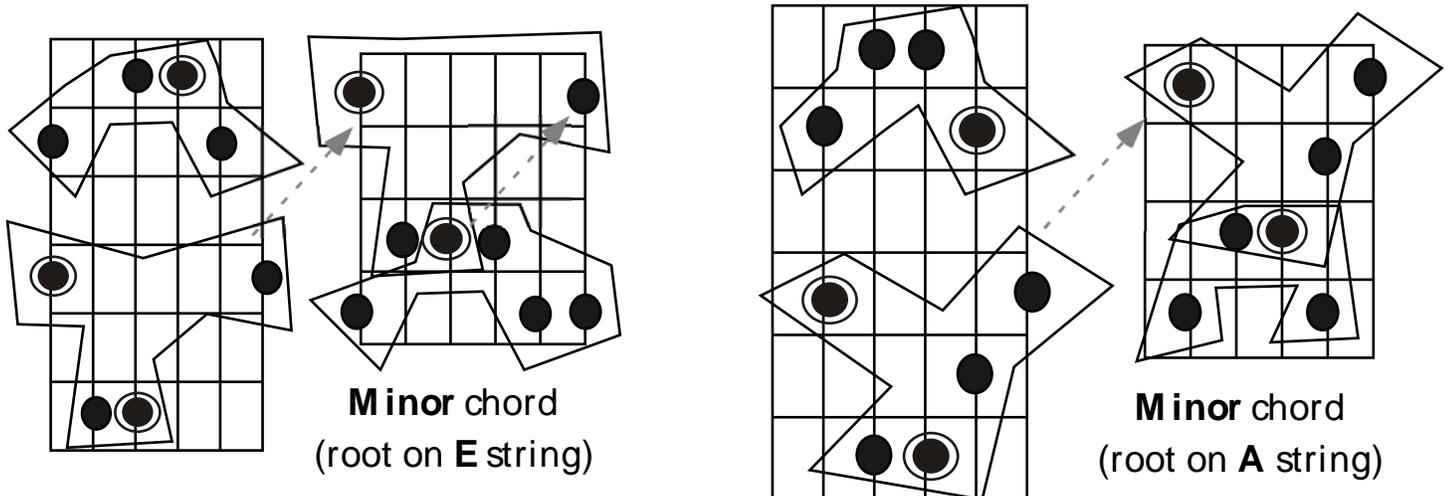
Once again we can think of the **G maj/B** in this progression in at least two ways; as an inversion or a substitution for the Gmaj and a chord is based on the seventh degree of the scale, the **B** (Bmin6). Once again there no ideal name for this chord when thought of in this way. G/ B works well enough if you focus on the B. Try this in other keys as well which don't use open strings eg. D or E. Practice using this common progression.

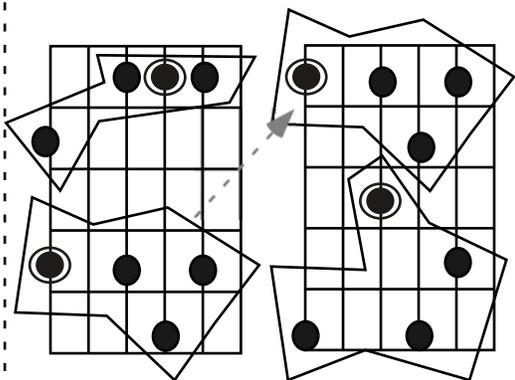


Quick Reference Sheet for Secondary Chords



Here are two more very important shapes. The most common way of thinking about them is as substitution chords for a **Major** or **Major 7** chord. Respectively they are Major 6/9 and Major 6 chords and are very natural to form with the fretting hand. While they are beautiful as major chords, they also provide for excellent movement with minor chords as well.





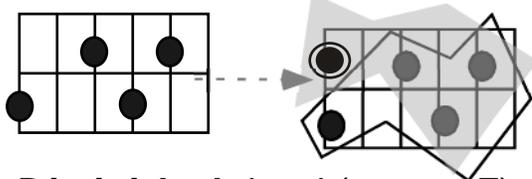
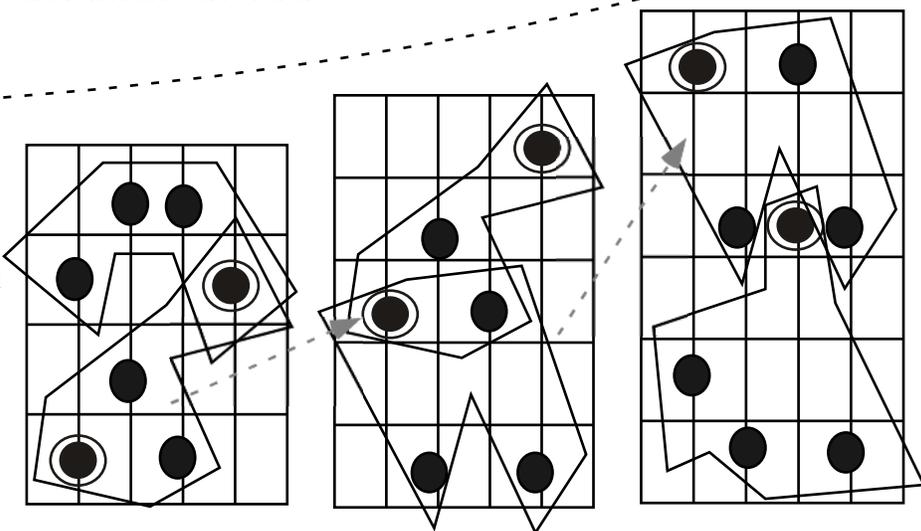
Dominant 7 (V7) chord (root on E string)

It is important to have a few good options for dominant chords as they occur often and frequently last for several bars. Many blues progressions are made up of only dominant chords.

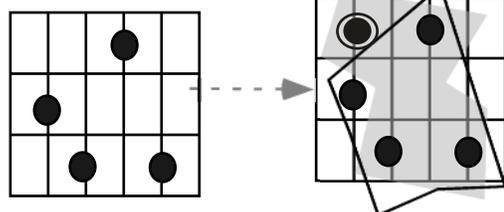
Dominant 7 (V7) chord

(root on A string) The late great Danny Gatton used these chords a lot to make his guitar feel like a Hammond organ.

The first two should come pretty easily, the third one is a bit tricky.



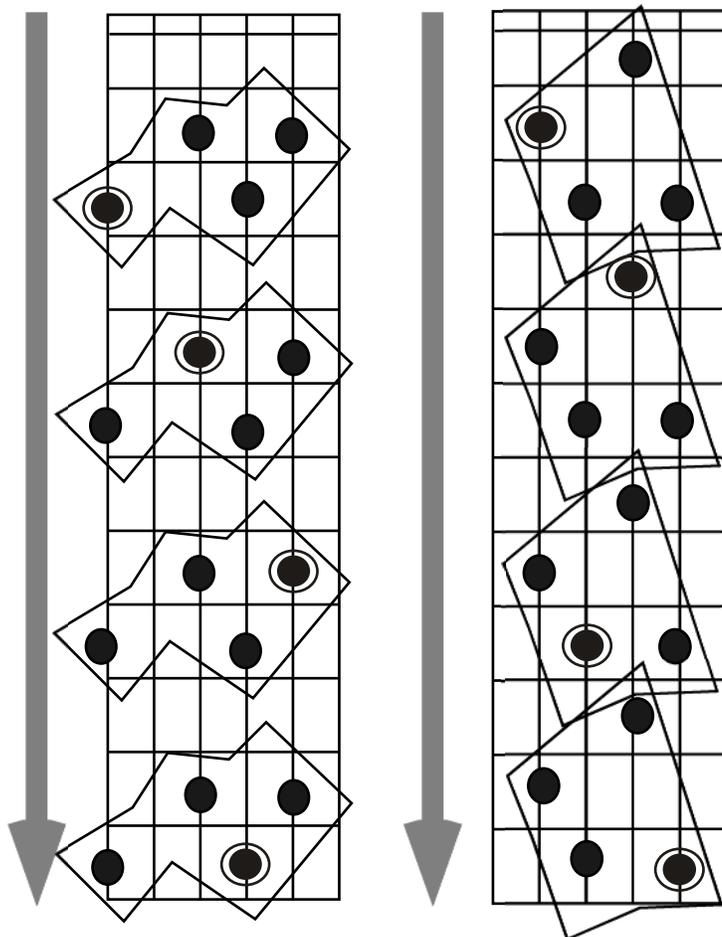
Diminished chord (root on E)



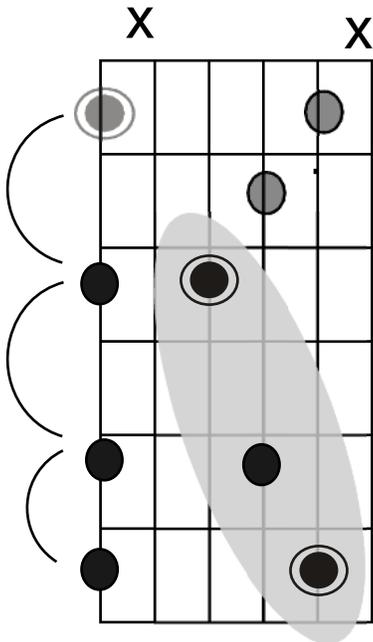
Diminished chord (root on A)

This chord often substitutes for the dominant 7 which has its root a semitone below.

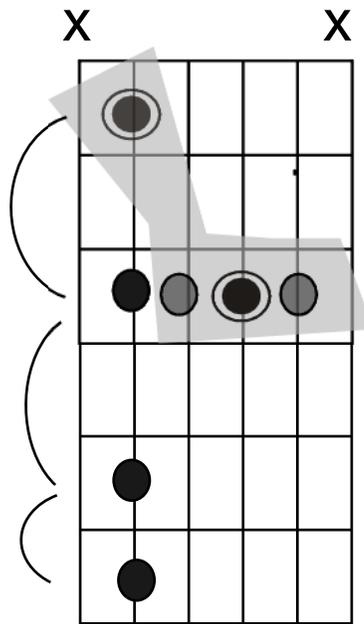
The **diminished chord** is unique in that it inverts itself each minor third degree up the scale retaining not only the same notes but the same shape allowing for many substitutions of the dominant 7 chord.



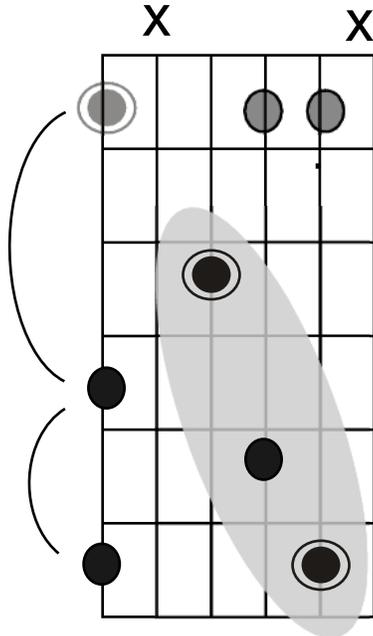
Moving the Bass



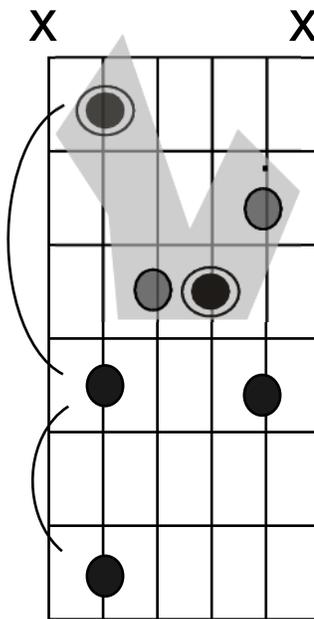
Moving the bass (i,ii,iii,iv)
under the major. (E string)



Moving the bass (i,ii,iii,iv)
under the major. (A string)



Moving the bass (i,ii,iii,iv)
under the minor. (E string)



Moving the bass (i,ii,iii,iv)
under the minor. (A string)