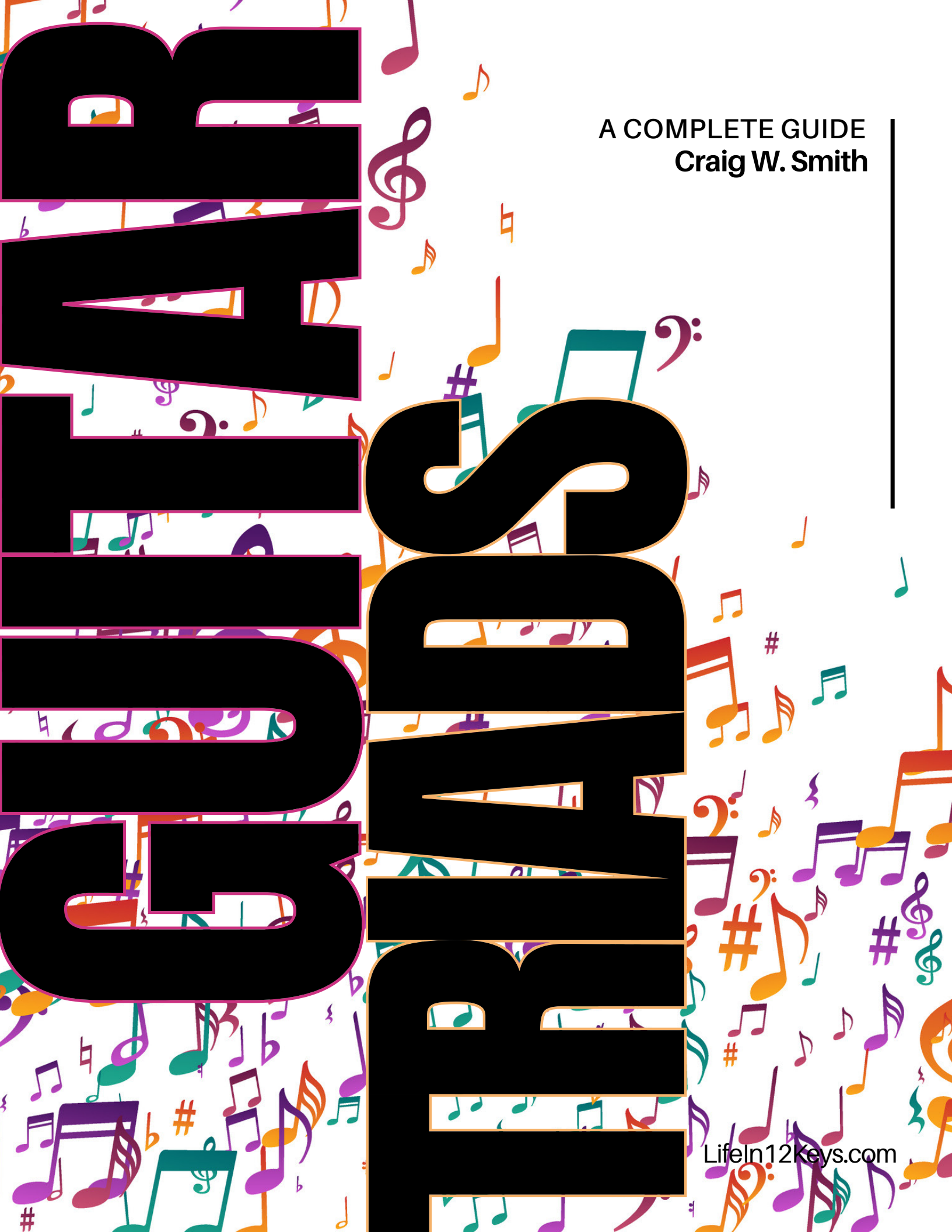


BE NE WS G

S E R I

A COMPLETE GUIDE
Craig W. Smith



Hello!

I hope you like this little mini-book. The 30 or so pages here comprise the first chapter in my next full-length book on Chords, Arpeggios, and how to make your solos and improvisations better. No matter what kind of guitar music you want to play, Triads, intervals, and where those target notes on the neck are located is an integral part of your guitar journey.

I hope that I've made learning Triads as painless as possible!

As always, if you have any questions email or text anytime. I don't usually answer calls from numbers not in my contacts, but I'd be happy to also setup a Zoom or Google Meet lesson. Just let me know.

Happy Practicing,

Craig W. Smith - Guitarist & Author



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If you enjoy this book, check out my other full-length books in PDF or print:

PDF Instant Downloads:

[**The 7 Day Guitar Practice Routine**](#)

[**Classical Guitar - A Practical Guide**](#)

[**Modal Scales for Guitar**](#)

[**Complete Chords for Beginners \(and Beyond\)**](#)

Paperbacks Shipped from Amazon:

7 Day Practice Routine <https://amzn.to/3dmCBo7>

Classical book - <https://amzn.to/39vcKJB>

Modal Workout - <https://amzn.to/2PNKDhy>

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Guitar Triads

Recently I received an email from a reader who requested a more in-depth lesson on guitar triads. Although I had touched on the subject in my [Beginner Chord Guide \(as well as in the 7 Day Practice Routine\)](#), maybe a refresher lesson or perhaps a different approach was worth a look.

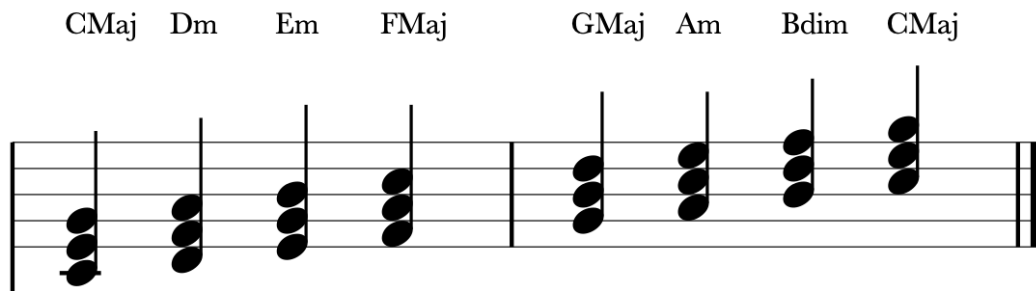
I like to teach triads in the context of a whole key, in this case the key of C Major:

C D E F G A B C

If we stay only in this C Major Scale and build (1-3-5) diatonic triads off of every scale degree, we get the following chart.

Scale Tones	C	D	E	F	G	A	B
Triad Notes	C E G	D F A	E G B	F A C	G B D	A C E	B D F
Intervals	R 3 5	R \flat 3 5	R \flat 3 5	R 3 5	R 3 5	R \flat 3 5	R \flat 3 \flat 5
Chord / Arpeggio	C Major	D minor	E minor	F Major	G Major	A minor	B diminished

Building a triad off of each scale tone in the Key of C Major looks like this:

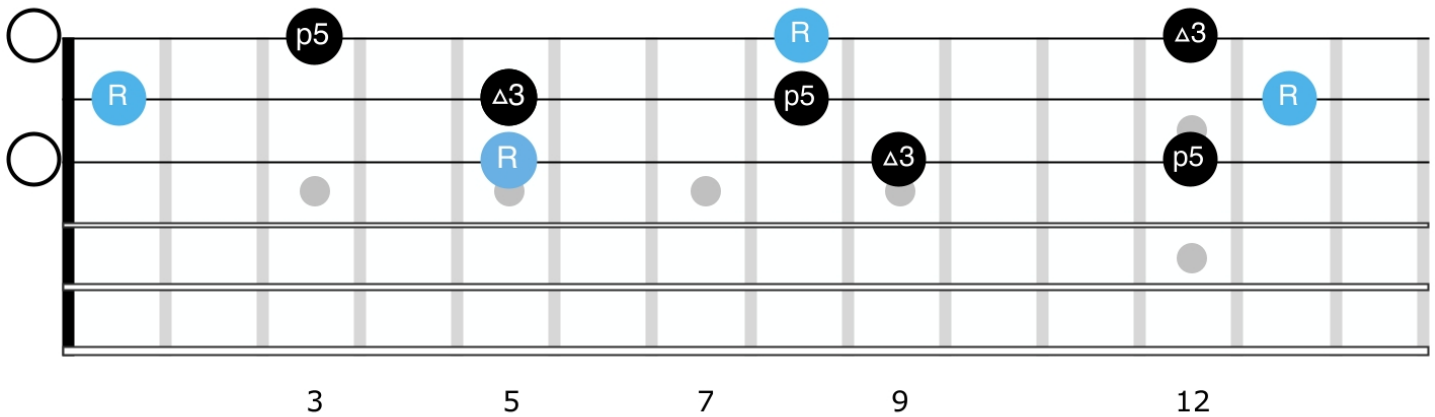


Don't worry if you can't read music yet. Just try to visualize the triads on the lines and spaces.

Learning Triads in a Key: I think it's important to learn triads for the guitar this way rather than just memorizing a bunch of information and music theory. *Why?*

When you learn Triads functionally rather than theoretically it gives you an actionable practice framework from which to build ideas for guitar solos, songs, melodies, and improvisations. You will gain a better understanding of the many things you can play within a key without hitting any "bad" notes. **Let's take a look at the first grouping.**

Example 1. C Major Triads



Most guitarists won't have much trouble reading these fretboard charts, but if you're a beginner that's ok! If you get it, go ahead and move on.

This is a horizontal guitar fretboard as if you were looking down on it while playing.

- The Low E String is on the bottom (thickest string).
- On the top is the highest string (High E).
- The frets are the light gray vertical lines.

The Circles are the notes in the Triads.

- R = Root or 1st Degree.
- $\Delta 3$ = Major 3rd.
- $\flat 3$ = Lowered 3rd (*minor*).
- P5 = Perfect or Major 5th
- $\sharp 5$ = Sharp 5th, or Raised 5th degree (*Augmented*).
- $\flat 5$ = Flat 5th or lowered 5th degree (*diminished*).

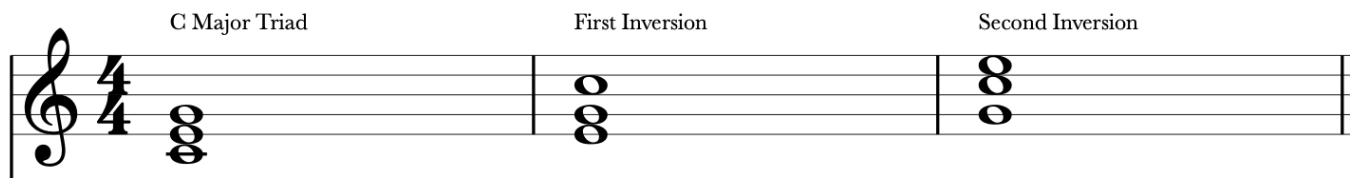
Triad Inversions

In Ex. 1 we have triads built from the root C on the top 3 strings G, B, and E. Seems simple enough right? Don't overthink it. This is how all chords and arpeggios are built in every key or scale

What if you flip the notes around? Instead of C E G, you play E G C? Is it still a C Major triad?

Yep, it's just a different inversion.

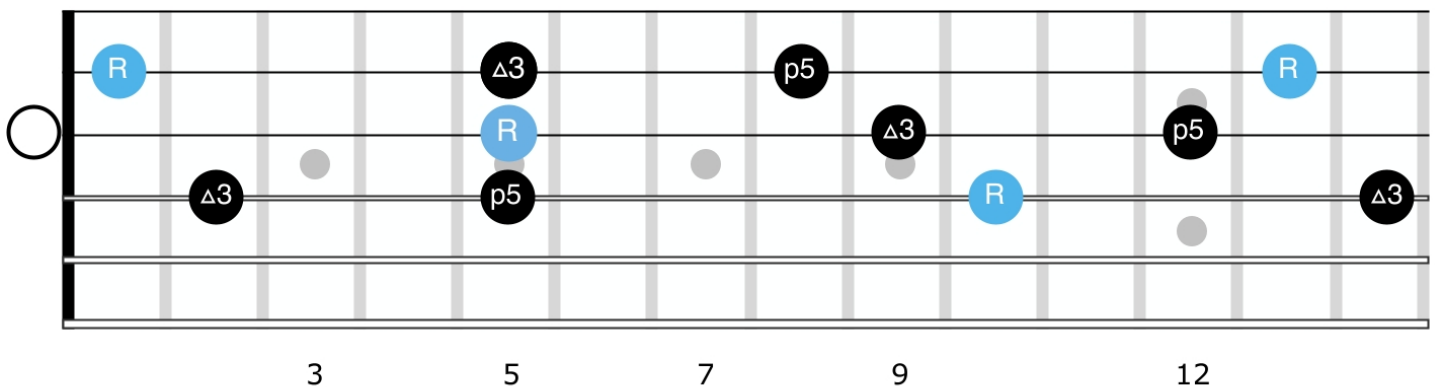
- In Ex.1 The 3rd fret position grouping (C E G) includes the notes in scale degree order 1-3-5.
- The next grouping shows the Major (Δ) 3rd in the bass, or **First Inversion**.
- The last grouping shows the Perfect (P) 5th in the bass, or **2nd Inversion**.



The best part about these shapes is that we only need to learn 3 different forms on each string grouping. In Ex. 2 we're using the same notes (**C-E-G**), but shifting down to the next set of strings.

Example 2.

In Ex. 2 above, we get some new shapes and triad inversions on the next set of adjacent strings B, G, and D.

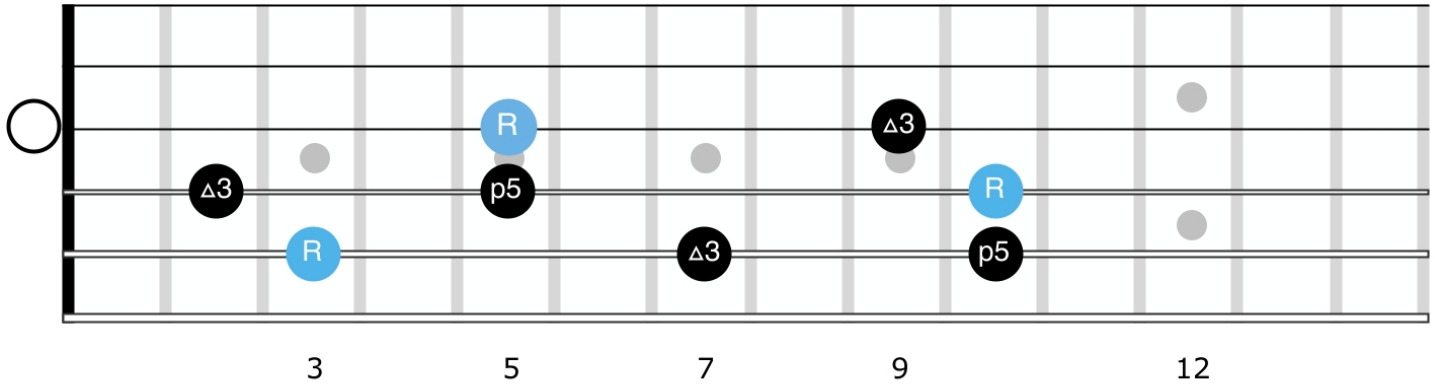


From left to right the inversions are:

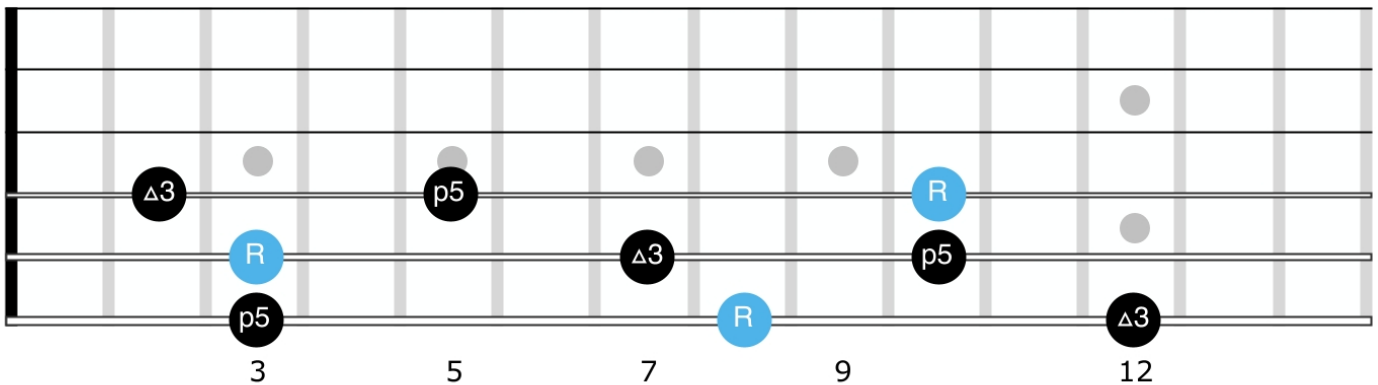
1. **1st Inversion**
2. **2nd Inversion**
3. **C Major Triad**
4. **1st Inversion 1 octave higher.**

In Ex. 3. We can continue moving to the next set of strings A - D - G and grab some new shapes using the same notes.

Example 3.



Example 4.



In Example 4., we get the last string grouping of Major Triads on the low E, A, and D strings. You don't have to learn *new* triad shapes for the other Major triads in the key. You can just move the root note to whichever triad you're looking for. If we were in the Key of C, we'll have 3 Major Triad - Chord - Arpeggios:

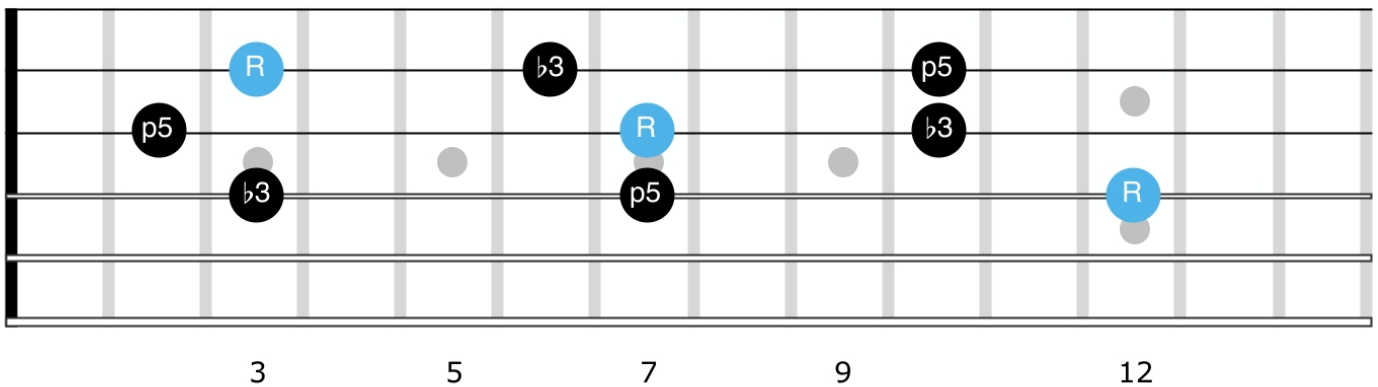
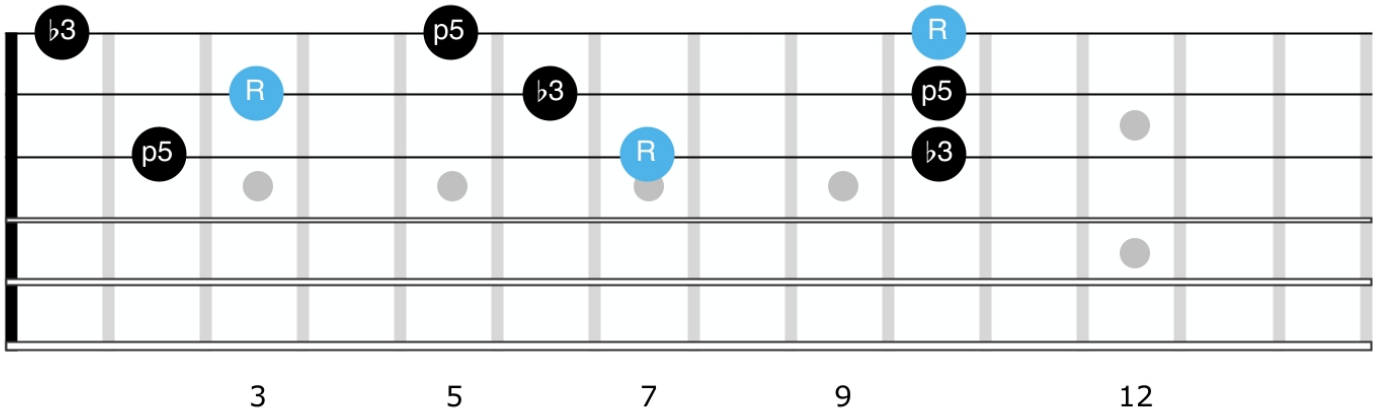
- **C Major**
- **F Major**
- **G Major**

Keep in mind, there are only 3 *types* of triads in every Major Key. We can also call these Diatonic Triads as they follow the Key Signature of the scale we are playing in without any deviation. We are just building a new Triad on each scale degree.

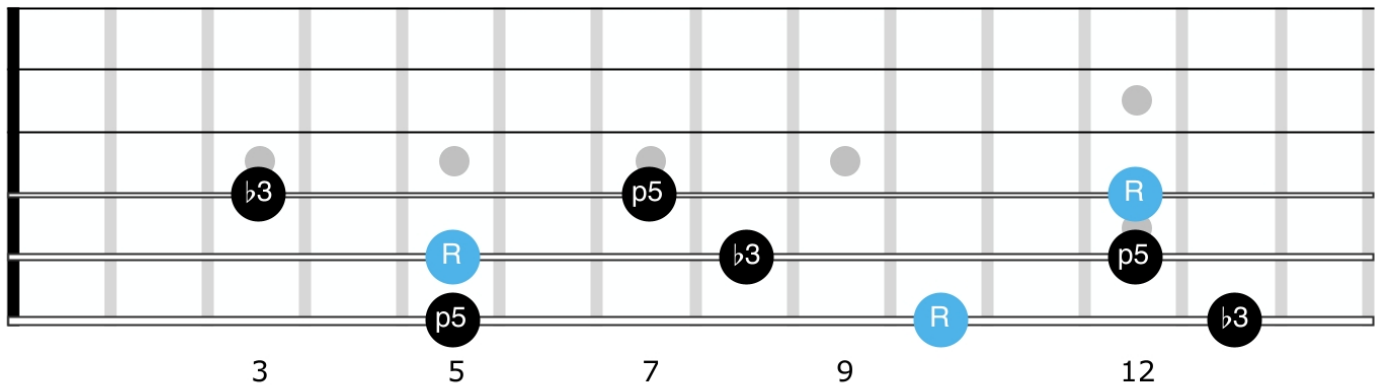
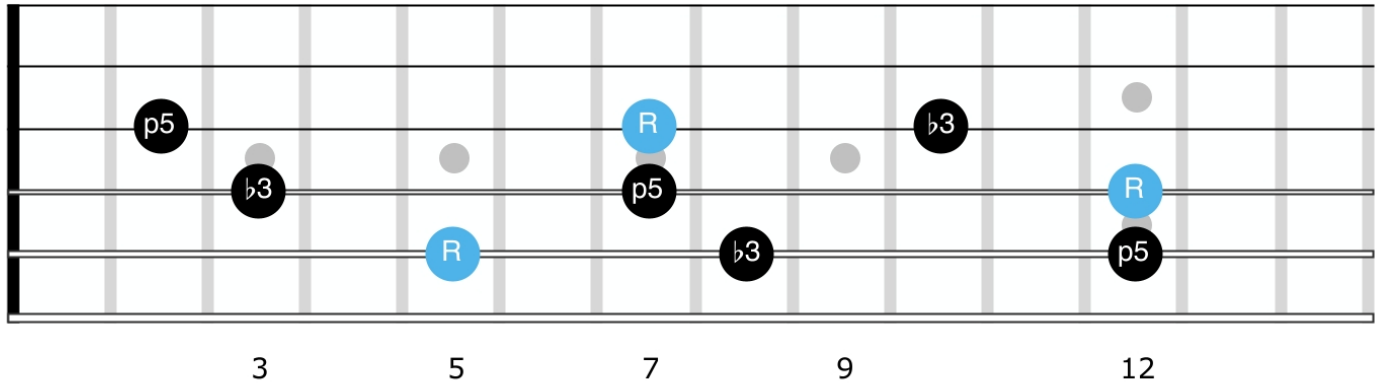
Minor Triad Guitar Shapes

The second type of triad we'll see diatonically in any Major Key is the minor triad. Remember, minor triads contain the **Root**, **b3rd**, and **P5th**. For D minor those notes would be D F A.

Now lets move on the the second group of triads in the Key of C Major: D minor. As we did with the C Major triads, we're going to make our D minor triads on 4 different adjacent string groupings.



D minor Triads continued:



You may be wondering if there are more triad shapes on guitar? YES, there are many combinations of triads once you factor in skipping strings and longer fret reaches. Try experimenting and practice finding the 3 notes in each triad. Try using backing tracks (*more on this later*) in the Key of C Major and find the target notes. See how those notes sound over the different chords in the Key of C.

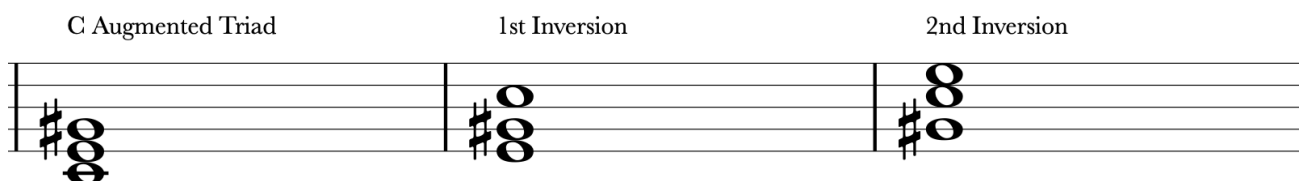
Types of Triads on Guitar

In Guitar and all music, there are 4 types of triads that chords (and arpeggios) are built from:

- **Major** - Includes the Root, Major (Δ 3rd), and Perfect (P5) 5th.
- **Minor** - Includes the Root, flat (\flat 3) 3rd and Perfect 5th.
- **Augmented** - Just adds a raised or \sharp 5th to a Major triad, or R, Δ 3, \sharp 5.
- **Diminished** - a minor triad with a \flat 5th. R, \flat 3, \flat 5.

Notice in the table of C triads (page 6) there are no Augmented Triads listed for any of the notes in the key of C Major. Incidentally, adding the raised \sharp 5th not to any of the triads will take us out of key. For example a C augmented triad would include the Root, Δ 3, and \sharp 5 or C- E - G \sharp .

This G \sharp note takes out of the key and is not included. The same would happen for all of the other triads in the if we added that \sharp 5.



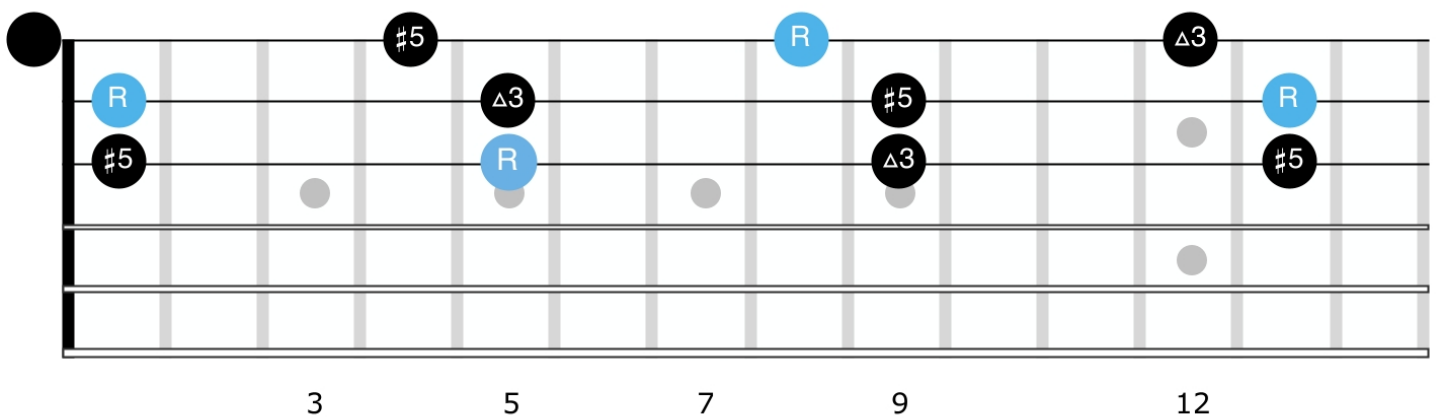
For more on Key Signatures and hows the notes in the scales work together, check out my free online guitar lesson on the [Circle of Keys and scale theory for guitar](#).

Augmented Triads

Augmented Triad guitar patterns, (R - Δ3 - #5), even though they go out of key, are still worth learning on guitar. They have a really neat repeating symmetrical pattern which makes them easy to learn, memorize, and move around.

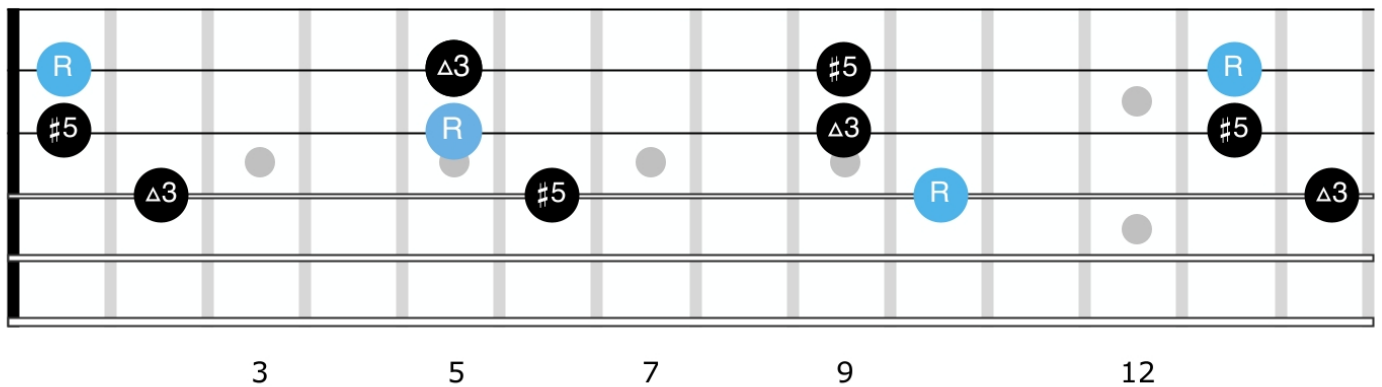
Remember that just because a chord, scale, or arpeggio goes out of key doesn't make it any less useful. It may have a specific sound or transition to another chord or sound that goes back in key.

Augmented triads & chords have been widely used in virtually every type of music from Bach to The Beatles and are certainly worth your time in the guitar practice room. Let's check out some Augmented Triad groups using C as our Root note:

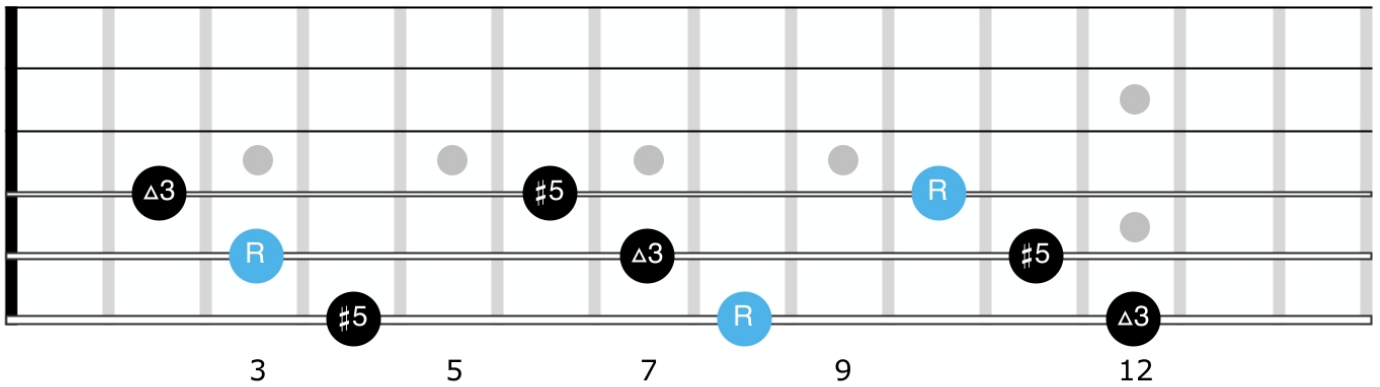
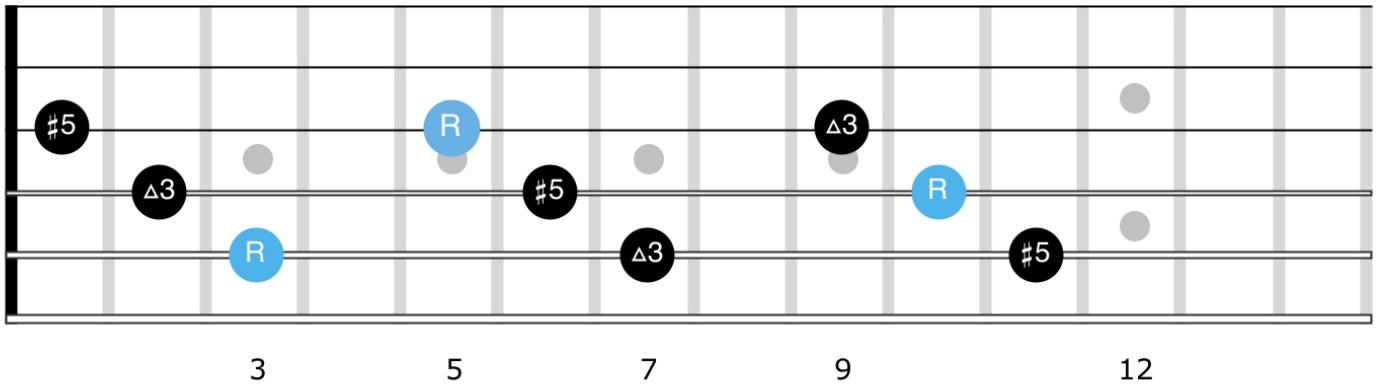


Notice how **Augmented Triad Guitar** patterns repeat on the neck. *Pretty cool right?* Think of it as an A minor chord shape that moves in Major 3rds or 2 whole-steps.

Let's move on to the next set of strings.



C Augmented Triads Continued:



Now that we've covered **Major Triads** and **Augmented Triads**, let's take a look at the strictly diatonic triads in the key of C.

The next triad in the Key of C is the E minor triad. **E - G - B** or (R \flat 3 5)

Minor Triads

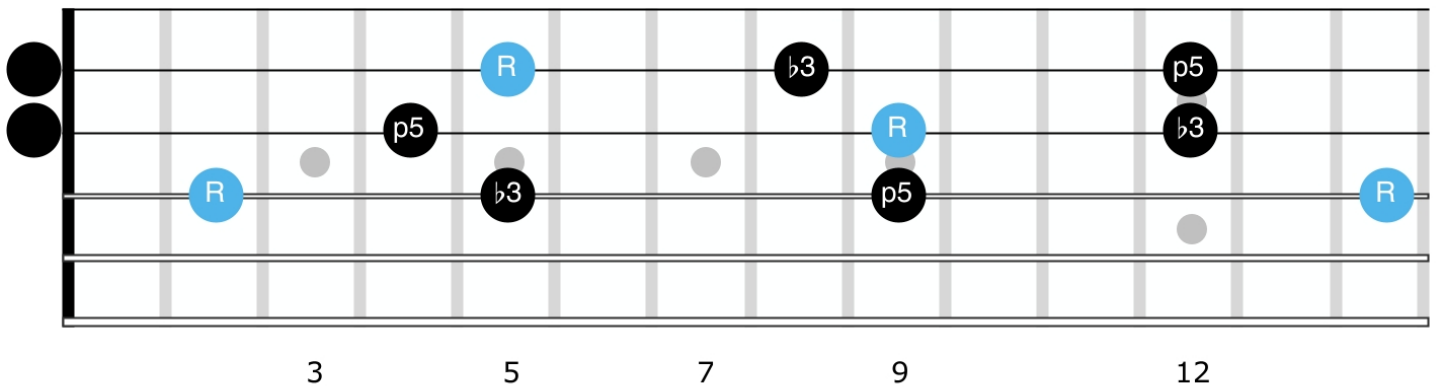
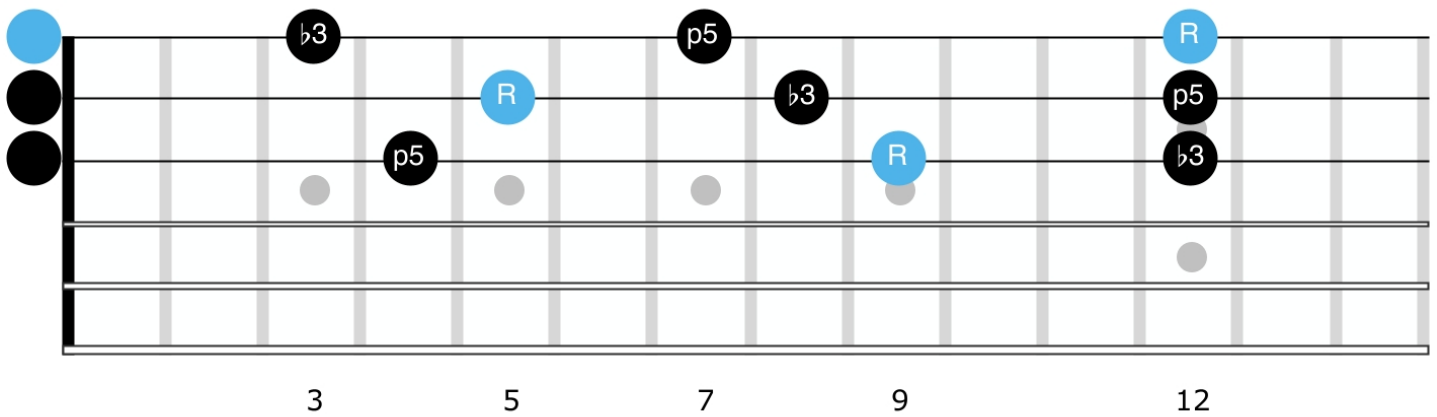
We can build minor triads on the 2nd, 3rd, and 6th degrees of every Major scale. In the Key of C this gives us 3 minor **Triads, Chords, and Arpeggios**:

C **D E** F G A B C

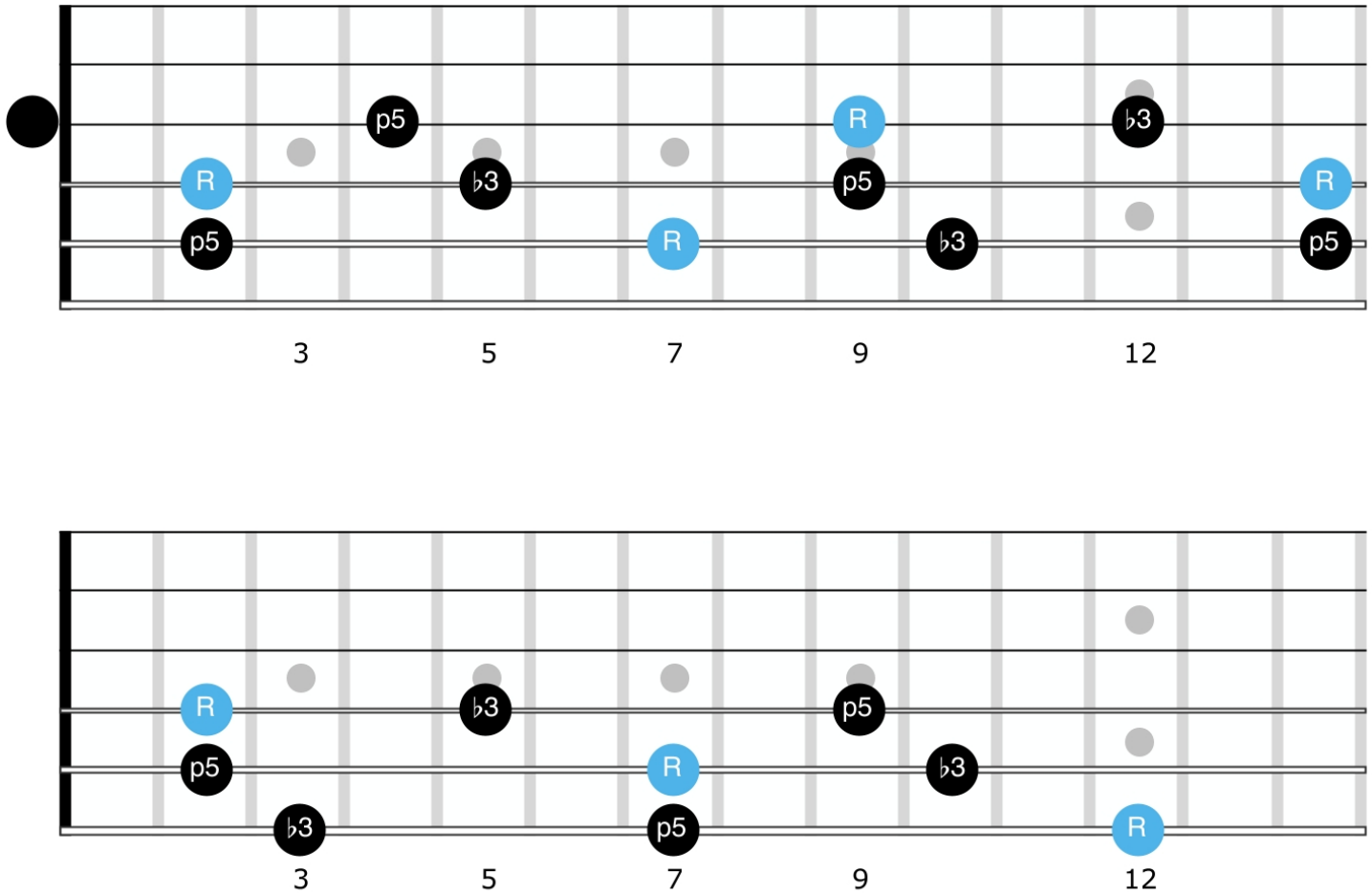
- D minor (D F A)
- **E minor (E G B)**
- A minor (A C E)

Remember: These triad formulas are the exact same notes that make up our chords and arpeggios!

Let's map out our triad shapes on the guitar fretboard for E minor.



E minor Triads Continued



Notice the triad shapes for E minor are the exact same as the triads for D minor on page 10. The only difference is where the root notes lie on the guitar neck.

This same principle follows for all of the remaining triads in the key of C Major.

Major Triads

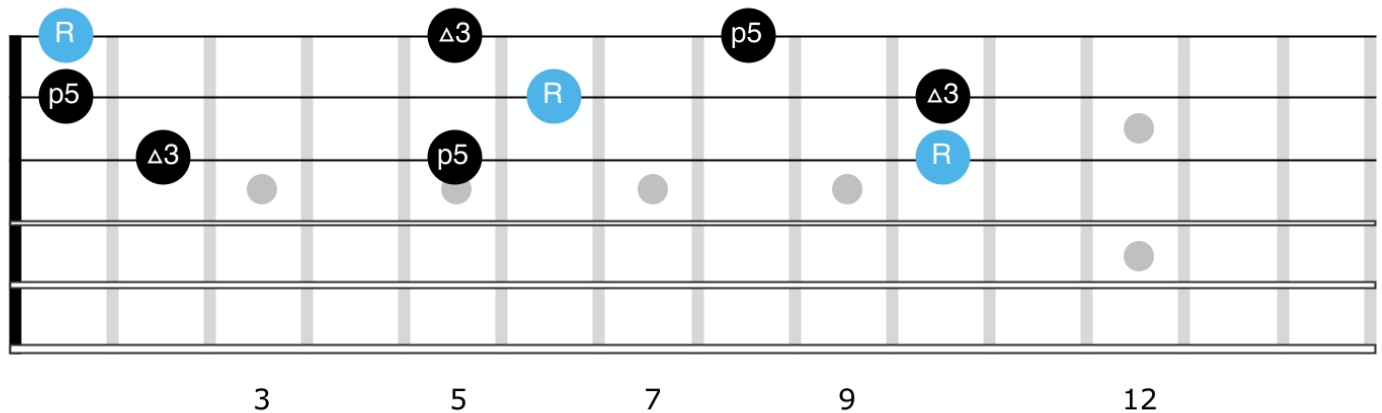
Earlier we discussed the C Major and Augmented type triads for guitar. *Just a quick reminder:* Major Triads contain the Root or 1st degree of the scale, Major 3rd (or $\Delta 3$), and 5th or Perfect 5th (P5). In the key of C Major, as in every Major scale key we get 3 Major triads:

- **C Major - C - E - G**
- **F Major - F - A - C**
- **G Major - G - B - D**

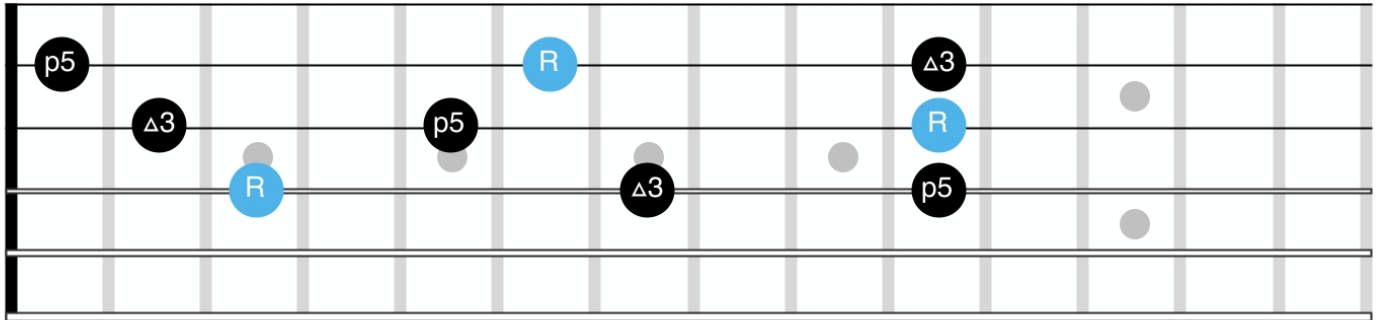
Scale Tones	C	D	E	F	G	A	B
Triad Notes	C E G	D F A	E G B	F A C	G B D	A C E	B D F
Intervals	R 3 5	R $\flat 3$ 5	R $\flat 3$ 5	R 3 5	R 3 5	R $\flat 3$ 5	R $\flat 3$ $\flat 5$
Chord / Arpeggio	C Major	D minor	E minor	F Major	G Major	A minor	B diminished

So let's move on to our next set of triads: **F Major**

F Major Triad Shapes



F Major Triads Continued



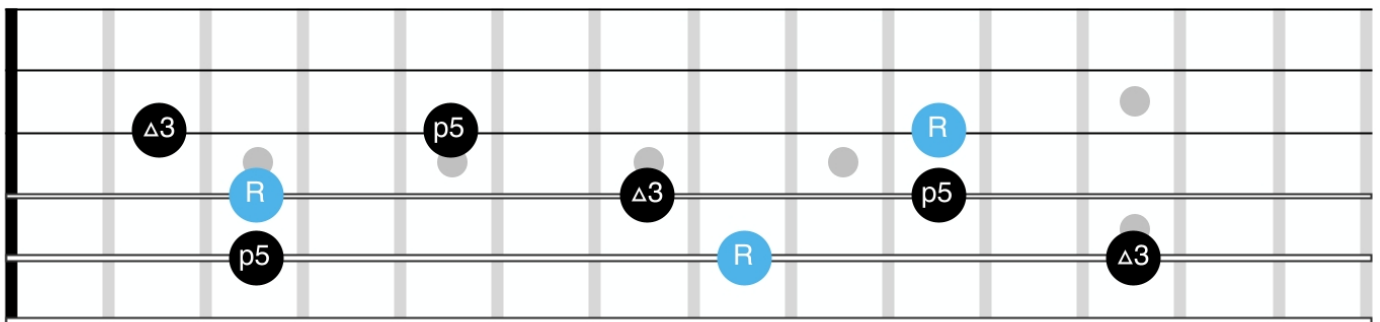
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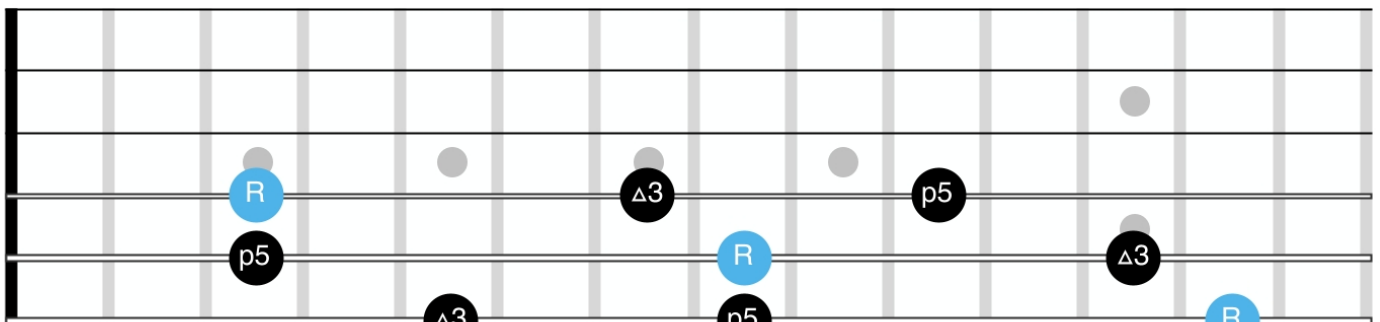
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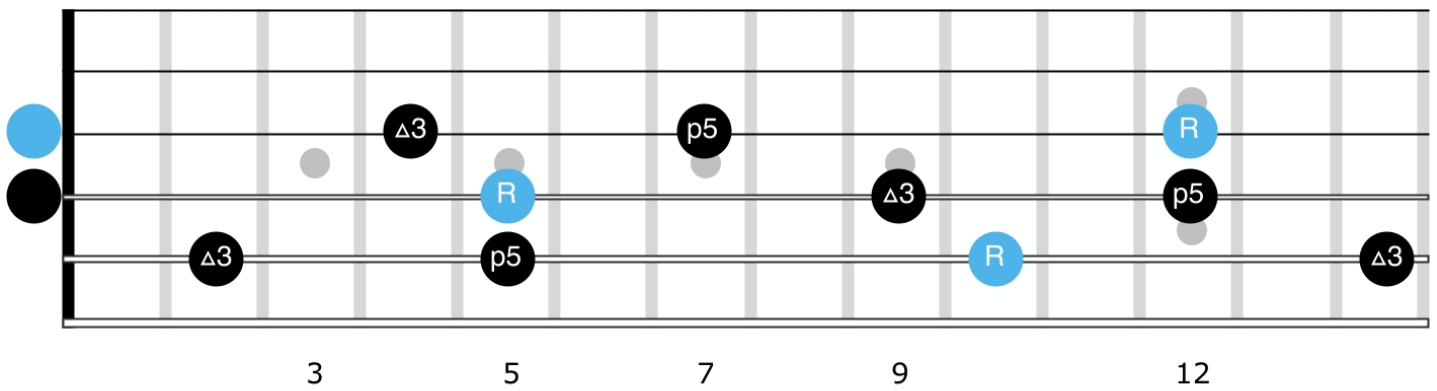
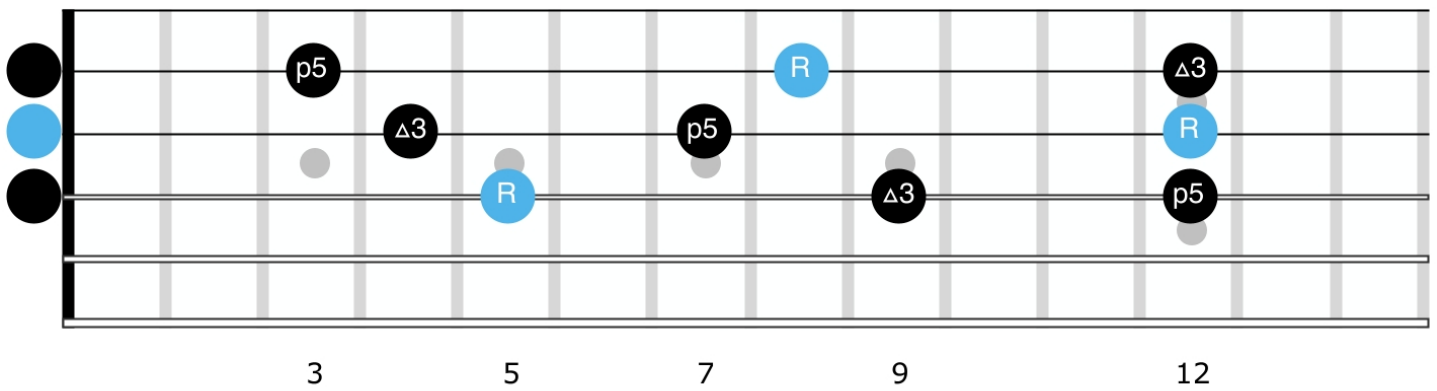
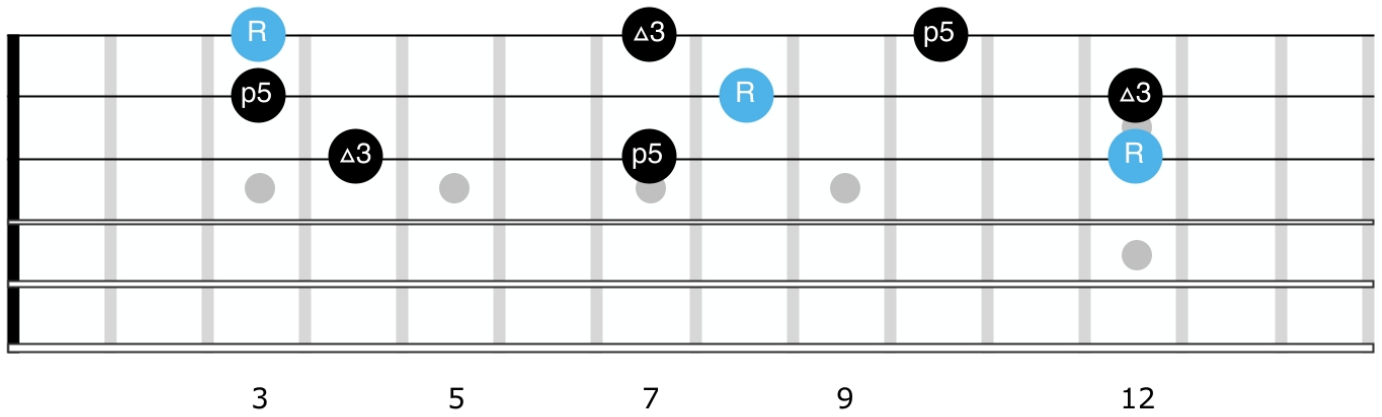
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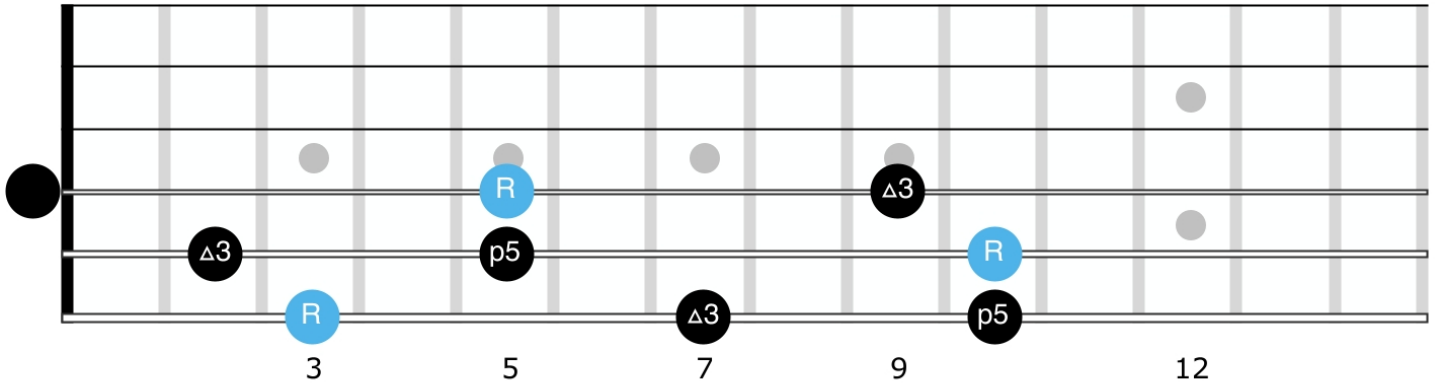
12

G Major Triads

Continuing to the next scale degree in C Major we get our G Major triads: **G - B - D**



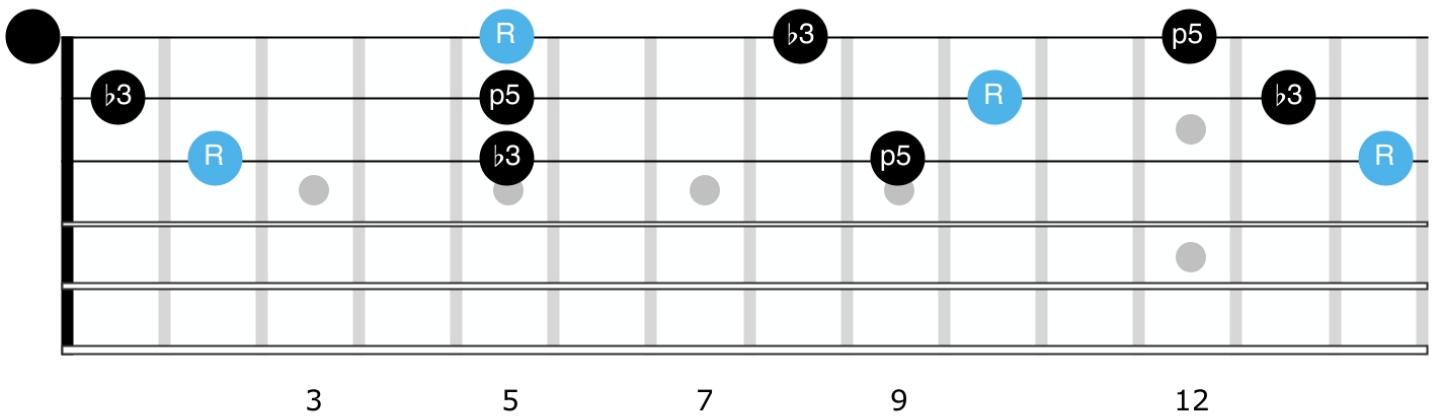
G Major Triads Continued



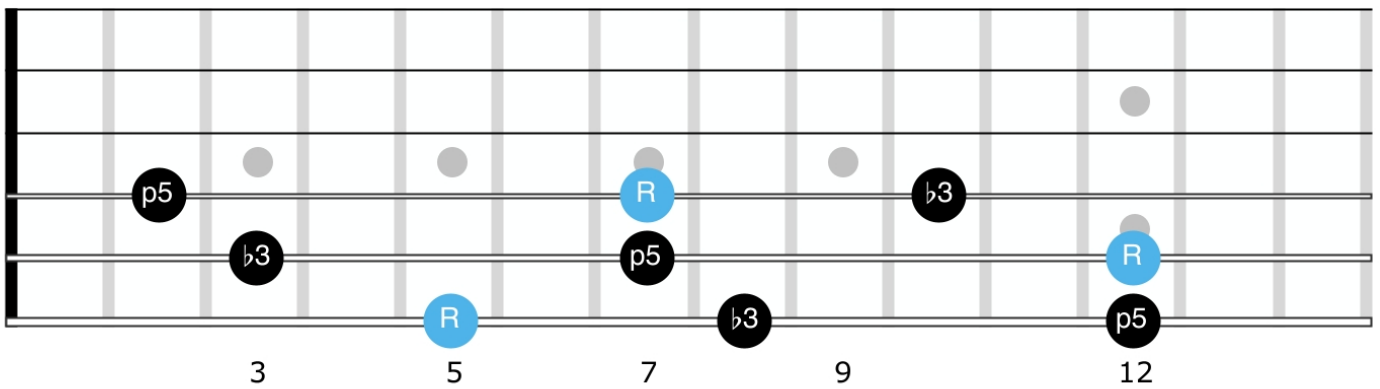
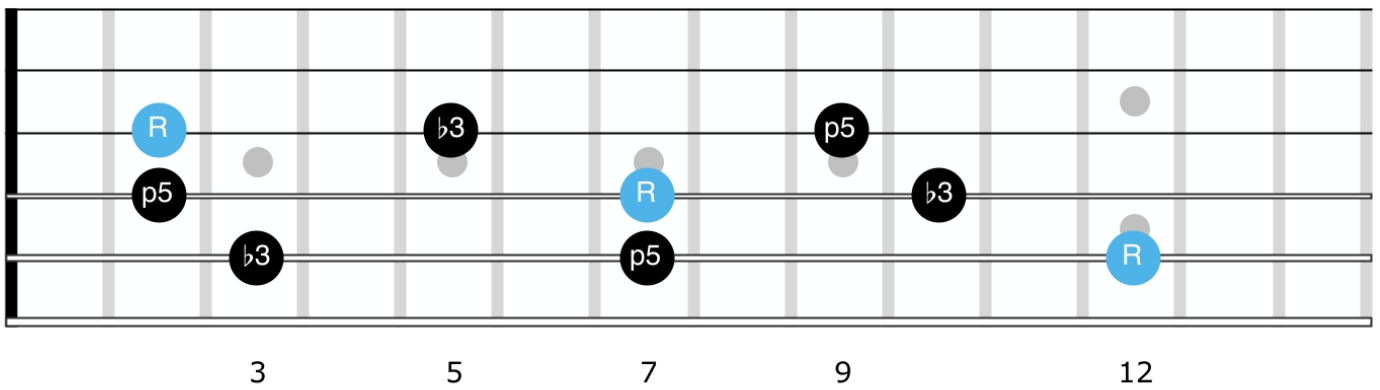
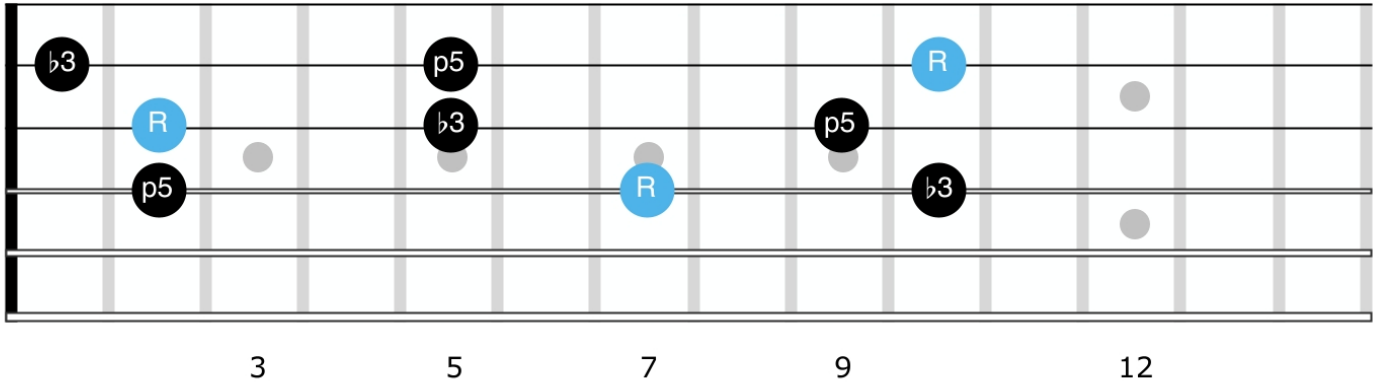
A minor Triads

Moving on to our last minor triad in the Key of C we get our *Relative* minor: **A minor A - C - E**
 Just like the Major triads, we get 3 different minor triad types in every Major key.

Scale Tones	C	D	E	F	G	A	B
Triad Notes	C E G	D F A	E G B	F A C	G B D	A C E	B D F
Intervals	R 3 5	R \flat 3 5	R \flat 3 5	R 3 5	R 3 5	R \flat 3 5	R \flat 3 \flat 5
Chord / Arpeggio	C Major	D minor	E minor	F Major	G Major	A minor	B diminished



A minor Guitar Triads Continued



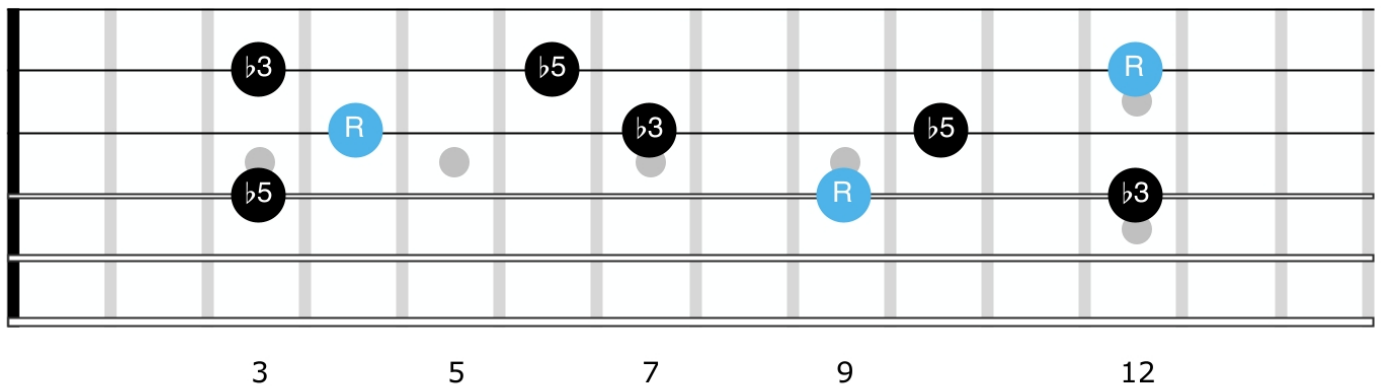
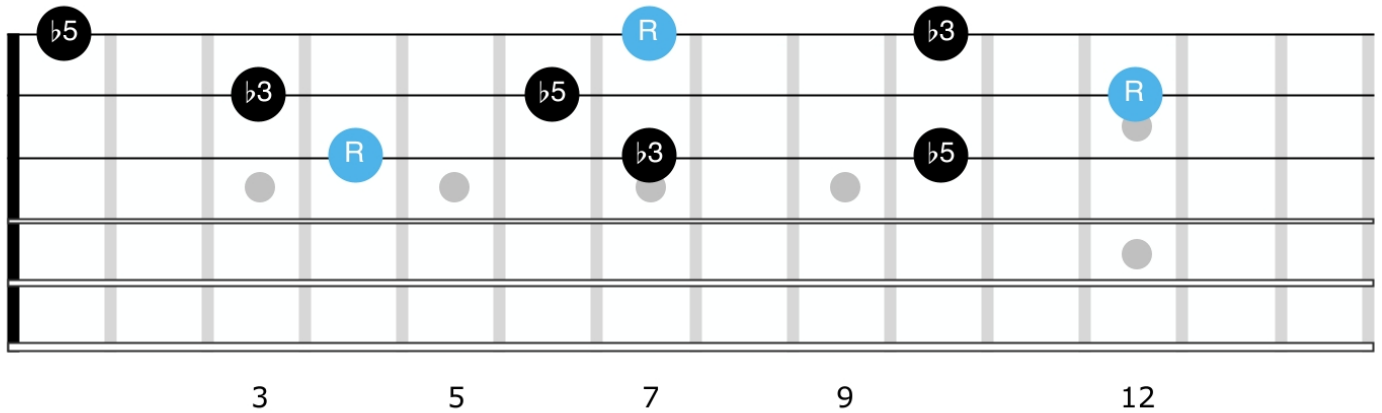
Diminished Triads for Guitar

Diminished triads are the odd guy in every Major Key. They fall on the last (7th) degree of the scale and sound wildly different than their Major, minor, or Augmented cousins. Diminished triads, chords, and arpeggios have a unique and dark flavor often heard in Classical, Jazz, and Metal guitar music.

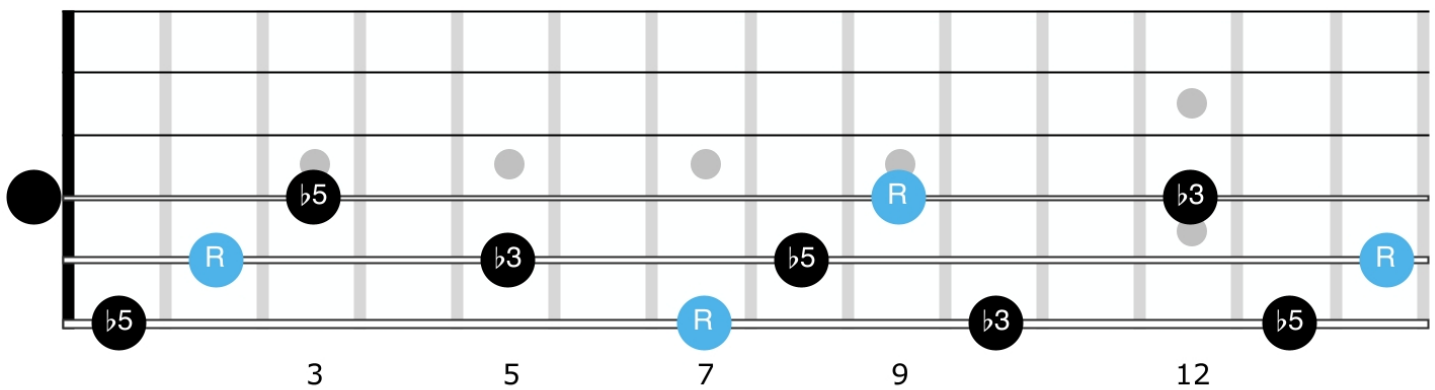
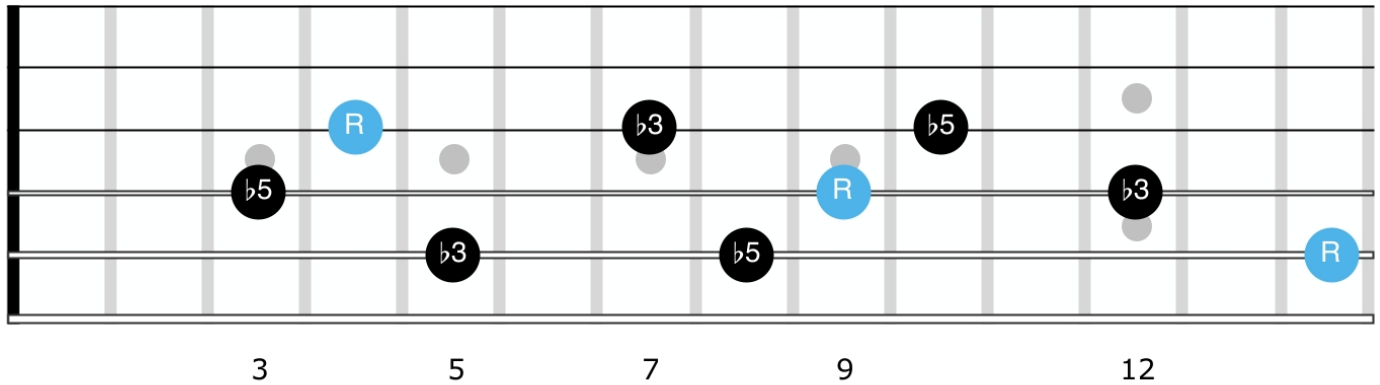
Diminished chords and arpeggios really get fun when you add the 7th and start using them in improvisations and transitions to neighbor chords. I've written about this topic in some of my more [advanced chord lessons and Chord book](#).

Let's take a look at the **B diminished triads in the Key of C Major**.

Scale Tones	C	D	E	F	G	A	B
Triad Notes	C E G	D F A	E G B	F A C	G B D	A C E	B D F
Intervals	R 3 5	R \flat 3 5	R \flat 3 5	R 3 5	R 3 5	R \flat 3 5	R \flat 3 \flat 5
Chord / Arpeggio	C Major	D minor	E minor	F Major	G Major	A minor	B diminished



B Diminished Triads Continued



That's it for the Key of C Major. All of the triads, all of the chord tones, all of the 'good notes' you need to create chords, melodies, and get some nice targeted inside sounding ideas for your solos and improvisations.

Don't stop with the Key of C though. Try these shapes in some other guitar-friendly keys like G, D, F, or Bb.

Guitar Friendly Keys

- **G Major** G A B C D E F# G
- **D Major** D E F# G A B C# D
- **F Major** F G A Bb C D E F
- **A Major** A B C# D E F# G# A

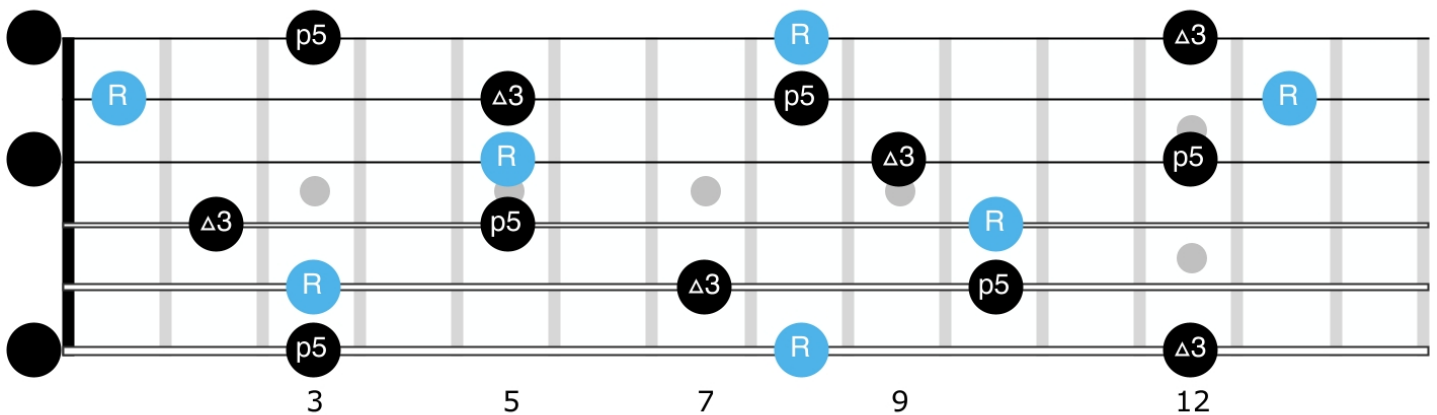
I like to think of the above keys as "guitar friendly" due to the low number of sharps (#) and flats (b) as well as having at least 5 available open strings to play.

Guitar Triads Master Chart

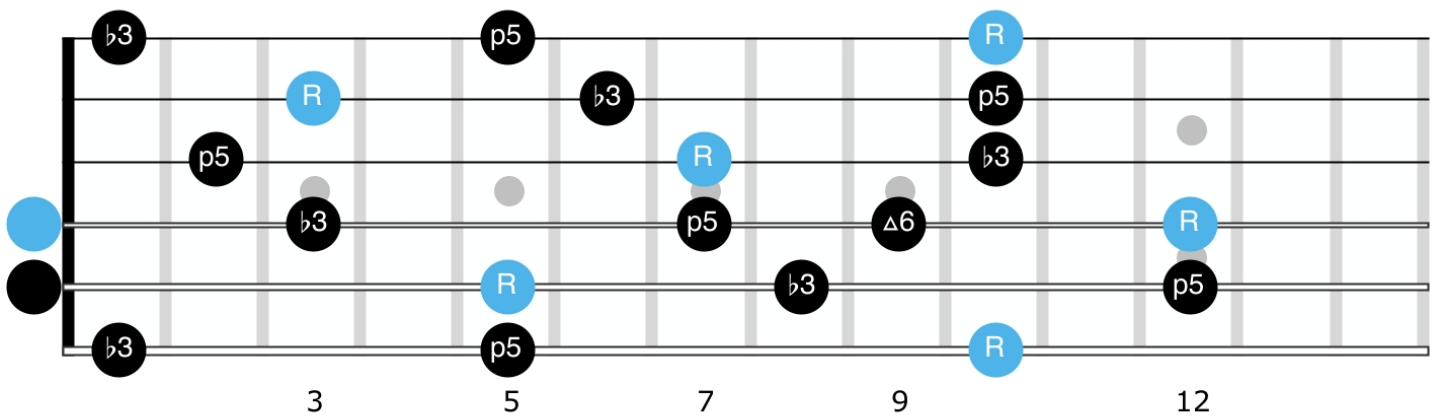
Don't stop with just triads. It's important learn and visualize all of the notes on the neck, particularly the notes in different keys. With that in mind, let's take a look at those same seven triads mapped out on all six strings at once in the key of C Major.

Notice some familiar shapes hiding in there? You'll see all of the common CAGED guitar shapes. You can use these to create a myriad of different chords and arpeggios for use in solos, improvisation, songwriting, and melody composition.

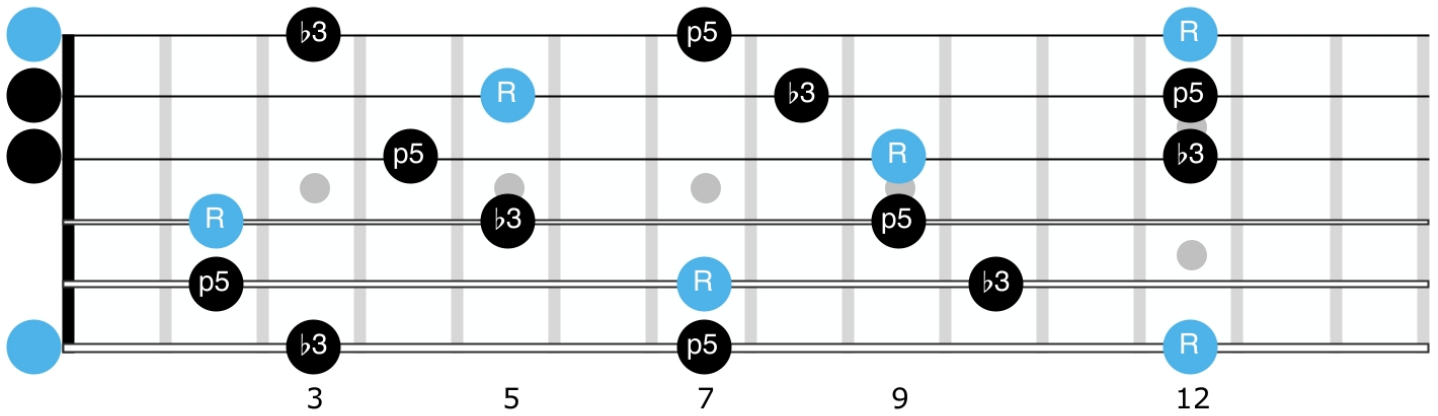
C Major



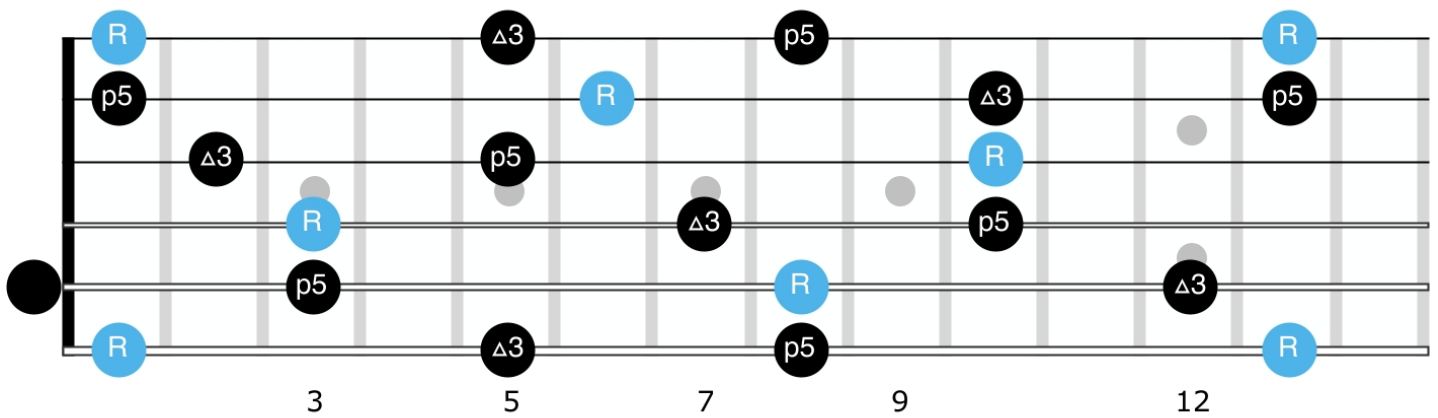
D minor



E minor

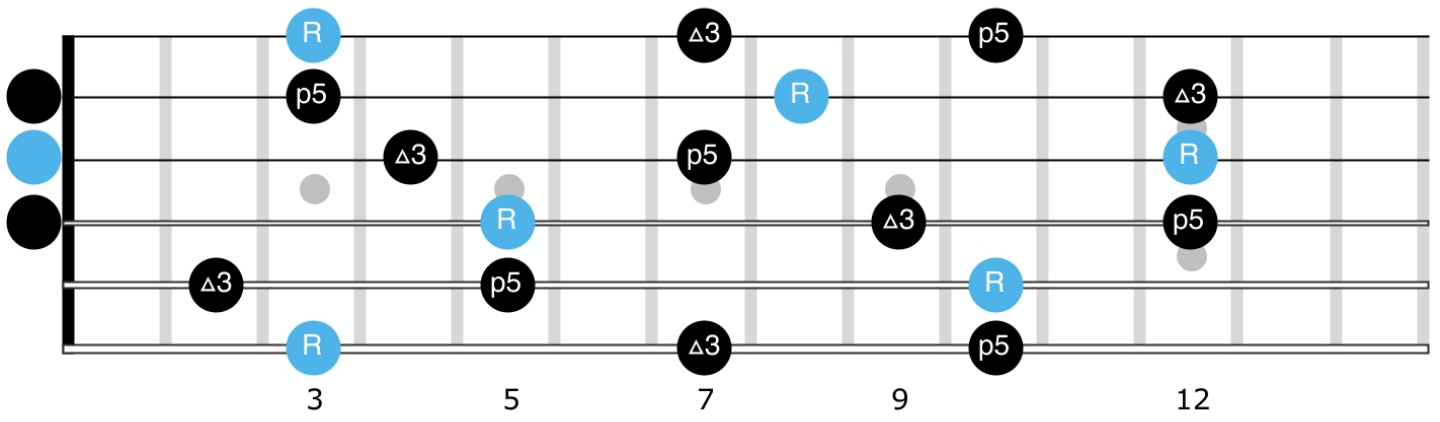


F Major

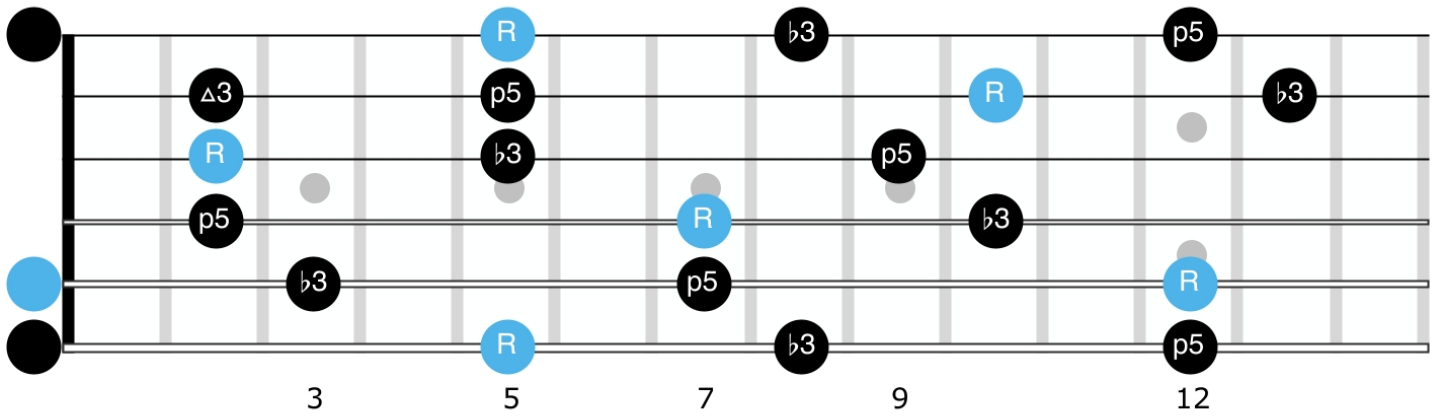


Starting to see a pattern? Notice that the shapes for C Major and F Major (*and next G Major*) are the same, just shifted to their respective notes within the key. D minor and E minor (*and later A minor*) will also use the same shapes just moved to their own diatonic Root, 3rd, and 5ths.

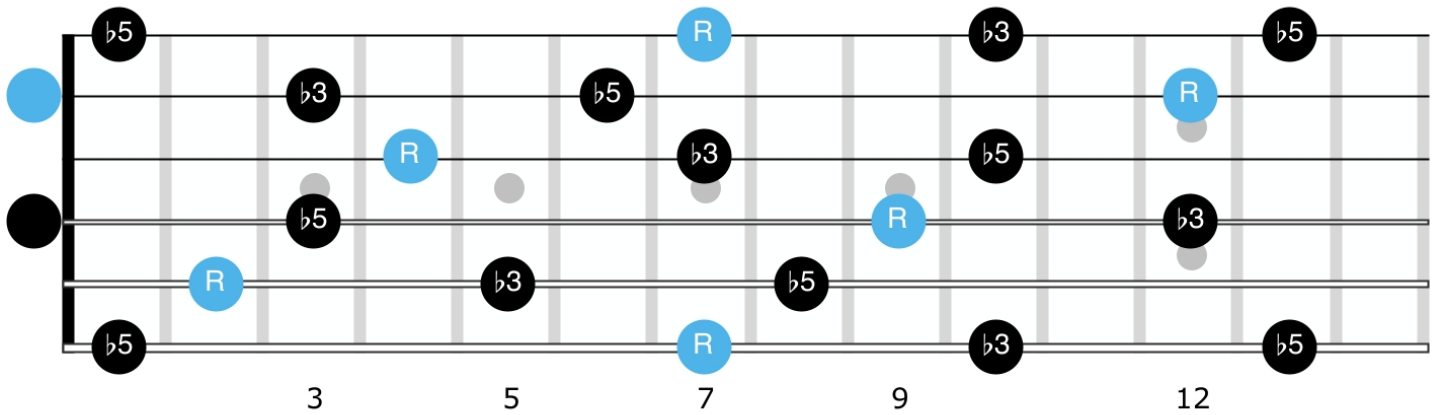
G Major



A minor

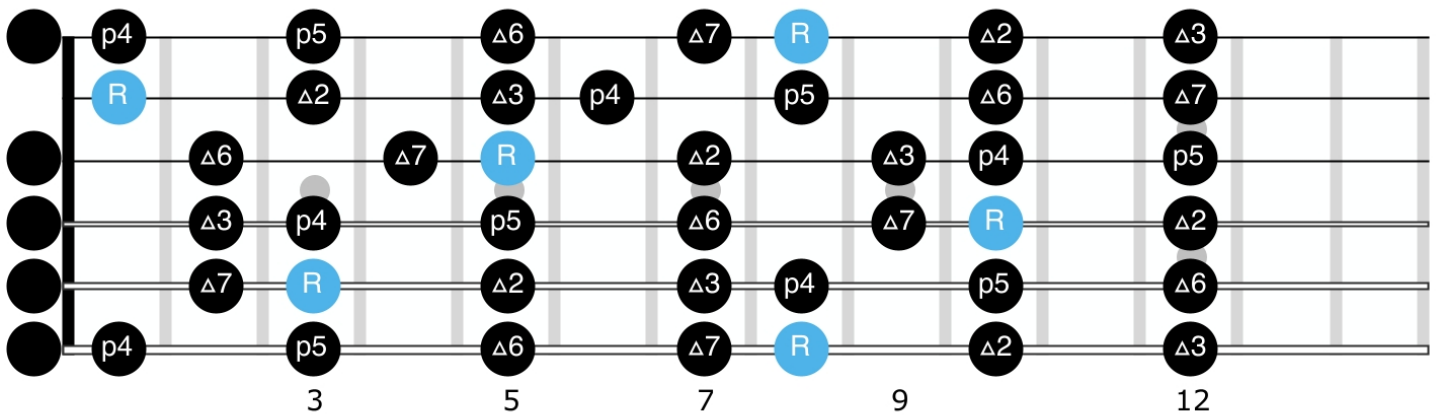


B Diminished



That's it for all of the Major, minor, and diminished diatonic triads in the Key of C Major. Lastly, let's take a look at what all of the notes would look like in the key of C. The intervals are labeled as they relate only to the Root C.

C Major - All Notes



This can be a lot to digest at once! All the more reason to learn the triads one at a time off of each scale degree. Regardless, you can use this master chart to assist in working out solos, chords, scales, and arpeggios.

How to Practice Triads on Guitar

All of those diagrams and shapes can be a little intimidating right? Let's talk about some different ways we can practice these on the guitar without so much memorization and theory.. Learning a bunch of similar shapes cant get boring real fast unless you can find a way to incorporate this stuff into your everyday guitar playing and make some actual music.

I like to work with Triads in a few different ways:

- **Picking Exercises.**
- **Solo & Improvisation over backing tracks (or looper).**

Improvising with Triads on Guitar

One of the easiest and best ways to get triads under your fingers is by using them in real-world playing situations such as improvising and soloing. Regardless of your skill level, targeting specific notes from triads is a great way to build melodies, create licks, and hit all of the *good* notes in a guitar solo.

Grab a C Major Backing track from Youtube. There are all different styles from Acoustic, to Heavy Metal. Pick whatever you like or create a playlist of different styles.

Cycle through each triad shape from previous examples slowly and see how they sound over the different chords in the key of C. Once you get a few shapes memorized, try to hit the specific triad over the chord as it passes by. For example, In a C-Dm -C progression, when a D minor chord comes up, switch to those D minor triad shapes.

If you don't have YouTube or something suitable in your guitar practice area, use a looper and record yourself playing the chords in the key of C however you like. If you're a beginner and need some chords, grab my [Complete Chord Guide](#) or check out some of the other lessons on the website.

Picking Exercises Using Triads

A while back I wrote this next exercise using the triads from one of J.S. Bach's famous piano inventions. Bach wrote so many amazing pieces that translate really nicely to acoustic, electric, and of course; *Classical Guitar*.

This little section from a Prelude in A minor uses only the top three strings and a variety of different alternate picking combinations. Great for both hands, but particularly effective for developing a strong cross-picking technique.

If Bach guitar pieces or Classical Guitar is something you might be interested in learning more about, check out my book: [Classical Guitar - A Practical Guide Vol. 1](#)

You can grab it in .PDF or [full-size paper-back from Amazon](#).

Bach Prelude

A minor

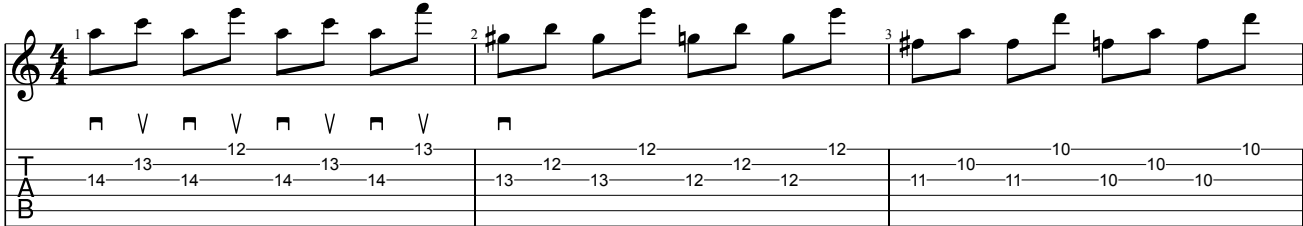
Music by Arr. Craig W. Smith

Standard tuning

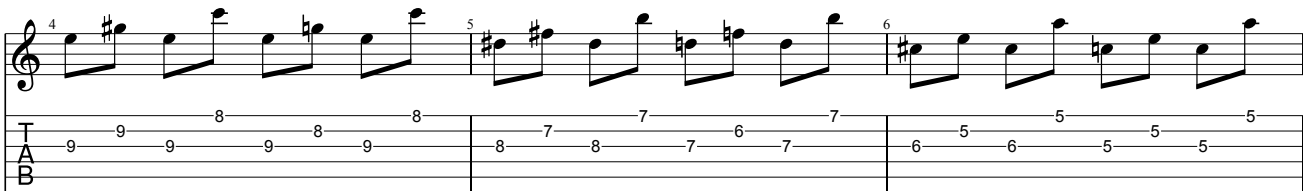
♩ = 140

Alternate Picking Throughout

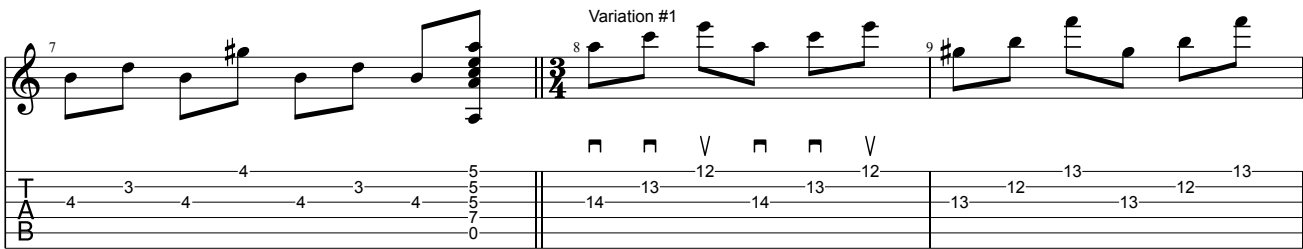
Musical notation for measures 1-3. Measure 1 starts with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. Measure 2 has a key signature change to one sharp (F#). Measure 3 has a key signature change to two sharps (F# and C#). The notation includes a guitar staff with fret numbers and a TAB staff with fret numbers.



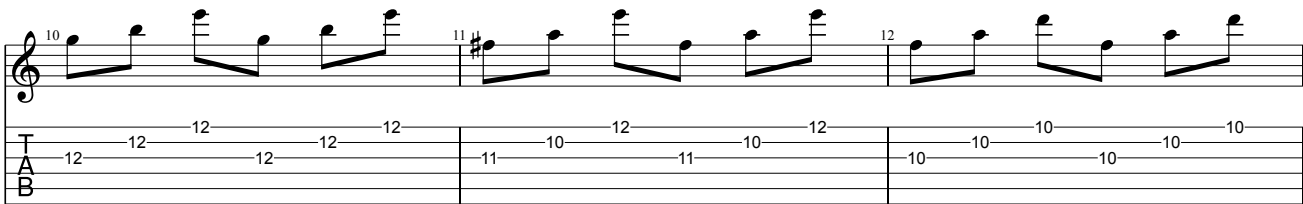
Musical notation for measures 4-6. Measure 4 has a key signature change to two sharps (F# and C#). Measure 5 has a key signature change to one sharp (F#). Measure 6 has a key signature change to two sharps (F# and C#). The notation includes a guitar staff with fret numbers and a TAB staff with fret numbers.



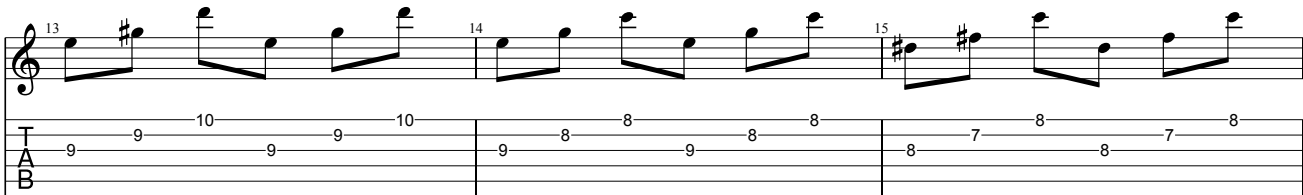
Musical notation for measures 7-9. Measure 7 has a key signature change to one sharp (F#). Measure 8 has a key signature change to two sharps (F# and C#). Measure 9 has a key signature change to one sharp (F#). The notation includes a guitar staff with fret numbers and a TAB staff with fret numbers. A double bar line is present between measures 7 and 8.



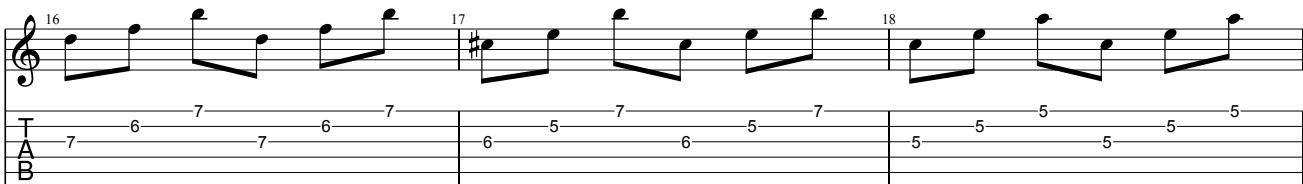
Musical notation for measures 10-12. The notation includes a guitar staff with fret numbers and a TAB staff with fret numbers.



Musical notation for measures 13-15. The notation includes a guitar staff with fret numbers and a TAB staff with fret numbers.



Musical notation for measures 16-18. The notation includes a guitar staff with fret numbers and a TAB staff with fret numbers.



19 20 21

T
A
B

Variation #2

22 23 24

T
A
B

25 26 27

T
A
B

28 29 30

T
A
B

31 32 33

T
A
B

34 35

T
A
B

The Bach prelude is certainly challenging even for the most advanced guitarists. Trust me, its worth the effort. Both hands will benefit tremendously and you'll get used to playing several types of triads in the process.

It's also an extremely effective exercise for developing your picking skills. Enjoy!

If you have any questions, email or text me anytime.

Craig W. Smith - Guitarist & Author



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