

Easy Fancy Chords (etc.) for beginners and non-beginners — Part 1

(updated February 22, 2021)

Wood County District Public Library Ukulele Club — [WCDPL.org/ukulele-club](https://wcdpl.org/ukulele-club)
Grande Royale Ukulelists of the Black Swamp — grubsmusic.com

There should be something enlightening and fun here for almost everyone, from beginners to veteran musicians of all sorts, because the ukulele makes it surprisingly easy to play sophisticated-sounding music. For more Ukulele Club stuff, see the library website: <https://wcdpl.org/ukulele-club>

Questions? We're reachable by email at grubs@grubsmusic.com or on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/grubsmusic/>

If you're an absolute beginner — or even if not! — we humbly suggest that you start by watching the first few quick video lessons in our "Uke Club Shorts" series at <https://wcdpl.org/ukulele-club>

Another good place to start might be Heidi Swedberg's article and video "Your first ukulele lesson" from *Ukulele* magazine. This is a single 20-minute lesson that covers most of the same essential material as several of our "Shorts": <https://www.ukulelemag.com/stories/your-first-ukulele-lesson-a-beginners-guide-to-playing-ukulele>

The main thing is to get the instrument tuned up properly; after that, almost *anything* you play on *any* type of ukulele will sound pretty good. (*Shorts #1 & #2*)

Studying technique and learning songs are important and necessary, of course, but we believe it's equally important to start *making real music* as early as possible. So we want to show you the easiest ways to get started making simple music:

🎧 The “Z” chord — with all four strings muted (*Shorts #3 and #4*)

If you happen to be holding a ukulele when someone else starts playing a song, and you don't know what else to do, you can *always* play the “Z” chord (which sounds similar to the “chop” of a bluegrass mandolin, or even a snare drum): just mute all four strings by touching them gently (but *not* pressing down!) with all the fingers of your fretting hand. Meanwhile, strum or pluck with your other hand for a variety of pleasant percussive sounds.

FYI: For most people, the left hand does the fretting while the right hand strums and plucks, but some people do it the other way around.

Also FYI: Most of the professional ukulele players we follow are from the UK, Canada, and New Zealand, so they pronounce this letter “zed”, not “zee”.

🎧 The C6/Am7 chord — with all four strings open (*Shorts #3 and #4*)

If you just strum or pluck the open strings on a ukulele, so they all vibrate freely, you will hear a C6 chord. If a song calls for a regular “C” chord, try this easy jazzy open-string chord instead; it just might work. Not always, but sometimes!

Bonus: the C6 chord contains exactly the same notes as the A minor 7 (Am7) chord, and you can use it almost *any time* to replace a regular “A minor” chord.

FYI: The word “chord”, loosely speaking, refers to a combination of different notes played at the same time. Different kinds of chords have different sounds, and are usually appropriate in different musical situations.

🎧 Other Easy Fancy Chords

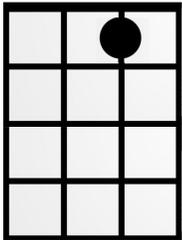
When you want to learn how to play specific songs, people will usually advise you to start in the key of C, with the C, F, and G7 chords. But the standard C, F, and G7 chords on the ukulele each require a *different number of fingers* and a *different hand position*, which means you might need to study and practice a bit before you can confidently play a simple song using those “basic” chords!

FYI: There are good reasons to start in the key of C on the piano and other instruments, and especially when you're first learning to read sheet music ... but it's just not the easiest place to start when playing the ukulele.

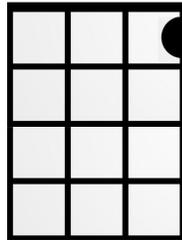
On the other hand, because of the unusual way the ukulele is tuned, it's sometimes easier to begin by playing "fancy" chords — which, of course, are useful for *non*-beginners, too! So we'll continue with some easy fancy chords in the key of F, and then in the key of G.

FYI: The strings are numbered from 1 (closest to the *floor*) to 4 (closest to the player's *nose*). But beware! The fretboard diagrams are drawn as if the instrument's neck is pointing straight up and facing you, with string 1 on the *right* side of the picture and string 4 on the *left*.

F(add9)



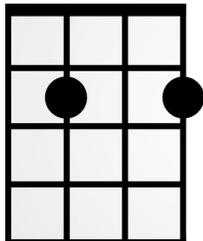
C7



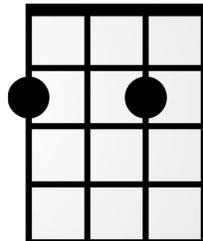
This one-finger F chord (first fret, second string) can usually replace a standard two-finger F chord, and also sounds ever-so-slightly jazzy. Its "twin" is C7 (first fret, first string). With only a tiny movement of one finger between two adjacent strings, you can play two-chord songs in the key of F, like "Jamabalaya", "Down in the valley", and "Singin' in the rain". (*Shorts #5*)

FYI: Canadian uke master James Hill uses the term "chord twins" for pairs of chords like these that have similar fingerings and are easy to play together.

G6



"Hawaiian D7"



The two-finger G6 chord (second fret, first and third strings) can sometimes replace a regular three-finger G major chord, especially if you're looking for a mellow, jazzy, "Hawaiian" sound. (*Shorts #6*)

FYI: James Hill says G6 is the *best* ukulele chord! https://youtu.be/sWhhw_mdwM

To get from G6 to the so-called "Hawaiian D7" (second fret, second and fourth strings), just move each finger over to the next string!

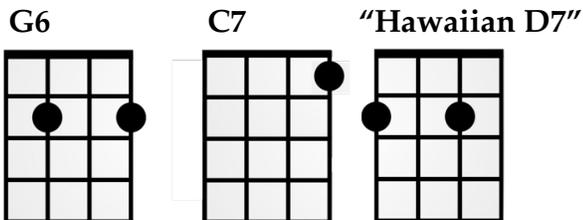
This "Hawaiian" fingering is much easier to play than other D and D7 fingerings, which usually require multiple fingers and/or awkward hand positions.

Now you're ready to start learning a million songs in the key of G ... and this is also a great time to practice *transitioning smoothly* between these easy fingerings ... which will give you the basic skills and confidence to learn more difficult chord changes later on. (*Shorts #7*)

🎵 “Hawaiian Blues” in G

The Ukulele Club Theme Song uses the following set of chords, which is similar to a typical 12-bar blues progression; we’re using G6 (*instead of G7*), C7, and “Hawaiian D7” to play what we call the Hawaiian 12-Bar Blues.

There’s a video tutorial for the theme song on the library website — just keep scrolling down this page until you find it: [WCDPL.org/ukulele-club](https://www.wcdpl.org/ukulele-club)



For additional inspiration, try sampling some ukulele music from around the world:

- Taimane (USA) — NPR Tiny Desk Concert — <https://youtu.be/tXUCJKto68Q>
- Jake Shimabukuro (USA) — “Bohemian Rhapsody” — <https://youtu.be/IYhcN8p4yhg>
- Tigerfish (Mongolia!) — “*Khailsan shokolad* (melted chocolate)” — <https://youtu.be/j8fX8KYX2MA>
- James Hill (Canada) — “Billie Jean” — <https://youtu.be/wVxaXODmA9Q>
- The Wellington International Ukulele Orchestra (New Zealand) — “It’s a heartache” — <https://youtu.be/GqynAAYdLW8>
- James and Jake (with Anne Janelle burning up the electric cello) — “Billie Jean” again! — https://youtu.be/HYqFJ5_0Ijc
- The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain (UK) “Lockdown Page” — <https://www.ukuleleorchestra.com/index.php/lockdown>

Next, we’ll show you how to play those “basic” C, F, and G chords at last — in two different ways. (*Shorts #8 & #9*)