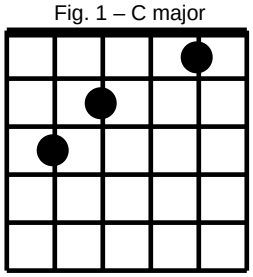
OPEN CHORD ALTERATIONS

There is nothing like open chords, so full and rich sounding - especially on an acoustic guitar. Open position chords have that nice full and jangley sound from the ringing of the open strings. You can really get some nice variations on these chords if you examine and understand the interval structures that make up certain chord voicings.

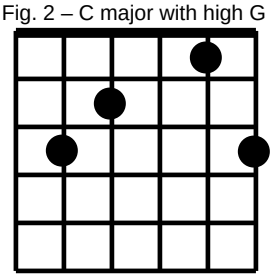
For example a major chord is made of the intervals root, third and fifth, (1,3,5). Following that formula a C major chord is made of the notes C (the root), E (the 3rd), and G (the 5th). Fig. 1 illustrates a basic open C major open chord that was probably one of the first chords you learned. Lets embellish the chord in a different way by adding a high G note and you get a very interesting sounding C major chord illustrated in Fig. 2. Its still a C major chord, but has a slightly different ring to it due to the doubling up on the fifth or G note. This chord voicing won't work for every 5th string root chord but it will work for the ones with a G note in the interval formula. This is so because it's the G-string that is ringing out on these open chords. G is a fifth of C, G is a third of Eb, and the root of a G chord. G would be the third in an Eb major chord - Eb (the root), G (the third), and Bb (the fifth). Fig. 3 illustrates an open string Eb major chord. Notice it has the same fingering as the C major chord in figure 2 – just slide the whole voicing down to the 5th fret root (Eb note). In Fig. 4 at the 10th fret you will find an open G major chord, G (root), B (the third), and D (the fifth). Try sliding these chords around for very interesting and different open string chord tones.

Fig. 1 – C major



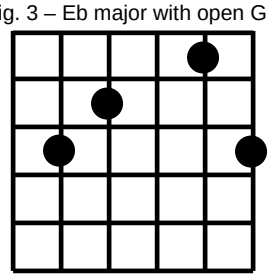
X 3 2 0 1 0

Fig. 2 – C major with high G



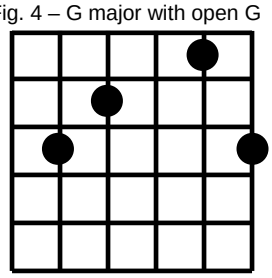
X 3 2 0 1 4

(6th fret root)
Fig. 3 – Eb major with open G



X 3 2 0 1 4

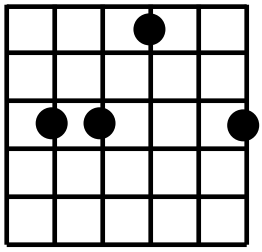
(10th fret root)
Fig. 4 – G major with open G



X 3 2 0 1 4

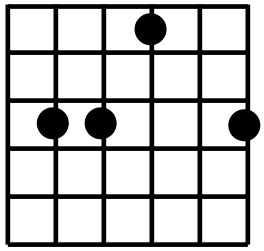
Let's try the similar process to get a few cool sounding and different minor chords. Instead of a variation of an open chord like above this example is more an offshoot from a barre chord that we will embellish with an open B string ringing. So all of the voicings will have the B note in the interval formula as that is the note that is ringing out. Remember the formula for a minor chord is a root, b3rd, and 5th. If we add a 9 on top we have R, b3rd, 5th, 9th – making the chord a Bmadd9. So lets try that at various positions with the open B string ringing out. Fig. 5 illustrates a Bmadd9 chord consisting of a root (B), b3rd (D), 5th (F#), and 9th (C#). Really cool sounding chord with the open B string ringing against the added 9th of a minor chord. As in the example above lets find other places where this chord will work – chords with a B in the minor add9 formula. Fig. 6 illustrates the same fingering just move to the 4th fret and you have an Abmadd9. The B is the b3rd in this chord – root is Ab, 5th is Eb, and the 9th is Bb. Fig. 7 moves to the 5th fret and you have a Amadd9 as the B is now the 9th. Fig. 8 illustrates an Emadd9 chord at the 12th fret where the B is now the 5th of the chord. Try all these variations and intimately examine the open strings and their relationships to chord intervals and you will be making some very interesting and different tones.

(7th fret)
Fig. 5 – Bmadd9 with open B



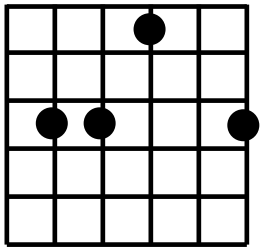
X 2 3 1 0 4

(4th fret)
Fig. 6 – Abmadd9 with open B



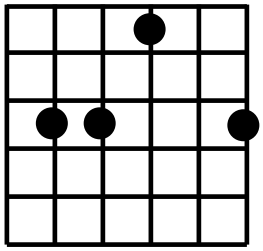
X 2 3 1 0 4

(5th fret)
Fig. 7 – Amadd9 with open B



X 2 3 1 0 4

(12th fret)
Fig. 8 – Emadd9 with open B



X 2 3 1 0 4