

Chords and More Chords for DGdg Tenor Banjo

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This tenth article about the fingerstyle tenor banjo in DGdg tuning will be focused on banjo accompaniment, i.e. on playing chords. The goal is to play basic chord progressions for the favorite songs in various keys (you know, summer campfire season is coming) in the oom-pah-oom-pah fingerstyle manner – with the correct bass note played by thumb and with the pinch of IM fingers. The capo usage will be also reviewed. Finally, the seventh chords will be presented on the Autumn Leaves chord progression in several keys.

Basic triads

Let's start with the the chord progressions shown in this YouTube video

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O14LbX83gU8>

There are used the **tonic**, **sub-dominant**, and **dominant** major triads, as well as two minor triads in those major keys suitable for DGdg tuning. There are also the dominant seventh chords, but they will be broadly presented in the latter section. (Please refer to other web sources for the explanation of the terms related to music theory as there is lack of space to cover this here). Apparently, the most suitable keys for open G tuning DGdg are those ones which contain the G chord as one of the harmonic functions emphasized above. The chords are presented in tab and as the chord diagrams, but I cannot resist adding also the music notation.

For the oom-pah-oom-pah accompaniment style, the chord voicings on the DGdg banjo are designed with the aim to have always the root and the fifth of the particular chord in the two thickest strings (they are numbered as the 4th string D and the 3rd string G). The interval between these two strings is the perfect fourth, which is the same as in lower strings of guitar; therefore the relative position of bass notes is similar. Basically, there are two options:

- 1) The root of the chord is on some fret of the 3rd (G) string and the fifth of the chord is on the same fret of the 4th (D) string.
- 2) The root of the chord is on some fret of the 4th (D) string and the fifth of the chord is two frets higher (closer to the bridge) on the 3rd (G) string.

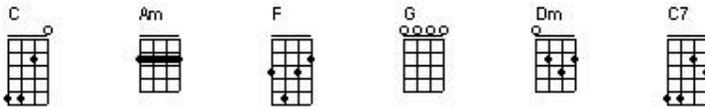
On the remaining strings – 1st (g) and 2nd (d) there is usually the third of the triad, determining the major or minor sound, and the repetition of either the root or the fifth of the chord. Or, there are just repeated both the root and fifth of the chord and the result is incomplete chord without the third – the power chord in the guitar terminology. Because of the number of options shown above, there are two shapes for these power chords, as discussed later.

You can see that the first note in the measure played by thumb is always the root of the chord (C note in case of C major), and the second thumb note is the fifth of the chord (G note in case of C major). Before new chord is coming, there are often some passing tones played by thumb, which lead the ear to the root of the new chord. When playing another chord progression of your choice, your task is to figure out the passing tones for the other chord sequences not shown here – the goal is the stepwise motion to the next root.

Sometimes there may appear the passing chord (e.g. at the end of the 2nd measure there is in fact E minor chord, and at the end of the 4th measure there is G major chord) or some dissonance (e.g. at the end of the 6th measure the F# in the bass against F played by index finger). The barre shape of A minor chord as well as the open shape of G major chord do not contain any third note of the triad – this is the first of two shapes of the power chord suitable for both major and minor chords. And yes, the bass note of the F major chord 3532 shape is played by left thumb wrapped around the neck.

Basic chord progression in the key of C major

Tab for DGdg tenor banjo by Mirek Patek
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First system of the chord progression in the key of C major. The music is in 4/4 time. The first four measures are: C, Am, F, G. The tablature shows the following fret numbers: 0-0-0-0, 2-2-2-0, 2-2-2-2, 0-2-2-2, 0-0-3-3, 0-0-0-0, 0-0-0-0. The strings are labeled G, D, G, D from top to bottom. The picking pattern is T M T M.

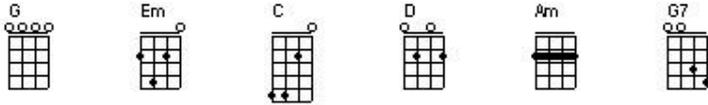
Second system of the chord progression in the key of C major. The first four measures are: C, Am, F, G, C. The tablature shows the following fret numbers: 0-0-0-0, 2-2-2-0, 2-2-2-2, 0-2-2-2, 0-0-3-3, 0-0-2-4, 0-0-2-0, 0-0-0-0. The strings are labeled T, A, B from top to bottom. The picking pattern is T M T T.

Third system of the chord progression in the key of C major. The first four measures are: F, G, C, Am, Dm, G, C, C7, C. The tablature shows the following fret numbers: 2-2-0-0, 0-0-0-0, 2-2-2-2, 0-0-3-3, 0-0-2-2, 0-0-0-0, 0-0-0-0, 3-3-3-3, 0-2-2-2, 0-2-2-2, 0-2-4-5, 5-4-2-2, 2-0-2-2, 0-2-4-5, 5-5-5-5, 5-5-5-5. The strings are labeled T, A, B from top to bottom. There are first and second endings indicated by brackets and numbers 1 and 2.

The next progression is in the key of G major. Note that the second half of the 6th measure differs from the YouTube video where I have played wrong passing tones into the D major chord. The D major chord shape shown here (0202) does not contain the third (with the third it would be 0242), so this is the other shape of the power chord – in addition to the barre shape of G and A(m) chords. Up the neck, you may play this power chord (e.g. 5757 for G chord) either with all four left hand fingers, or with the help of index finger barre – this may speed up the alternation e.g. between the power chords 5757 (G) and 5555 (C).

Basic chord progression in the key of G major

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First progression: G, Em, C, D. The notation includes a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The bass line is shown on a four-string tenor banjo (D, G, D, G). The melody consists of quarter notes and eighth notes.

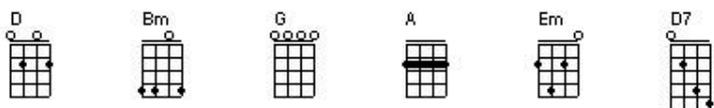
Second progression: G, Em, C, D, G. Similar notation to the first progression, with a treble clef, key signature of one sharp, and 4/4 time signature. The bass line and melody are adapted for the five-chord sequence.

Third progression: C, D, G, Em, Am, D, G, G7, G. This progression includes a repeat sign with first and second endings. The notation includes a treble clef, key signature of one sharp, and 4/4 time signature. The bass line and melody are adapted for the nine-chord sequence.

The third progression shown in the YouTube video is the key of D major. In the Bm chord shape (4404) you can hold both D and G strings on the 4th fret with your middle finger simultaneously, or your middle finger may jump from one string to the other as needed; in the latter case the middle finger on the 4th fret on D string is angled to mute the 3rd G string in order to avoid the dissonant sound of G against F#. You can observe that the different chord progressions vary in the amount of passing tones – it is up to you if you stick with basic root-fifth bass or you strive for some walking bass.

Basic chord progression in the key of D major

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First system of musical notation (measures 1-8). The treble clef staff shows a melody in 4/4 time. The bass line is shown on a four-string tenor banjo (G, D, G, D). Chords indicated are D, Bm, G, and A.

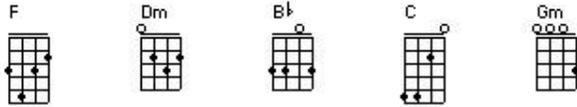
Second system of musical notation (measures 9-16). The treble clef staff shows a melody. The bass line is shown on a four-string tenor banjo (T, A, B). Chords indicated are D, Bm, G, A, and D.

Third system of musical notation (measures 17-24). The treble clef staff shows a melody. The bass line is shown on a four-string tenor banjo (T, A, B). Chords indicated are G, A, D, Bm, Em, A, D, D7, and D. The system concludes with a double bar line and first and second endings.

Final progression in the YouTube video is in the key of F major. Unlike the previous progressions, I did not [succeed to] play the second part (the third line) as the repetition so there are two different versions (third and fourth line). I have corrected the second part of 27th measure (F to Dm in the fourth line) where is notated the A7 passing chord (misplayed in the video). The Gm to C connection in the 21st measure (G-A-C bass line instead of A-Bb-C in 29th measure) sounds bit pentatonic, but I left it there. For the fingering of Bb major chord shape (3303) there apply the same options as for the Bm chord (4404) discussed above – the left middle finger either covers the 3rd fret of both strings or jumps from G to D string as needed.

Basic chord progression in the key of F major

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Musical notation for the first system (measures 1-8). The key signature has one flat (B \flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is written in treble clef. The bass lines are for strings G, D, G, and D. Chords indicated are F, Dm, B \flat , and C.

Musical notation for the second system (measures 9-16). The key signature has one flat (B \flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is written in treble clef. The bass lines are for strings T, A, and B. Chords indicated are F, Dm, B \flat , C, and F.

Musical notation for the third system (measures 17-24). The key signature has one flat (B \flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is written in treble clef. The bass lines are for strings T, A, and B. Chords indicated are B \flat , C, F, Dm, Gm, C, and F.

Musical notation for the fourth system (measures 25-32). The key signature has one flat (B \flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is written in treble clef. The bass lines are for strings T, A, and B. Chords indicated are B \flat , C, F, Dm, Gm, C, and F.

Apparently the key of F has been bigger struggle than the previous keys so maybe the capo could be good choice here – let’s discuss this topic before we move to the seventh chords.

Where to put the capo?

I play mostly out of the key of G, C, or D. Other major keys are easily accessible with the capo as shown in the table.

The key of the tune	C	C#	D	Eb	E	F	F#	G	Ab	A	Bb	B
Play out of the key	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C				
Capo is on the fret	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
Play out of the key			D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D		
Capo is on the fret			0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
Play out of the key	G	G	G					G	G	G	G	G
Capo is on the fret	5	6	7					0	1	2	3	4

The preferred options are highlighted in bold – they use the capo in the area close to the nut (called “down the neck”) in order not to waste unnecessary big portion of the fretboard. There may be occasions when the capo is put higher, e.g. on the 5th fret for the key of C, if there is particular lick or melody which needs to be played “out of the key of G” – with the “G shapes”. Similarly, for the key of D there are tunes which are playable without the capo (out of D), other ones are easier with the capo on 2nd fret (out of C). For the key of F discussed above, I would typically go for the capo on the 3rd fret and play out of D.

For the songs in minor keys there are more options. Instead of putting them into the complicated table, here are two examples.

1) The song in B minor can be played

1a) without the capo (in fact out of the key of D, the relative major key of Bm). The shapes for tonic, sub-dominant and dominant chords would be

Bm = 4404, Em = 2420, F# = 4643

1b) with the capo on the 2nd fret (if the song touches the B dorian mode where the A major chord fits). The shapes for tonic, sub-dominant and dominant chords would be

Am = 2222, Dm = 0232, E7 = 2401

1c) with the capo on the 4th fret. The shapes for tonic, sub-dominant and dominant chord would be Gm = 0000 or 0003, Cm = 5510 (quite stretchy) or 5555, D = 0242

2) The song in E minor can be played

2a) without the capo; the chord shapes would be

Em = 2420, Am = 2222, B7 = 4412

2b) with the capo on the 2nd fret; the chord shapes would be

Dm = 0232, Gm = 0003, A = 2222 (or A7 = 2220 shape with the middle finger on the 2nd string and the index finger making the partial barre over the 3rd-4th string)

Seventh chords

In the oom-pah-oom-pah accompaniment style discussed in this article, there are used the chord shapes which generally contain all four notes of the seventh chord, the only exception being the A7 chord shape 2220 which does not contain the third for the sake of easy fingering. As a rule, the root

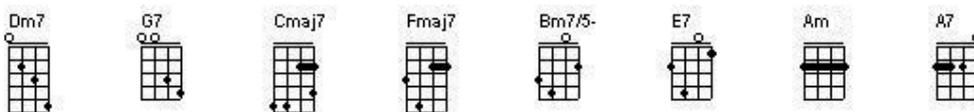
and fifth are again on the 4th and 3rd string (to be played as the bass notes by right thumb). As discussed in the Basic triads chapter, there are the same two options of the root location – either it is on the 3rd (G) string, or on the 4th (D) string. Here is the video of so called 1-6-2-5 chord progression containing major seventh, dominant seventh, minor seventh and half-diminished chords:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEJya3yjWWo>

Instead of presenting here the tab transcription of this video, there follows the chord progression of section A of Autumn Leaves, the jazz standard with music written by Joseph Kosma, in four different keys. Note that in case of Cmaj7 and Cm7 shapes there is auxiliary partial barre with the left index finger which I use for easier grip. The Am7 shape uses both index and little finger partial barre. Similarly to F major triad 3532 (and not shown Fm triad 3531), the F7 shape uses the right thumb wrapped around the neck.

Autumn Leaves, section A chord progression in Am

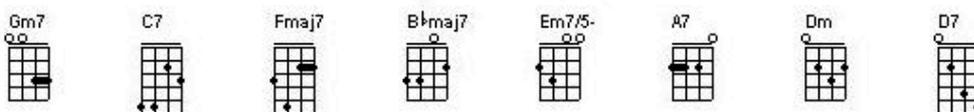
Tab for DGdg tenor banjo by Mirek Patek
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Musical notation for Autumn Leaves, section A in Am. The score includes a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a key signature of one flat (Bb). The melody is written on a single staff. Below the staff, the chord progression is indicated: Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, Fmaj7, Bm7/5-, E7, Am, A7, Am. The notation includes first and second endings. Below the chord names is a guitar-style tab for a tenor banjo (DGdg) with fret numbers for each string (G, D, G, D).

Autumn Leaves, section A chord progression in Dm

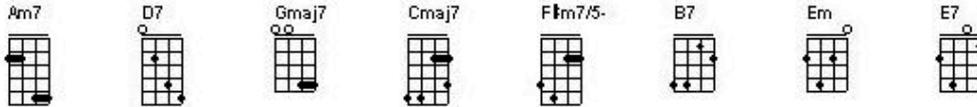
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Musical notation for Autumn Leaves, section A in Dm. The score includes a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a key signature of two flats (Bb, Eb). The melody is written on a single staff. Below the staff, the chord progression is indicated: Gm7, C7, Fmaj7, Bbmaj7, Em7/5-, A7, Dm, D7, Dm. The notation includes first and second endings. Below the chord names is a guitar-style tab for a tenor banjo (DGdg) with fret numbers for each string (G, D, G, D).

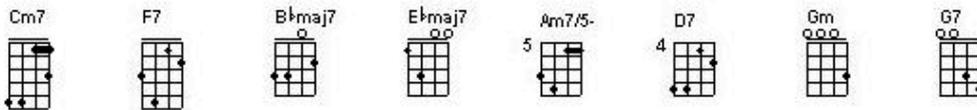
Autumn Leaves, section A chord progression in Em

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Autumn Leaves, section A chord progression in Gm

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When you are tired of the oom-pah-oom-pah sound (or oom-pah-pah in case of waltz 3/4 rhythm), you can play all presented chord progressions with some right hand fingerpicking pattern – start with the TIMI TIMI roll shown in the Example 1 of my June 2010 article at <http://banjosessions.com/?p=60>.

Practice the tunes from your songbook, play the correct bass notes (root first!) and explore the passing tones between the chords. Enjoy!

P.S. In case you miss the diminished seventh chord, the complete four-note shape is 3401 or 6734 or 9-10-6-7 or 12-13-9-10 for Fdim, Abdim, Bdim and Ddim chords; 4512 or 7845 or 10-11-7-8 or 13-14-10-11 for F#dim, Adim, Cdim and Ebdim chords; 5623 or 8956 or 11-12-8-9 or 14-15-11-12 for Gdim, Bbdim, Dbdim and Edim chords. If it is too stretchy for your left hand, start with the up-the-neck positions (closer to the bridge with smaller fret distances) and gradually practice the ones down the neck.