

Fantastic Chords & Where to Find Them

Every chord shape belongs to a “chord family”. Chord families are sets of chords that sound good together, and usually look alike.

Main Chord Families

- **“Baby” Chord Shapes**
 - Two-finger chords that include open strings, and are usually played in first position.
 - Baby chords are usually the first chords you learn when taking up the mandolin, but they are used by all skill levels, beginner to professional
 - Because they use open strings, baby chords are not moveable
 - Baby chords sound great when backing up a singer, and work well with the Sam Bush style chop
 - They are useful in most genres, depending on how they are used
- **“Monroe Style” Chord Shapes**
 - The chord shapes most often used by Bill Monroe
 - Monroe style chords are closed position chords, which means they are moveable since there are no open strings
 - Monroe style chords are ideal chopping chords
 - They sound good when allowed to sustain, but aren’t usually the best choice for sustained strum patterns
 - Monroe Style chords are commonly used in bluegrass music, but are useful in other genres as well
- **“Bar” Chord Shapes**
 - Bar chord shapes use the index finger as a capo, and make baby chords moveable by turning them into closed position chords
 - Bar chords work well for chopping, and also sound great when allowed to sustain
 - Bar chords work well for bluegrass, country, pop, and many other genres
- **“Triangle” Chord Shapes**
 - With triangle chords, your fingers will be arranged in a small triangle
 - Triangle chords are most often 6th, 7th, and diminished chords

- Triangle chords work well for chopping, and also sound great when allowed to sustain
- Triangle chords work well for most styles of music, and mix well with most other chord families
- **“Two Note” Chord Shapes**
 - Two note chords are literally made up of only two notes, and are not the same as baby chords
 - Two note chords are typically played on the G and D strings and are made up of portions of chord shapes from other chord families
 - Two note chords work well when used with the Sam Bush style chop
 - Because there are only two notes, they aren’t always the best choice for sustained strum patterns
 - Two note chords work well in most genres, and are commonly used in modern bluegrass, newgrass, reggae, etc

From the classroom of Nate Lee at Nashville Mandolin Camp, 2019
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