

Ukulele begins with C

Well, not literally of course! But it is the first chord that most people learn and, because it is a one finger chord on the bottom string it is generally a favourite!

There are a few things that are useful to know at the beginning of your ukulele journey. Some people will use different methods or ways of explanation. What I detail here is reasonably common though, and hopefully easy to understand. I've not gone into too much detail. That can come when you're ready for it.

You need to know a few things before you get started. Your uke has a body – the big bit – a neck – the long bit – and a head – the small bit on the end where the tuning keys are. The neck is divided into divisions called frets. They are numbered from the head towards the body. There are 4 strings which are generally numbered from bottom (closest to the floor) to top (closest to your head) and just to confuse people the notes they are tuned to are usually named from top to bottom. (see further on) The fingers on your chord hand (if you are right handed, this will be your left hand) are also numbered. The index is 1, middle is 2, ring is 3, pinky is 4. Your thumb needs to be at the back of the fretboard in a comfortable position so you can squeeze your hand and press your fingers on the appropriate strings. Try to use the tip of your finger and have the knuckles bent. It can take a bit of time to learn the right amount of pressure to use.

You need to be able to tune your ukulele. In this, George Clooney is your friend - you just need to remember that **George Clooney Eats Apples**. From the top string to the bottom the notes the strings are tuned to are **G C E A**. An electronic tuner takes the guess work out of finding the notes, and there are phone apps if you don't have a tuner. You can tune to a piano or to another player's uke.

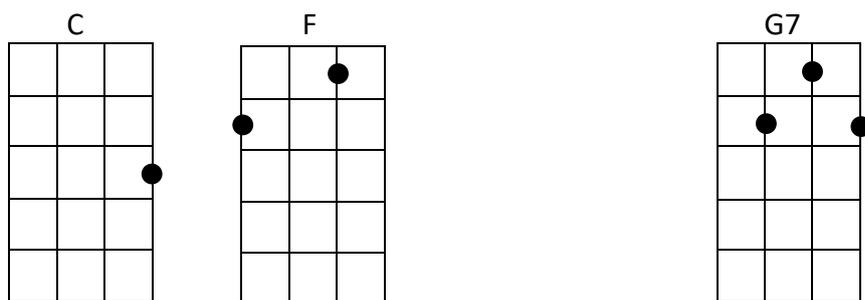
Once you're in tune you're ready to start playing. Now it's time to learn some chords. The first chords most people learn are C, F & G7. With these you can play a lot of songs.

For C place your 3rd finger on the 1st string in the 3rd fret.

For F place your 1st finger on the 2nd string in the 1st fret and your 2nd finger, 4th string, 2nd fret.

For G7 – 1st finger, 2nd string, 1st fret; 2nd finger, 3rd string 2nd fret; 3rd finger, 1st string, 2nd fret.

Here is what that looks like in a diagram.



It is always good to look for any connections between chords to make changing chord easier. Between C and G7 you can slide your third finger from fret 3 – 2 then add the other fingers.

F and G7 have the 1st finger in the same place.

Anything that will help you find your way between chords is helpful. It may be a finger in the same place, the same fret or on the same string. It will help you navigate between chords without having to keep looking at your fingers – which probably means losing your place in the music you are playing! The main things to remember – take your time! There's no rush. You won't remember everything at once, so don't panic. Don't be afraid to ask questions of your teacher, or anyone who is willing to help you. You can't ask a question too many times, and no question is too silly to ask! If you're wondering or confused, someone else probably is too!

And above all – have fun!!

Strumming the ukulele

There are no hard and fast rules when you start strumming your ukulele. You can use your thumb, finger or fingers – whatever works best for you to get a relaxed action. If you want to try a pick I recommend a felt pick.

Do – try to keep your ukulele facing as straight out as possible, not tilted up to your face. (I know it's tempting so you can see your chord hand)

Do – keep your wrist relaxed, loose, flexible.

Do - try to strum down all the strings, not just hit the top ones.

Do – start with just down strums – this trains your hand to keep the up and down motion going so when you are ready to try different strum patterns that action is automatic.

Don't – rest your fingers on the body of the ukulele if strumming with your thumb

Don't – lock your wrist and end up with a tense 'robot arm'

It's ok to use the pad of your thumb to strum, just as it is ok to use the fingernails – you will end up with a different sound with each method, and as you progress you might want to experiment further and play different songs with different methods.

You could also use a pick – I recommend a felt pick, especially for beginners as it feels more secure to hold and gives a softer sound.

You could also 'pinch' your thumb and first finger (or fingers) together as if you were holding a pick and strum with the nails that way.

When you're ready to progress, start out gently. Some people pick up strum patterns quickly while others take more time and practice. Remember you have a lot to think about when you are still a beginner, or even when you are getting more confidence with chords!

Strum patterns can be written out with different symbols to essentially mean the same thing.

The basics are;

Down strokes can be D D D D or V V V V or ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ or ////

Generally down strokes are counted on the beat, so 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

Up strokes can be U U U U or ^ ^ ^ ^ or ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑

Generally up strokes are between the beats, on the 'and' if you count 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

If we are talking about a song in 4/4 timing – which means one you can march to, and count 1, 2, 3, 4 (3/4 would mean you waltz to it and count 1, 2, 3) there are lots of variations to play around with. Here are some to think about.

Count	1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&
Pattern 1	D		D		D		D	
Pattern 2	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U
Pattern 3	D		D	U	D	U	D	U
Pattern 4	D		D	U	D		D	U
Pattern 5	D		D	U		U	D	U