

One Finger Ukulele

FOR BARITONE & TENOR

By Douglas Reynolds

If...your hands “don’t want to” make those shapes...or if you have physical challenges like arthritis or a missing finger...or you enjoy experimenting with different styles...or if you just don’t want to cut your nails...**there’s another way to play!**

Introduction

One Finger Ukulele is an easy to learn method of playing that uses a different tuning of the instrument. This alternate tuning will allow you to play *almost* every chord in any uke songbook while using only one finger on the fretboard! It makes the uke even *easier* to learn for new players, while making complex melody lines and licks *more* accessible to *more* players. It also lets baritone uke owners play seamlessly with GCEA tuned ukes, without having to think about the different chord shapes.

In a nutshell, One Finger Ukulele works by having you play only the *common* notes within any family of the ukulele’s most common chord types. For example, within the family of the G chord, the most common chords are G, Gm, G7, and Gm7. All of those chords have the notes G and D in common. One Finger Ukulele tuning has you play the G and D notes, but in two octaves. This replaces the missing, variable notes of those four chords with the rich, full sound of double notes an octave apart. More about this later:

One Finger Ukulele is not meant to *replace* normal GCEA tuning, but you may find that you prefer it for many types of songs. In the guitar world, artists such as Keith Richards, Ry Cooder, Joni Mitchell, Laurence Juber, Leo Kottke, David Lindley, Robert Fripp, David Wilcox, and more all favor alternate tunings. **Music should be fun and the One Finger Ukulele method is just that!**

Newbies will be able to quickly learn to accompany yourself or jam with others in *any key* while more experienced players will find many complex melody lines and licks *more* accessible. By experimenting with single note positions on one string you will quickly find that those notes duplicate on the second string above or below where you are playing, either an octave above or below. This makes for fun “lick experimentation!”

How it works

One Finger Ukulele borrows from the rock 'n roll world's concept of "*power chords*." In short, you retune your ukulele so that when you bar a finger at any position on the fretboard, you are playing only *common notes* of the most popular chords. This assures that your playing will blend seamlessly with others and provide backing for your own voice if you are a singer. In many cases, your playing will accentuate the overall sound as you'll be playing in two octaves! You can ignore all the chord variables. You only need to know the notes along the 4th string to instantly play over 60 chords!

Easier barring

The "one finger" in One Finger Ukulele refers to a single finger barring the width of the neck on a given fret. In regular tuning, barre chords can be difficult because you must also put down other fingers, but with One Finger Ukulele other fingers are not required. This means that you can help your index finger by pushing your middle finger down on top of it until you get stronger. With your thumb kept approximately in the center of the back of the neck you'll have maximum pinching/barring power without other fingers weakening the overall structure. You'll find One Finger barring much easier and, over time, you will actually build up strength for the more difficult barring of regular GCEA tuning.

Instrument Requirements

One Finger Ukulele began as a baritone-only system, however the popularity of GCEA ukuleles required that I bring tenor ukes into the fold. (Anything smaller than tenor doesn't work well with One Finger ukulele.)

There are many advantages in using a baritone:

- No re-stringing required.
- The longer neck gives easier access to chords up the neck.
- The lower string tension lessens strain on your hands.
- The larger body best compliments the tones of the power chords.

To match One Finger tuning on a tenor, you must change strings. Therefore you should keep a separate tenor uke set up for this system, assuming you still want to play GCEA regularly. With a baritone you only need one instrument.

What tuning does One Finger Ukulele use?

Because the key of C is the most practical and is the easiest to understand, we tune to the C power chord of CGCG. This allows you to easily play in all popular ukulele keys.

How to convert your ukulele to a One Finger Ukulele

Baritone: Tuning a baritone to CGCG is easy. From standard DGBE baritone tuning, tune the 4th string from D *down* to C (1 full step down). Leave the 3rd string at G. Tune the 2nd string from B *up* to C (1/2 step). Tune the 1st string from E *up* to G (1 1/2 steps).

Tenor: Tuning a tenor to CGCG requires changing strings. You can tune a tenor with standard GCEA strings to *another* power chord but the key would be impractical for playing music with others. You can also tune GCGC. See page 12.

You will need two new wound strings: one in the range of .039-.041 and one in the range of .029-.031. (We sell these string gauges at www.ukulele.cafe or you may source them yourself. *Make sure they are nylon/classical guitar strings-NOT steel!*)

Here is the process of re-stringing your tenor:

- Leave the existing 1st/A string in place.
- Move the existing 3rd/C string to the 2nd position, discarding the old 2nd string.
- Place the wound +/- .030 string in the 3rd position.
- Place the wound +/- .040 string in the 4th position.*

*The nut slot may be too small for the new 4th string. You can enlarge the slot with a needle nose file or even a fingernail file.

Tune the 4th string to C, the 3rd string to G, the 2nd string to C, and the 1st string down one full step to G.

*** *Or just get a baritone!* ***

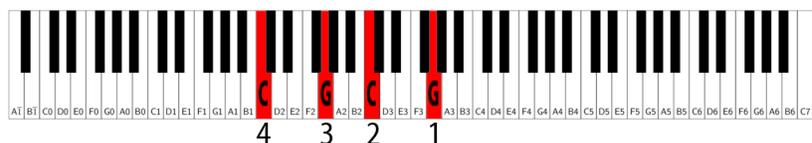
NOTE: For both of the above ukuleles, the proper pitches on a keyboard are:

4th string-C below middle C

3rd string-G below middle C

2nd string-middle C

1st string-G above middle C



The hardest thing about One Finger Ukulele

You will need to learn the fret positions of the notes along the 4th string. That's why we install chord markers on the side of the neck of our One Finger Ukuleles! Of course you can always mark the notes on the side of your neck.

Why One Finger Ukulele works

Here's just a smackerel of "music theory." You do *not* need to remember it, but it doesn't hurt to know *why* the method works. One Finger Ukulele borrows from the rock 'n roll world's concept of "*power chords.*" What is a power chord? To answer that we must first look at regular chords.

A major chord, such as C Major, is made up of the 1-3-5 notes in the root-note's scale. So C Major is composed of the notes CEG: (1C 2D 3E 4F 5G). The other three *most common* chord types found in ukulele music are minor chords (such as Am), 7th chords (such as G7), and minor-7th chords (such as Dm7). Those chord types are created by flattening the 3 note, adding a note above the 5 note, or both. *But the 1 & 5 notes are never altered.* (Many other chord types, such as Maj7, 6 chords, suspended chords, and more also retain unaltered 1 & 5 notes.)

A power chord consists *only* of the 1 and 5 notes, that is, the root note and the fifth note of a scale. (This is also called a 5 chord.) Therefore, if you re-tune your ukulele so that all strings are either the 1 or 5 notes of a scale, **barring*** a finger across any fret will give you a "5 chord" or "power chord" version of the root note of that fret. This power chord will *substitute* for or *sound good with* any major, minor, 7th, minor 7th, Major 7th, 6th, etc. chord and more.

How to play One Finger Ukulele

- 1) Look at the letter of the chords being played—ignore everything past the letter*
- 2) Find that chord letter along the 4th string
- 3) Bar that fret and strum!

* except dim chords. See page 7 for those rascals

Here are the notes along the 4th string in the key of C.

Chord	C	C[♯]D[♭]	D	D[♯]E[♭]	E	F	G[♭]F[♯]	G	A[♭]G[♯]	A	B[♭]A[♯]	B	C
Fret	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

A more rich and full sound

In One Finger Ukulele, you are doubling the playing of the 1 & 5 notes in two adjacent octaves. If you are playing with others and they are playing *any* common chords, your power chords will add to the overall sound! *You* will be playing the 1&5 notes of the chord, *they* will *also* be playing the 1&5 notes *plus* whatever additional notes that make up the chord. Your *sounds* will blend together perfectly as *your* notes are integral parts of *their* chords and your two octave playing will enhance the overall sound. Likewise, if you are playing solo and accompanying yourself singing, the 1&5 of your power chord will compliment and back the melody you are singing.

SUMMARY

In One Finger Ukulele we tune to an open **C5 power chord: CGCG.**

The root letter/note for every chord is found along the 4th string.

To play a proper substitute for *any* common chord, (Major, minor, 7th, minor 7th) simply find the fret matching the letter of the chord on the 4th string, bar that fret, and strum!

Playing Songs: The 1-4-5 formula

This is more stuff that you do not need to remember but is good to know: Most songs found in ukulele song books and played in uke clubs use the 1st, 4th, and 5th chords of a scale. These songs are referred to as... *drumroll...* **1-4-5 songs!**

There are two other common components of the 1-4-5 song formula:

1) Minor chords: 1-4-5 songs also use the relative minors of the 1-4-5 major chords.

These are, in order, the 6, 2, and 3 minors. In the key of C, the 6-2-3 minor chords are Am, Dm, and Em.

2) The V7. The "5" chord in a 1-4-5 is often played as a 7th, so in the key of C you will commonly encounter G7.

Playing in other keys

It only makes sense that the concept of using the 1st, 4th, and 5th chords of a scale (and the 6m, etc.) works with all scales or keys. The challenge is to grasp the pattern. It's not terribly difficult except when the pattern runs up too high on the neck and must start over again on the bottom. No matter the key, the 4 chord is always 5 frets up from the 1, the 5 chord is always 7 frets up, and the 6m is always 2 up, however the chords of the fretboard (and notes along the 4th string) start over at the 12th fret. Luckily you don't want to play up that high on the neck anyway. Basically, it's simple arithmetic but you must include the number zero. Zero is your open C chord.

The easiest key change to start with is the key of F. It's a common ukulele key and the scale starts over at the bottom of the neck. In F, F(1) is on the 5th fret, Bb(4) is up 5, on the 10th fret, and C is up 7, on the 12th fret, but the 12th is the same as 0, so you go back down to the open C. The 6m is Dm, on the 2nd fret, (6 being a full step up from the 5).

The chart in the next section will further address this pattern.

KEY OF C

1-4-5#	1		2m		3m	4		5		6m			1
Chord	C	C♯D♭	D	D♯E♭	E	F	G♭F♯	G	A♭G♯	A	B♭A♯	B	C
Fret	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

KEY OF F

1-4-5#	5		6m			1		2m		3m	4		5
Chord	C	C♯D♭	D	D♯E♭	E	F	G♭F♯	G	A♭G♯	A	B♭A♯	B	C
Fret	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

KEY OF G

1-4-5#	4		5		6m			1		2m		3m	4
Chord	C	C♯D♭	D	D♯E♭	E	F	G♭F♯	G	A♭G♯	A	B♭A♯	B	C
Fret	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

KEY OF D

1-4-5#			1		2m		3m	4		5		6m	
Chord	C	C♯D♭	D	D♯E♭	E	F	G♭F♯	G	A♭G♯	A	B♭A♯	B	C
Fret	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

KEY OF A

1-4-5#		3m	4		5		6m			1		2m	
Chord	C	C♯D♭	D	D♯E♭	E	F	G♭F♯	G	A♭G♯	A	B♭A♯	B	C
Fret	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

In the key of C, the 1-4-5 chords are C, F, and G

And the 6-2-3 minors are Am, D, and Em.

The chart above shows the chords in the key of C as well as in the other four common ukulele keys of F, G, D, and A: By strumming the color coded frets in the chart above, you have nearly all the chords you will ever need to play ukulele. Once again, **with One Finger Ukulele you just play the letters by barring across the fret number indicated in the chart!** Disregard the minor and 7th variations of the chords!

Strumming the ukulele open (without barring any fret) results a C chord (and all common variations). Barring the 2nd fret gives you Dm (and all other common D chords). Barring the 4th fret gives you Em (and all other common E chords). The 5th fret gives you F (and all common variations). Barring the 7th fret gives you G (also G7 and other common variations). Barring the 9th fret gives you Am, etc. The 10th fret gives you Bb, etc

Embellishments

One Finger “True” C7

Even though you don't need to concern yourself with playing 7 chord variations, you can play a one finger C7 if you like. The position is identical to a regular C Major chord in standard GCEA tuning: one finger on the third fret of the first string. Strum this position then take your finger off and listen to the difference.

The Sliding Bar

Try sliding into a bar chord position from the fret below it. For example, slide into an F chord by beginning in fret 4 and sliding into fret 5 *as you strum*. If used strategically, this technique enhances some songs. This is demonstrated in the video when playing Dire Straits' *So Far Away*.

Single Note Runs

A note or two picked between chords can be effective. It is especially fun to fret individual notes with one finger *while strumming the open C chord*. Start with the 2nd and 4th frets of the 2nd string then try others.

1+1 Licks and 7th Chords

If your hands are strong enough, add a finger while barring. Start by adding your ring finger two frets above the bar on the 3rd string. Strum and alternate placing your finger down and picking it up on every other strum.

Next try placing your pinky finger on the 3rd fret above the bar on the 1st string. This position turns any bar into a true 7th chord version of the chord created by the bar.

Leaving On A Jet Plane – John Denver

 G7 C0
All my bags are packed I'm ready to go
 G7 C0
I'm standin' here outside your door
 G7 C0 D2
I hate to wake you up to say goodbye
 G7 C0
But the dawn is breakin' it's early morn
 G7 C0
The taxi's waitin' he's blow-in' his horn
 G7 C0 D2
Already I'm so lonesome I could die

 G7 C0
So kiss me and smile for me
 G7 C0
Tell me that you'll wait for me
 G7 C0 D2
Hold me like you'll never let me go

 G7 C0
Cause I'm leavin' on a jet plane
 G7 C0
Don't know when I'll be back again
 G7 C0 D2
Oh babe, I hate to go

Bring It On Home To Me – Sam Cooke

 C0 F5 C0 G7
If you ever change your mind
 C0 C7(1-3) F5
About leavin', leavin' me behind
 C0
Oh, oh, bring it to me
 G7
Bring your sweet lovin'
 C0 F5 C0 G7
Bring it on home to me, yeah

Under The Boardwalk – The Drifters

Oh, when the sun beats down and burns the tar up on the roof
And your shoes get so hot you wish your tired feet were fireproof

Under the boardwalk, down by the sea, yeah
On a blanket with my baby is where I'll be

(Under the boardwalk) out of the sun
(Under the boardwalk) we'll be havin' some fun
(Under the boardwalk) people walking above
(Under the boardwalk) we'll be falling in love
Under the board-walk (board-walk!)



Our Ukuleles Customized for One Finger Ukulele–Lots of Bang for the Buck!

To make it easier to play multi-chord songs in any key, we have customized two models of budget friendly ukuleles. We place D,E,F,G,A,Bb, and C markers on the near side of neck for quick location of proper chords. Use the spaces in between as sharp and flat versions of the adjacent chord letters.

In addition, One Finger Uke owners have access to an ever increasing online songbook with frets to play indicated in **red** as in the sample song below.

We re-string our tenor model with the proper string gauges for CGCG tuning and file the nut slot appropriately. On baritone, we condition a new set of baritone strings for optimal performance and add strap pegs. (You'll want a strap when playing the larger baritone.)

Testing One Finger Ukulele on tenor without re-stringing

If you'd like to experiment with One Finger Ukulele on a tenor before re-stringing it, you can do so with a low-G tenor. Here's how:

From standard low-G GCEA tuning, tune the 4th string from G *down* to E (1 1/2 steps down). Tune the 3rd string from C down to B (1/2 step down). Leave the 2nd string tuned where it is at E. Tune the 1st string from A *up* to B (1 full step).

This results in the tenor being tuned to an open E chord. The patterns for playing 1-4-5 songs will be the same, 4 chord on 5th fret, 5 chord on 7th fret, 6m on 9th fret. This will only work for solo experimentation as I doubt that you will encounter anyone else playing a song in E, but you'll be able to experience the concept.

Alternatively, you can tune GCGC by tuning the 2nd and 1st strings up 1 1/2 steps. This will allow you to play chords along with the One Finger Ukulee videos, but the individual notes and licks in the videos will be on different strings so it's not good for that. The tone match of the double octave playing will also be off—tuning to GCGC is ONLY a way to let you experience the same chords along the neck as with the CGCG tuning of One Finger Ukulele.

If you haven't already, please watch all of the videos at www.playuke.net. And visit www.ukulele.cafe for more information about our One Finger Ukes!

Email me at: onefingeruke@gmail.com. (The videos say to email playukemail@gmail.com and that still works, but I'd like to move One Finger specific email to the new address.)

Thanks, I hope you have fun with One Finger Ukulele!
Douglas Reynolds

One Finger Ukulele™
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