

# Transitioning to Perfect Fourths Guitar Tuning

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Guitar in Fourth  
Gear: Transitioning  
from Standard  
Tuning (CAGED) to  
Perfect Fourths  
Tuning (P4)

Transform Your Guitar Playing with the Symmetry,  
Logic and Simplicity of Perfect Fourths Tuning.

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Part of the Guitar in Fourth Gear Perfect Fourths Tuning Project

By [TorusHeadStudios.com](http://TorusHeadStudios.com)

# Why Use Perfect Fourths (P4) Tuning?

Unlike many guitar modifications, tuning to perfect fourths is free, takes just a few seconds and is entirely reversible!

Fourths tuning is a small change and easy to try. Going back-and-forth between standard and perfect fourths is very easy. I keep guitars in different tunings but you can also re-tune in seconds.

## **The Power of Symmetry**

Perfect fourths tuning makes the entire fretboard completely symmetrical, unlocking new playing possibilities in ways you might not anticipate at first. You should be able to pick up the general idea of this tuning and play it smoothly in a few minutes. After spending some time with it, you will see that the shapes make a lot more sense and the fretboard is much easier to learn.

## **Simplifying Muscle Memory**

With a symmetrical fretboard, you can develop muscle memory quickly and easily because you only need to learn one pattern for each arpeggio, scale, or chord. Concentrate on improving your technique and speed without having to worry about learning different shapes for the same musical idea.

In standard tuning, you must learn any chord or scale in 3 different shapes to play horizontally across the fretboard. The irregular major third interval between the G and B strings creates an inconsistent pattern. In perfect fourths tuning, you only need to learn one shape and you can play it anywhere on the fretboard.

If you want to practice a 4 note, 3 string arpeggio across the fretboard in standard tuning you need 3 patterns so in an hour that would be 20 minutes each. The same arpeggio in P4 tuning only has one pattern so you can practice that for the entire hour.

## **Perfect Fourths can Easily apply to Extended Range Guitars and Bass**

Perfect fourths tuning already translates to 4,5 and 6 string basses that are normally tuned in fourths. Also, you can tune extended range 7,8 or 9 string guitars to fourths and benefit from a symmetrical fingerboard across more strings. You can apply the same scales and chord shapes to any guitar that you have.

## **Modern Tonalities Are Under Your Fingers More Easily**

Perfect fourths tuning let you create "modern" symmetrical sounds more easily. For example, the jazz fusion sounds of the 70 and 80s and also newer progressive heavy metal sounds use symmetrical scales and chords built on thirds, fourths or fifths. A symmetrical tuning makes these sounds intuitive and easy to play all over the neck.

## **Disadvantages**

Wim Den Herder says Perfect Fourth's tuning makes things too easy. If you watch the Troy Grady interview, you can learn that Wim is a monster on guitar but also that he has a point. You will lose the different moods that you can get from using different finger shapes to play the same tones.

You will lose the 6 string cowboy chords (C,A,G,E,D) and the ability to play traditional barre chords across all 6 strings. However, you can still play 4 note barre chords that have the same notes. You also lose the ability to play some standard blues and country licks that revolve around the major third at the B string, or at least make them more challenging. The Funk #49 riff from Joe Walsh/James Gang becomes hard to play.

The most significant single loss might be blues and country riffs based around the G and B open strings. It can be very difficult to duplicate that fingering in P4 tuning. If you decide to tune your top strings up from B E to C F you will be hard pressed to play these riffs in concert pitch with a band at all.

It can also be harder to play cover songs in a band situation. If you are playing a lot of AC/DC songs or country songs in G you should just tune your guitar to standard tuning unless you are trying to make a "bold artistic statement." Life does not need to be that hard.

You can work around most of these limitations and play most songs with some small modifications. You can play 4 string chords and also open voicings of just the root and third, root and fifth or root third and seventh.

# How to Tune in Fourths

## **Gear talk**

### **Tuners and Bridges**

If you want to try out different tunings on your guitar I strongly recommend locking tuners. They can make changing tunings easier and quicker and provide better tuning stability. They are an easy upgrade and make a lot of difference in the joy you can get from playing guitar. I have them on all of my guitars, even an acoustic and one with a Floyd Rose: triple locking system!

If you have a fixed bridge, you can just tune and play. If you have a floating tremolo, the tension does not change much, so you won't need to adjust your tremolo right away, but tuning will be more frustrating as your tremolo is trying to return to the tension it is set for. If you want to use perfect fourths tuning long-term, consider adjusting the tremolo spring tension. If you are unfamiliar with adjusting spring tension, many videos on YouTube show you how to do it.

### **String Gauge and Tension**

If you are just experimenting with this tuning, changing your string gauge is unnecessary. However, if you are committed to this tuning on a few guitars, you might want to change your string gauge to adjust the tension.

Whether you prefer tighter or looser strings is a matter of preference and your preferences may change. You can try a heavier string gauge to increase tension or a lighter gauge to decrease tension.

You may want to get lighter strings if you want to tune your B and E strings up to C and F and still have them feel the same.

Once you decide on P4 tuning you can just tune your strings wherever they are comfortable and play in any key. I prefer the string tension of a standard .009 set of strings with the lower 4 strings all tuned down a half

step on electric guitar. I have a fretless guitar that I string with .010 strings and it is tuned down to D G C F Bb Eb.

StringJoy makes awesome guitar strings and they allow you to build completely custom sets at no extra charge. I have 2 of their custom sets for guitars that I have in different tunings. Custom gauges make a big difference in tone and playability. I just discovered StringJoy a few months ago and I will be putting them on all of my guitars.

They have a string tension calculator that you can use to see how the tension changes when you tune down or up. Here is a link to their calculator:

<https://tension.stringjoy.com/>

Here is a link to their strings:

<https://stringjoy.com/>

For comparison on (Stringjoy's own) .010 gauge strings:

Standard tuning: 116.1 lbs tension

4 Strings Tuned Down: 108.4 lbs tension

2 Strings Tuned Up: 121.6 lbs tension

## **Tuning in Fourths (P4)**

To tune to perfect fourths, you can either tune your bottom four strings down a half step or your top two strings up a half step.

### **Tuning Four Strings Down (E flat)**

Ant Law tunes this way. I prefer this way and the examples in the book use this tuning.

I prefer tuning down for three reasons:

- String tension is looser

- You gain one note (the low Eb)
- You can still play many "standard" open string blues and country licks using the high B and E strings

You can think of tuning down as a "flattened tuning." It offers lower string tension and a slightly different tone. Additionally, keeping the high B and E strings the same makes it easier to play certain songs and riffs: If you tune up you lose these 2 notes.

If you are playing with others in standard tuning you will have to fret the notes of E at the first fret as if it is an F chord in standard tuning. Play the rest of your rock riffs "transposed" a fret higher than usual.

Tuning down looks like this:

Eb Ab Db Gb B E

To write this academically correctly to show the fourths intervals, you would write it as:

Eb Ab Db Gb Cb Fb (Cb and Fb are the same notes as B and E)

Another way to write the same tuning academically correctly to show the fourths is as a "d# tuning"

D# G# C# F# B E (same notes)

I usually refer to it like this: Eb Ab Db Gb B E because the letters all stay the same. Enough of the academics for now!

## **Tuning Two Strings Up**

Tom Quayle and Stanley Jordan tune this way. You keep your reference on the low E A D G strings but the open B and E notes become C and F.

Tune your B and high E strings a half step sharper than standard.

This tuning is:

E A D G B F

The remainder of this book focuses on interval relationships and not absolute pitches so as long as you tune in fourths you can use the diagrams.

# Comparing Standard Tuned CAGED to P4

## CAGED Standard Tuning in A Nutshell

The CAGED system in standard tuning is a powerful tool for beginner and intermediate guitarists. It is based on the five basic major triad chord shapes: C, A, G, E, and D. These chord shapes serve as the foundation for understanding the layout of the guitar neck and provide an easy way to visualize and remember where to place your fingers to produce different chords and scales.

While the CAGED system is excellent for learning chord shapes and basic scale patterns, it does not fully prepare players for more complex music theory concepts or advanced techniques. You memorize shapes and boxes instead of intervals.

As we have emphasized, P4 tuning is symmetrical and emphasizes interval relationships.

## Major Triad Chord Shapes

CAGED is named for the C A G E D major triad chord shapes.

These shapes start on the root and have two variations:

- ROOT - THIRD - FIFTH like a G or C chord that go down the neck
- ROOT - FIFTH - ROOT - THIRD like the E A and D major chords that go "up" toward the bridge

## P4 Replaces the five chord shapes of CAGED with two shapes

The P4 chord shapes are the same as you would play on the bottom 4 strings of standard tuning except you can transpose them by moving to another string.

5 CAGED Shapes	Structure	Direction	P4: 2 4-note Shapes
G, C	Root-Third-Fifth	Root is higher: notes are "down" toward the nut	Root-Third-Fifth-(Root)
E, A, D	Root-Fifth-Root-Third	Root is lower: Notes are "up" toward the bridge	Root-Fifth-Root-Third

Major Triad Across the Fretboard  
 CAGED tuning: 5 shapes, 5 or 6 notes per chord ●  
 P4 Tuning 2 shapes, 4 notes per chord ●

**CAGED E shape: Root-Fifth-Root-Third**

**CAGED A Shape: Root-Fifth-Root-Third**

**CAGED D Shape: Root-Fifth-Root-Third**

**P4 Root-Fifth-Root-Third**

**P4 Root-Fifth-Root-Third**

**P4 Root-Fifth-Root-Third**

**CAGED G shape: Root-Third-Fifth-Root**

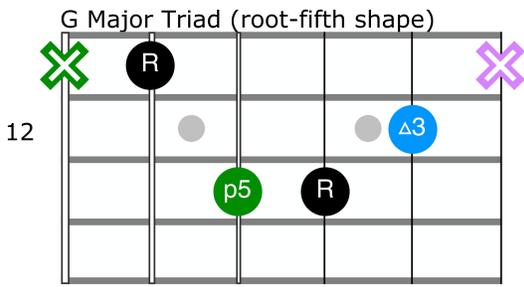
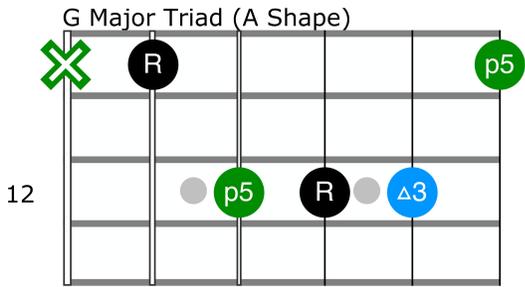
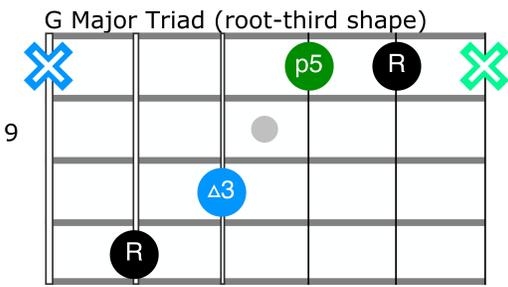
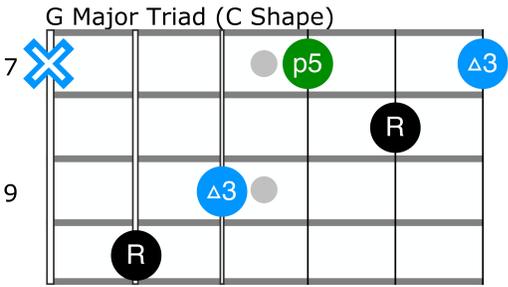
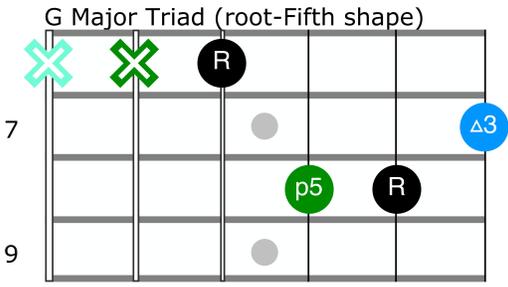
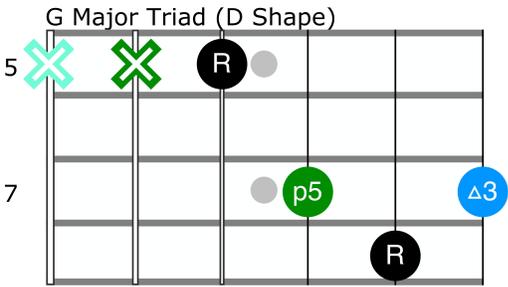
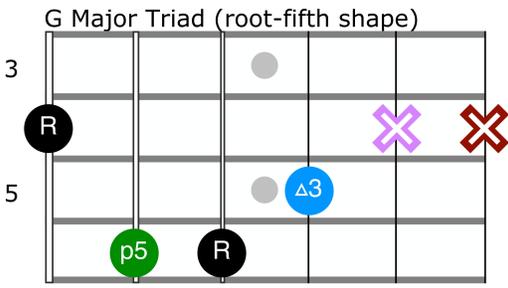
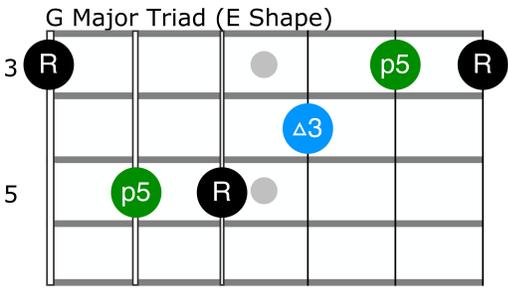
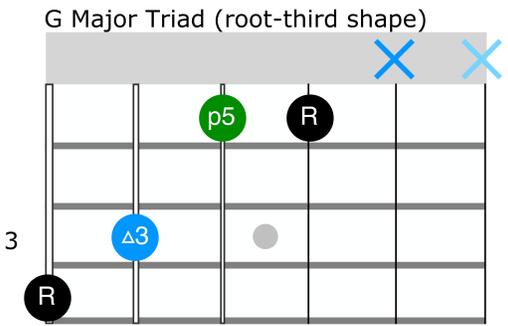
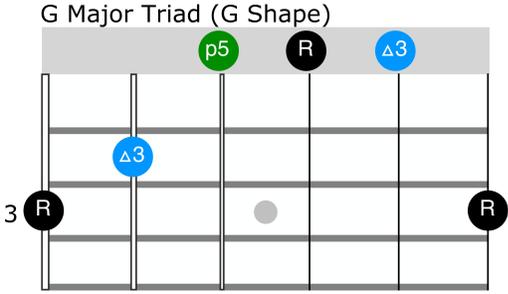
**CAGED C shape: Root-Third-Fifth-Root**

**P4 Root-Third-Fifth**

**P4 Root-Third-Fifth**

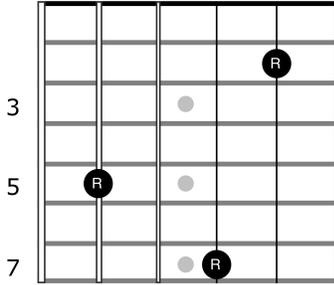
Standard tuning:  
 E A D G B E  
 5 shapes  
 CAGED System

Tuning: Bottom 4 strings down a half step from standard tuning:  
 P4 system: 2 shapes  
 D# G# C# F# B E  
 (Eb Ab Db Gb B E)

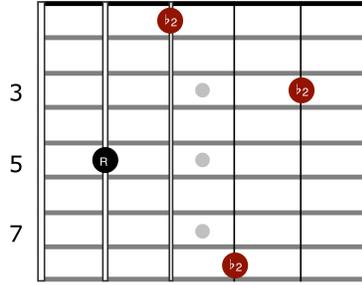


# Intervals

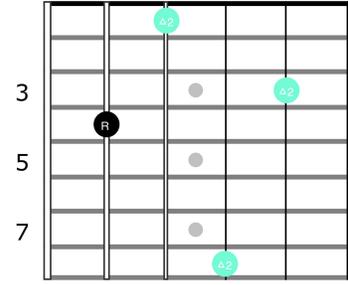
Octaves



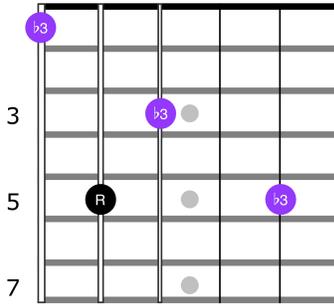
Minor Seconds



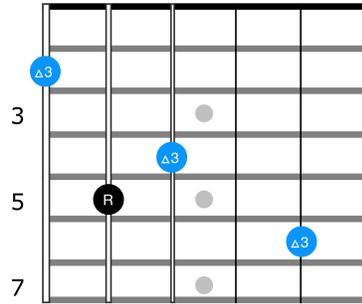
Major Seconds



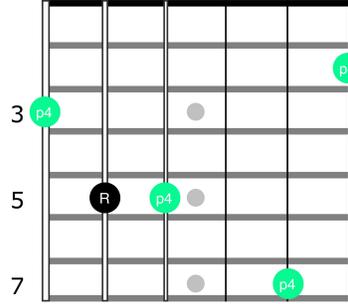
Minor Thirds



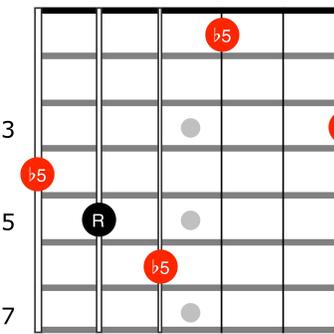
Major Thirds



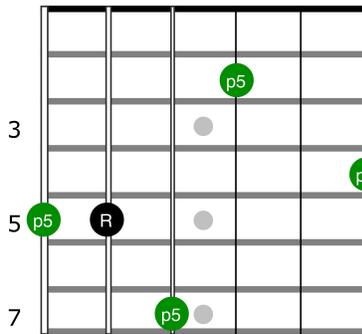
Perfect Fourths



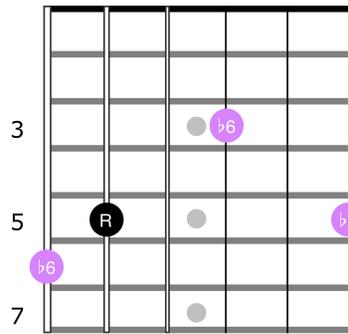
Tritone/Dim 5



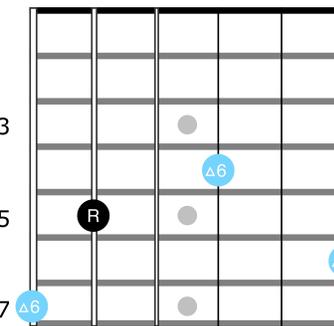
Fifths



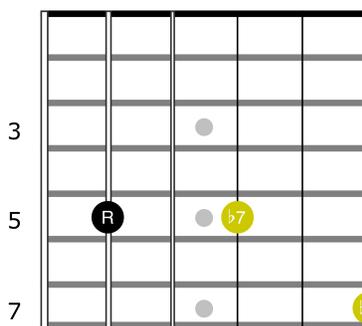
Minor Sixths



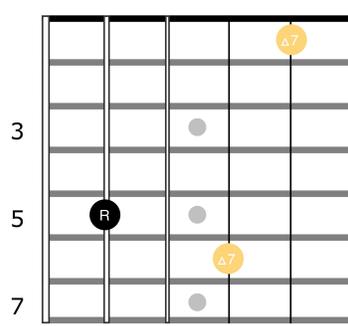
Major Sixths



Minor Sevenths

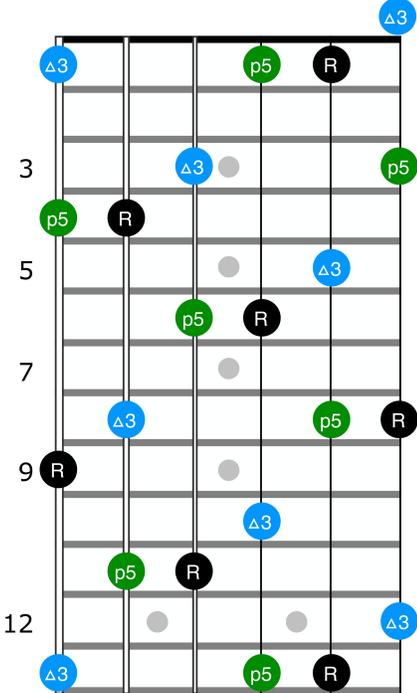


Major Sevenths

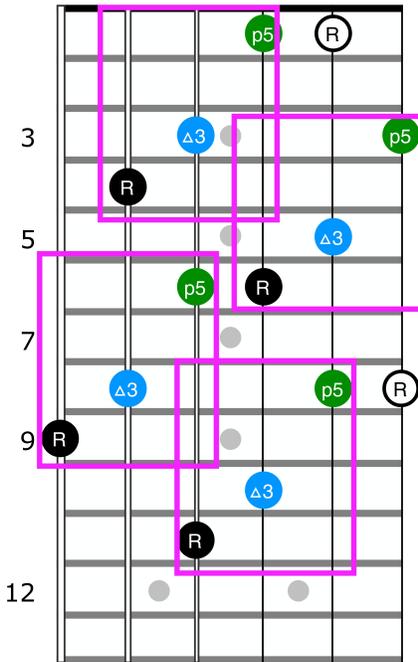


Major Triad P4 tuning: 3 shapes

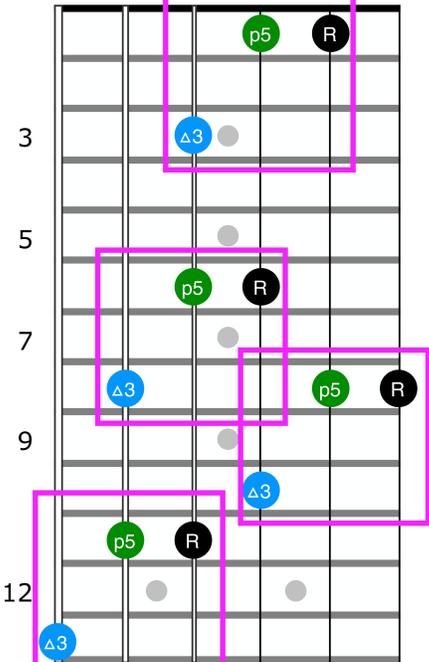
C Major Triad



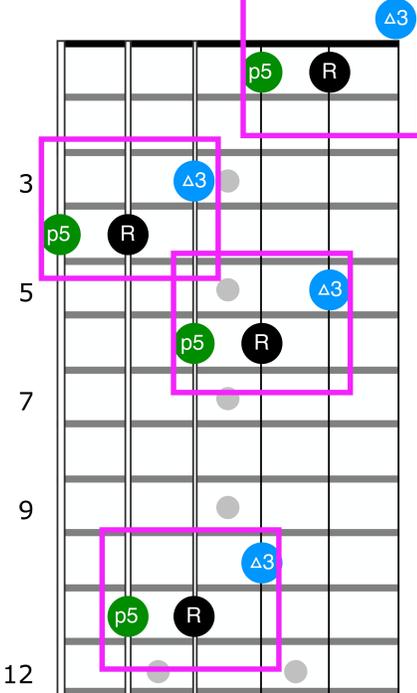
C Major Triad: root position



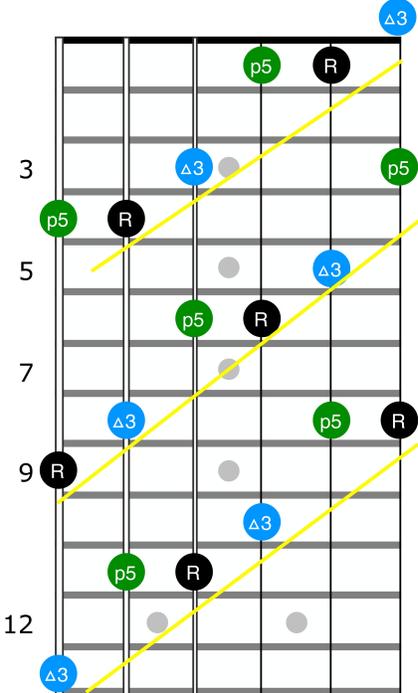
C Major Triad: first inversion (from the third)



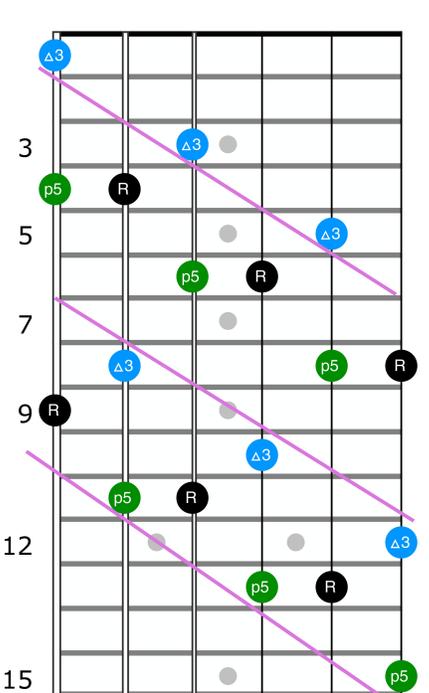
C Major Triad: second inversion (from the fifth)



C Major Triad: symmetry down the neck: 2 octaves

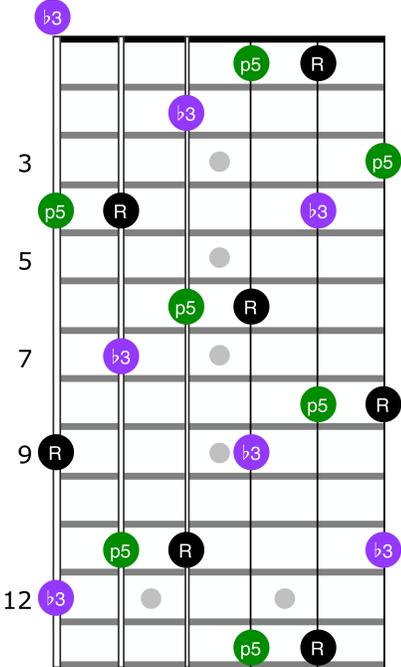


C Major Triad: Symmetry up the neck: 2 1/2 octaves

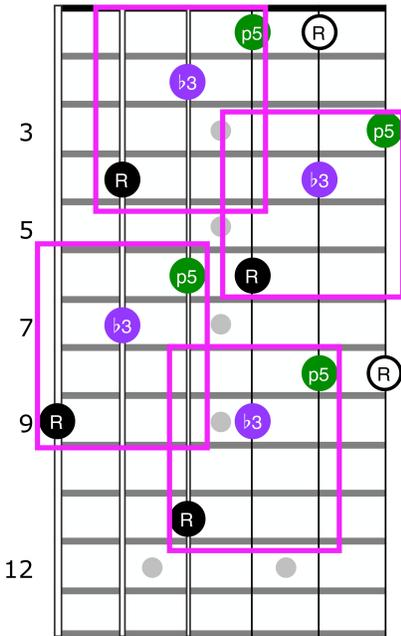


Minor Triad P4 tuning: 3 shapes

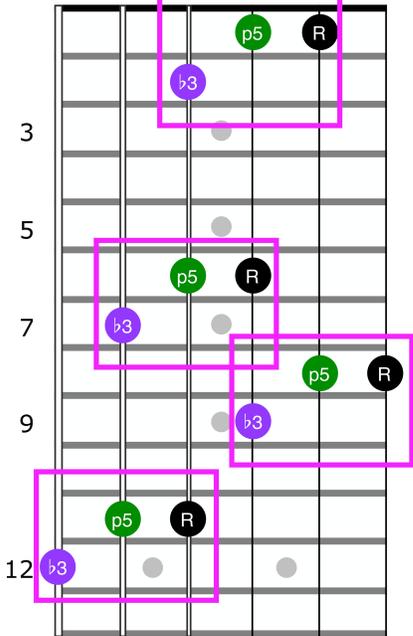
C Minor Triad



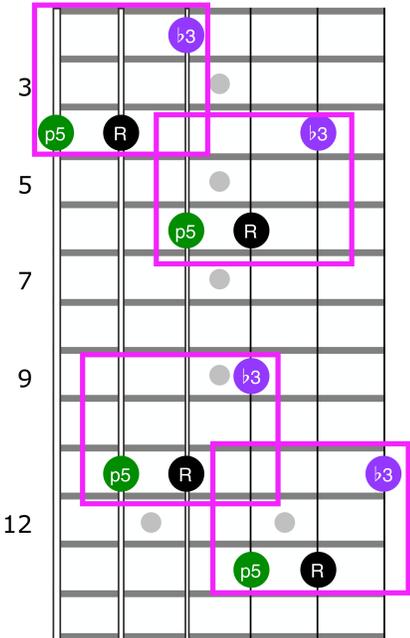
C Minor Triad: root position



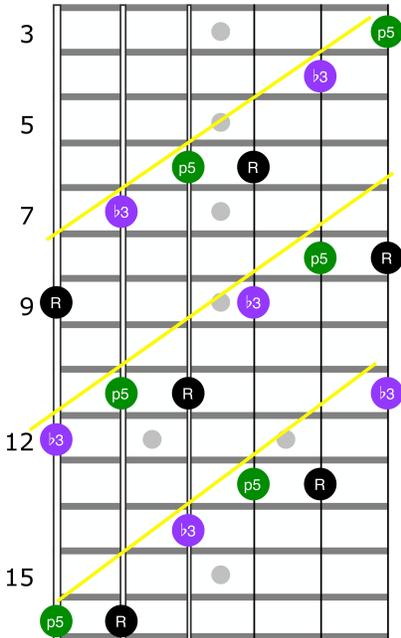
C Minor Triad: first inversion (from the third)



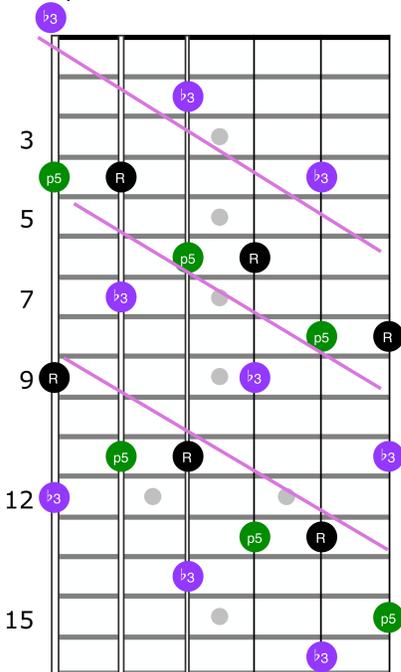
C Minor Triad: second inversion (from the fifth)



C Minor Triad: symmetry down the neck: 2 octaves



C Minor Triad: Symmetry up the neck: 2 1/2 octaves





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