

DADGAD – the guitarists guide to creating big sounds in a small group

Have you ever played in a small music team or led worship at a house group and felt your acoustic guitar just didn't fill out the sound as much as you wanted?

The way we get big open ringing sounds from guitars is by using as many open (non-fretted) strings as possible. So whilst a bar chord is a great way to get exactly the chord you want they can sometimes sound a bit small and constricted.

One way to use as many open strings as possible is to work with an alternative tuning. The one we shall look at today is called DADGAD because the strings are re-tuned from EADGBE to DADGAD. To do this tune your 6th (lowest) string down one tone from E to D. A quick way to do this is make it match the sound of the 4th (D) string but an octave lower. Then tune the second B string down one tone to A, or match it to the 5th (A) string, again an octave apart. Finally tune the 1st or highest E string down a tone to D. This is best matched to the 4th (D) string. You are now tuned in DADGAD!

There are lots and lots of chord shapes you can use in DADGAD but to keep things simple we are going to explore just two chord shapes that will allow you to play every chord in the key of D. There are loads of worship songs written in D and I have used DADGAD in conjunction with a capo to transpose to other keys and play entire worship sets at a house group.

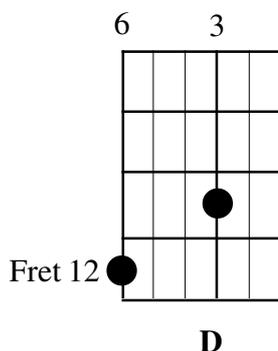
The chords in the Key of D look like this:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D	Em	F#m	G	A	Bm	C#m (actually C# ½ dim but don't worry about it !)

In this article I'm going to show you one shape that covers all the major chords - D (chord 1) G (4) and A (5). The second shape will cover all the minor chords of Em, F#m, Bm and C#m.

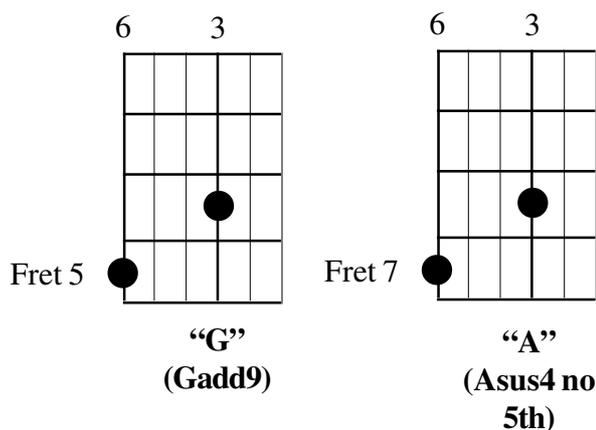
The trick is our fretting fingers are only going to touch string 6 (lowest) and 3 (the G string).

Let's start by playing the D chord.

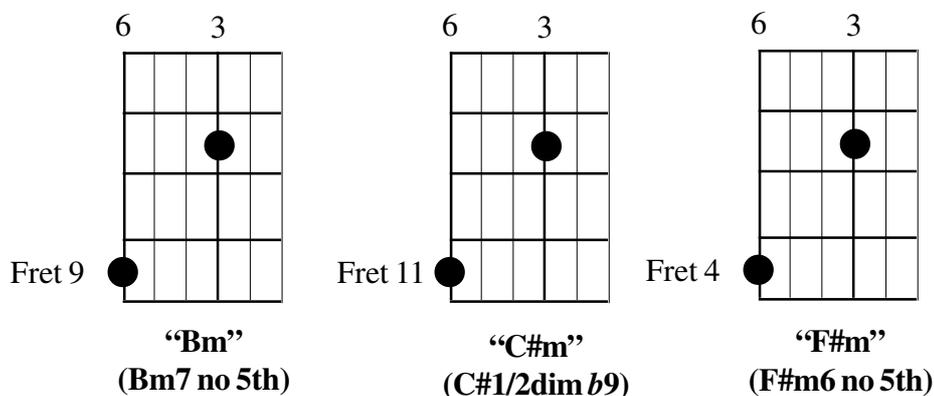


Put your middle finger on string 6 fret 12 (on the double dot if your guitar has fret markers). Next, put your index finger string 3 fret 11 and play all the strings. Big sound hey?

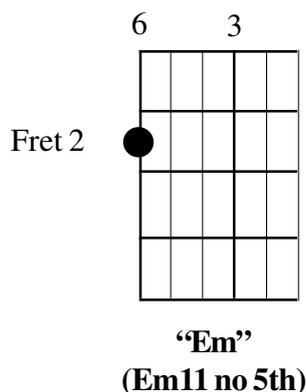
This same shape will work for the chords of G and A so for the G chord slide that whole shape down so your middle finger is on fret 5 and your index finger is on fret 4. Again play all the strings. Lastly, for the A chord, move that whole shape up the neck towards the sound hole two frets (frets 6 and 7).



For the minor chords, lets start with Bm. Place your ring (3rd) finger again on string 6 but now at fret 9. Then, place your index on string 3, fret 7 and play all the strings. You'll notice that this minor chord shape looks slightly different to the major shape as your fingers are two frets apart.



Again this shape works over all the minor chords in D. So for C#m move your ring finger up to string 6 fret 11 and make sure your index finger follows so it plays string 3 two frets down (fret 9). For F#m move your ring finger to string 6 fret 4 and for Em move it to fret 2. At this point you will notice your index finger on string 3 has moved off the end of the fretboard. So Em is just played with your ring finger.



But these chords sound slightly different to regular chords!

Yes, because we using the open strings of D and A as drone sounds, it will slightly change the make up and name of some of the chords. For instance the A chord I've shown you would strictly be called Asus4 (no 5th) but the reason this works is because we are using the 1st (D) and 5th (A) notes of the **KEY** (NOT the chord) as drones and in any key you can pretty much always play the 1st and 5th and they will fit with what the instruments are doing. Assuming the other musicians are playing what they are supposed to!

What about playing in other keys?

One option is to use one guitar for the many worship songs written in the key of D and a second instrument for songs in other keys. If you don't have that luxury then another option is to use a capo. There are lots of songs written in E. So, for the key of E put a capo on fret 2 and transpose all your shapes up the neck by two frets. For the key of F put the capo on fret 3 and transpose up. Finally for G put the capo on fret 5. At this point you will probably find that you are beginning to run out of frets! As I mentioned at the top of this article there are lots of shapes you can use to play chords in DADGAD tuning and far more than we have time to look at here. So, a quick browse on the internet will dig up a whole host of interesting chord shapes that will allow you to play all the necessary chords close to the capo. However I hope that just by trying these few shapes it will give you an appetite to use this tuning to create some nice big lush sounds on your guitar in a worship time.



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