

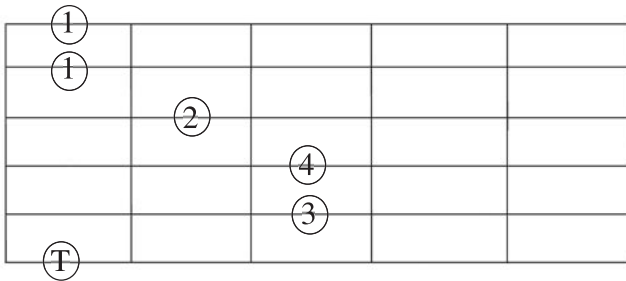
How to Play Traditional Backup Guitar in Any Key Without a Capo the Hillbilly Way

by Phil Williams

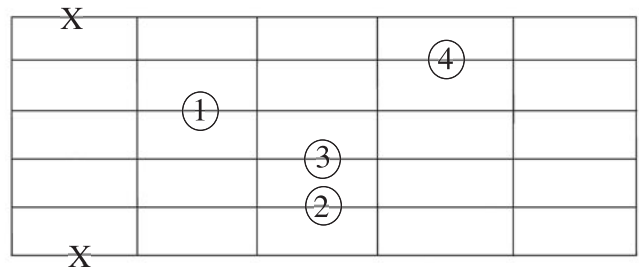
I learned a simple system of playing backup chords in any key without a capo from my father, who came from a rural Kentucky family. This system is based on chord formations not generally found in guitar instruction books, and is a method not taught by any self-respecting guitar teacher. However, it has gotten me through many jam sessions and public performances, and will do the same for you.

The system is based on only four chord formations: F, C7, D, and a barred A, with a couple 7th chord formations and some other fingers added as needed. Here are the chord formations:

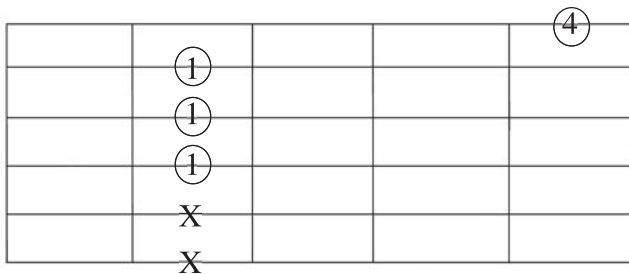
F Chord Formation - Formation 1



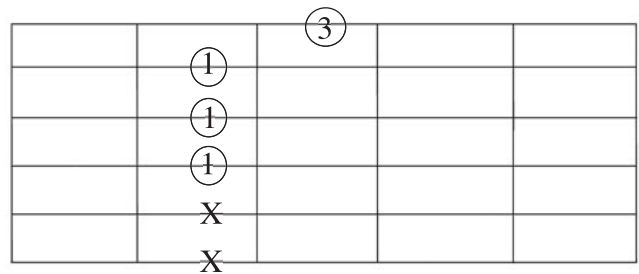
F7 Chord Formation - Formation 1A



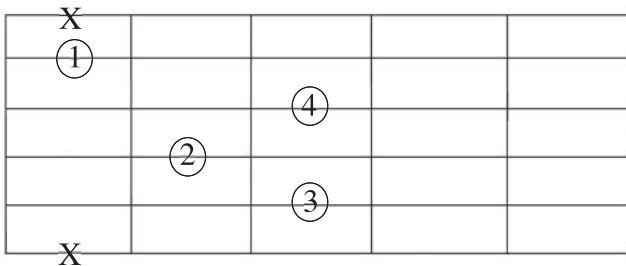
A Chord Formation - Formation 2



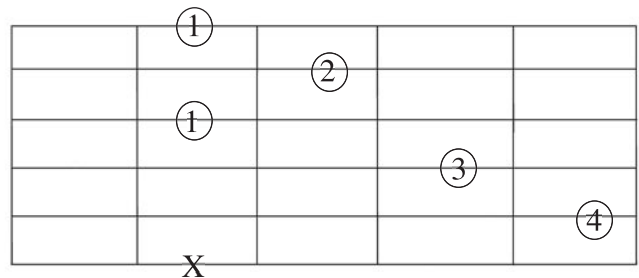
A7 Chord Formation - Formation 2A



C7 Chord Formation - Formation 3



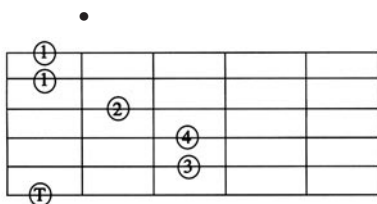
D Chord Formation - Formation 4



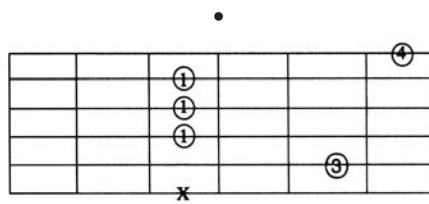
Note: an "X" on a string indicates that it is not sounded. The "thumb over" on the sixth string on the F formation chord is optional. If you do not use the thumb, do not sound the 6th string. The fingers are numbered: index - 1, middle - 2; ring - 3, little - 4, thumb - T. The top string in the diagram is the high E, the next down the B, third string down the G, fourth the D, fifth the A, and bottom, the low E.

Here are the rules. I am using chord numbers to refer to the chord sequence, as follows: The chord of the key being played in (the tonic) is I; the “sub-dominant” chord of that key is IV; and the “dominant” chord of that key is V. All these chord formations are movable. Formations 1, 2, and 3 can be used as I chords (the chord of the key in which you are playing) anywhere on the fingerboard where it will make the I chord desired. If a Formation 1 chord is played with the 1 finger fretting the 1st fret, it makes a I chord in the key of F. If a Formation 2 chord is played with the 1 finger fretting the 2nd fret, it makes a I chord in the key of A. If a Formation 3 chord is played with the 1 finger fretting the 2nd fret, it makes a D chord. To determine other keys playable using a Formation as a I chord, simply count frets up the fingerboard for that formation. Formations 1A and 2A make a “7th” chord out of the Formation 1 and 2 chords, respectively. For example, the “F” formation played starting with the lowest notes on the first fret is an F, move it up one fret and it is an F#, another fret and it is a G. The same applies for the other chord formations. Following are diagrams of the I, IV, and V chords for keys in which the I chord is the Formation 1, 2, or 3 chord starting with the 1 finger of the I chord at the fret marked “•” in each example, with the IV and V chords placed as shown by the “•” mark on the fret on which the I chord is made. The tonic or 1 note(s) in each chord formation is indicated by “♭”.

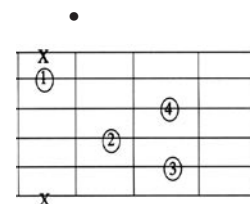
Formation 1 = I Chord



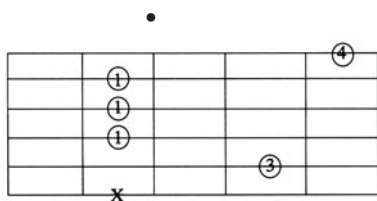
Formation 2 = IV Chord



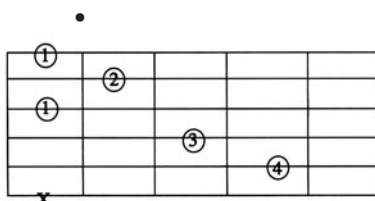
Formation 4 = V Chord



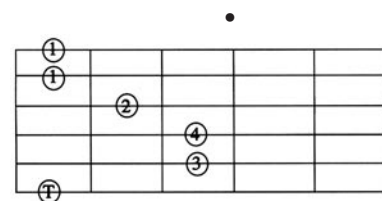
Formation 2 = I Chord



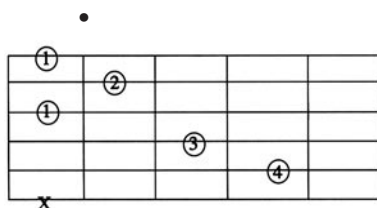
Formation 3 = IV Chord



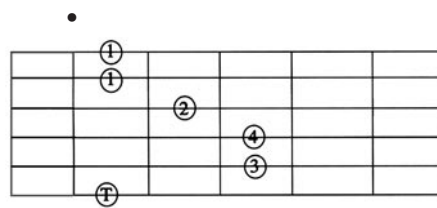
Formation 1 = V Chord



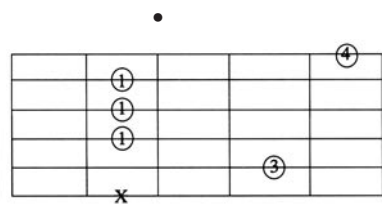
Formation 3 = I Chord



Formation I - IV Chord



Formation 2 = V Chord



A circle of fifths run can be made automatically by finding the starting chord of the sequence in an F Formation up the neck. The next chord in the sequence will be the C7 Formation two frets down the neck. The next chord will be the F Formation in the same place as the C7; and, so on down the fingerboard until the sequence resolves with the I chord of the key being played in. This sequence can also be started with the C7 Formation, if it is the appropriate place to start the particular sequence.

That's it. Have fun!