

# 12 Bar Blues Chords & Scales for Guitar

The 12 bar blues is a 12 bar long chord progression that solo blues musicians can easily improvise over the top of because the chord progression is familiar to them. This chord progression is based around the most important chords in a key I, IV & V (1, 4 & 5) and is repeated over and over for the duration of the piece. It is usually in 4/4 (4 crotchet beats per bar) and uses 1 chord per bar with 12 bars in total - thus the 12 bar blues.

The 12 bar blues progression is as follows:

I	I	I	I
IV	IV	I	I
V	IV	I	V

It is very common in blues music to add 7ths to the major chords giving that classic blues sound. These are constructed of a major triad (as in the table below) and then adding a minor 7th on the top (10 semitones above the root forming dominant 7th chords). For example in C Major this would be:


Chord I	C	E	G	B $\flat$
Chord IV	F	A	C	E $\flat$
Chord V	G	B	D	F

Try playing the 12 bar blues progression in C with just the major triads:


Musical notation for the 12 bar blues progression in C major using only major triads. The notation is in 4/4 time and consists of three staves. The first staff contains four measures of C (chord I). The second staff contains two measures of F (chord IV), two measures of C (chord I), and two measures of C (chord I). The third staff contains two measures of G (chord V), two measures of F (chord IV), two measures of C (chord I), and two measures of G (chord V). Each measure is represented by a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a staff with four diagonal slashes indicating the chord.

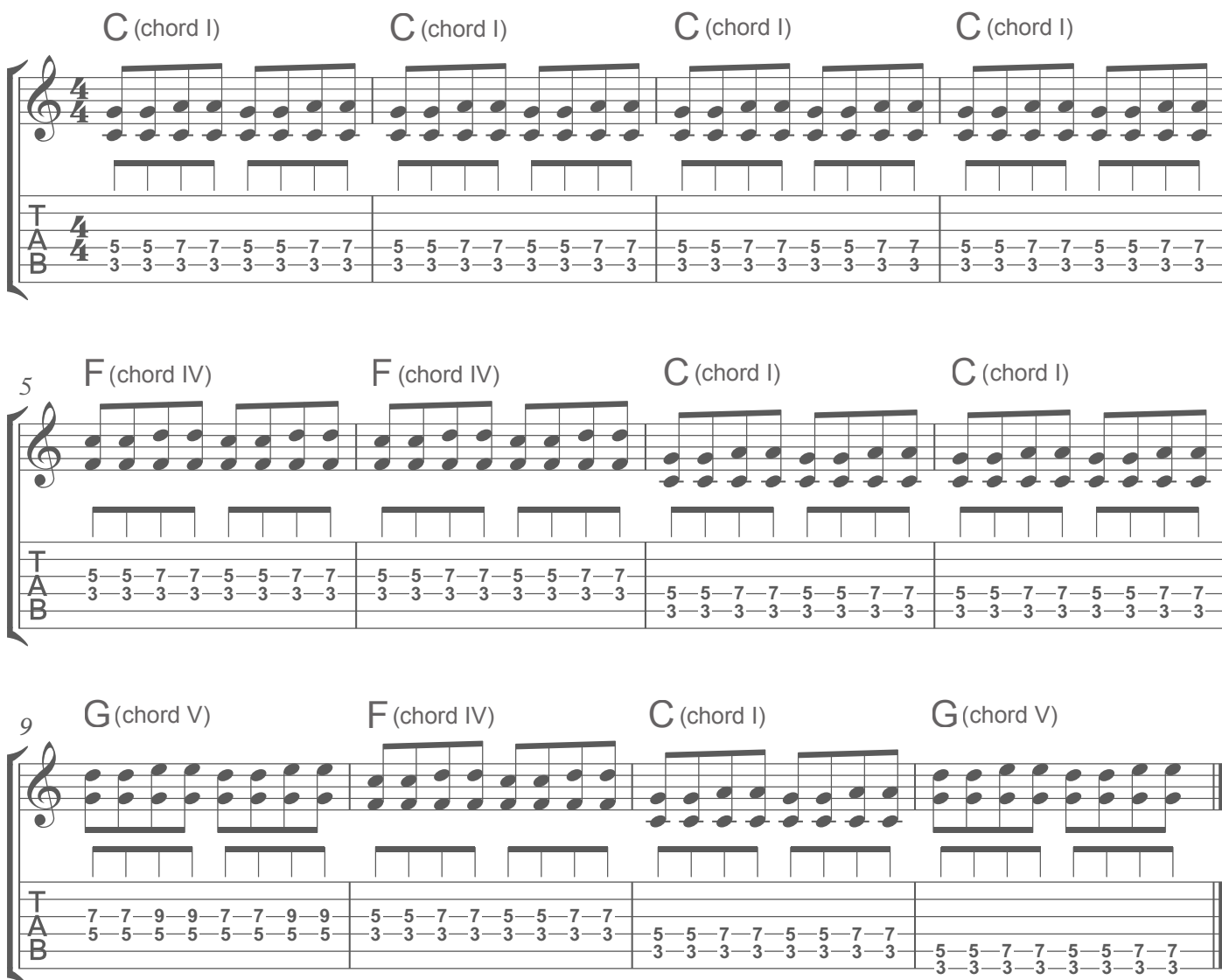
Now try playing it in the same key, but with the 7th chords so that you can hear the difference:

Musical notation for the 12 bar blues progression in C major using dominant 7th chords. The notation is in 4/4 time and consists of three staves. The first staff contains four measures of C<sup>7</sup> (chord I<sup>7</sup>). The second staff contains two measures of F<sup>7</sup> (chord IV<sup>7</sup>), two measures of C<sup>7</sup> (chord I<sup>7</sup>), and two measures of C<sup>7</sup> (chord I<sup>7</sup>). The third staff contains two measures of G<sup>7</sup> (chord V<sup>7</sup>), two measures of F<sup>7</sup> (chord IV<sup>7</sup>), two measures of C<sup>7</sup> (chord I<sup>7</sup>), and two measures of G<sup>7</sup> (chord V<sup>7</sup>). Each measure is represented by a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a staff with four diagonal slashes indicating the chord.

In blues music you will hear a lot of syncopation (off beat) and swing rhythms. With swing rhythms you will have even note values (for example a group of quavers). You elongate the first note and then slightly accent the second (almost like a dotted rhythm, but not quite as strict or straight). It is like you are playing triplets (squeezing 3 beats in to the time of 2) i.e.  You will see the marking for 'swing' (sometimes along with the triplet equation), 'swing 8ths', or 'swung' or similar instructions at the start of the piece to indicate this. A traditional way to accompany a 12 bar blues is to use these swing rhythms (in this case swing 8ths) with alternating intervals of 5ths to 6ths which is called a 'shuffle'.

Here is an example in C...why don't you have a go:

Swing   
 (Repeat 12 bars as long as required)



**System 1: C (chord I)**

T												
A												
B	5	5	7	7	5	5	7	7	5	5	7	7
	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3

**System 2: F (chord IV) | F (chord IV) | C (chord I) | C (chord I)**


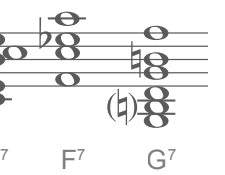
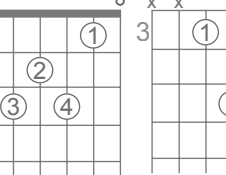
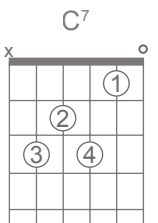
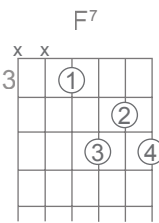
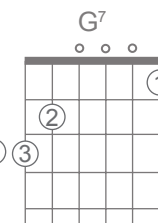
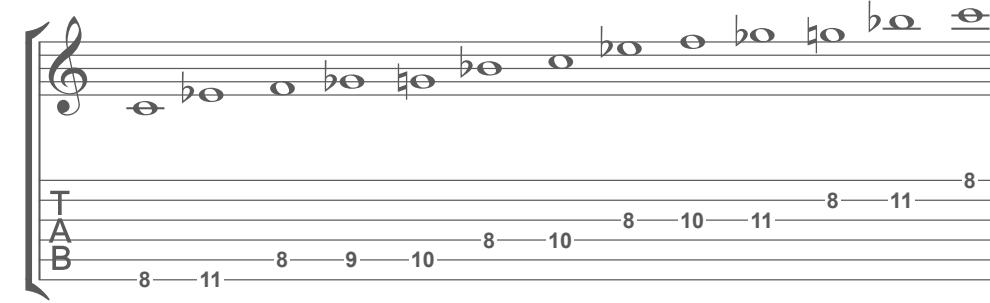

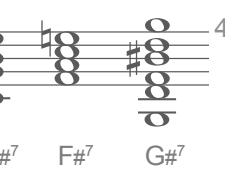
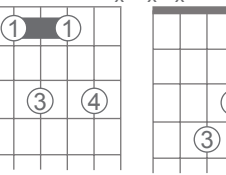
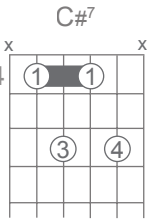
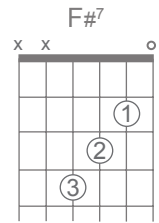
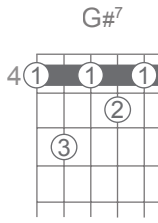
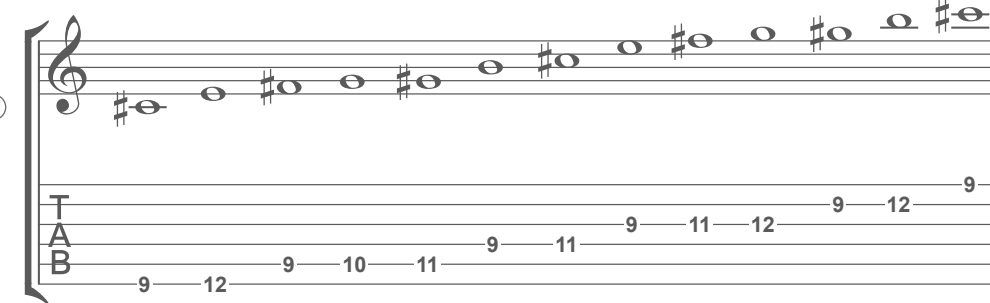

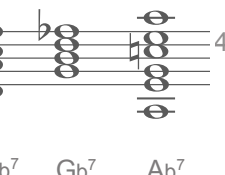
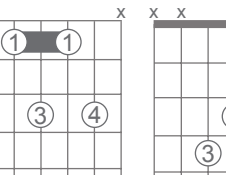
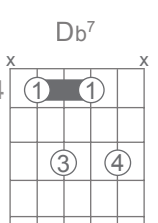
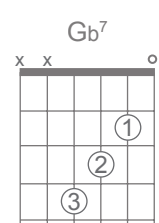
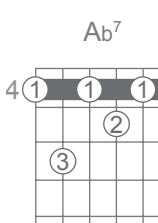
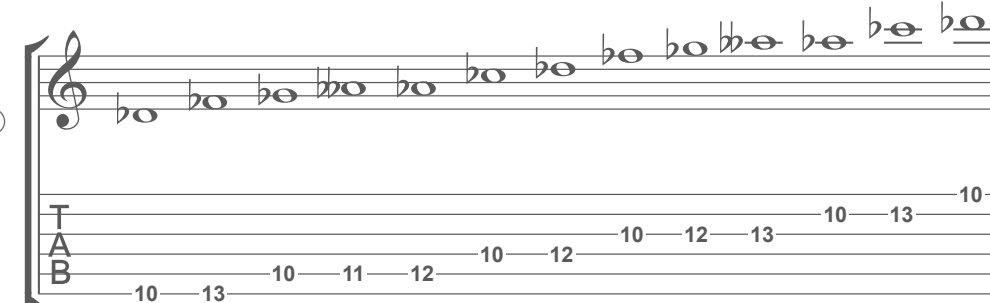
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A	5	5	7	7	5	5	7	7	5	5	7	7
B	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3

**System 3: G (chord V) | F (chord IV) | C (chord I) | G (chord V)**



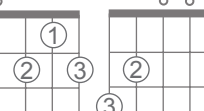
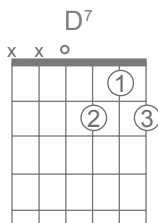
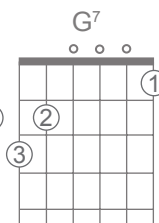
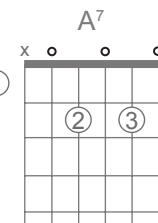
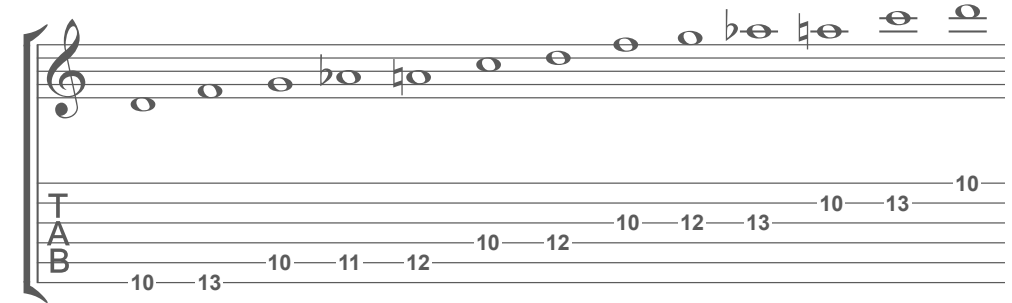


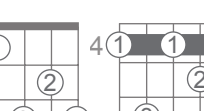
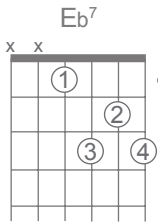
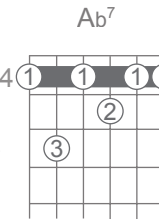
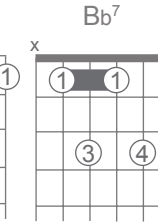
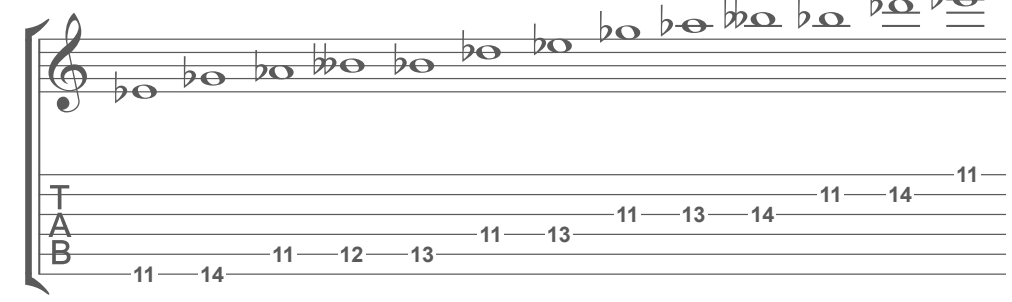


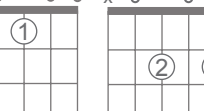
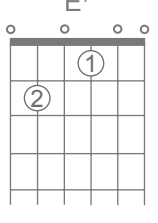
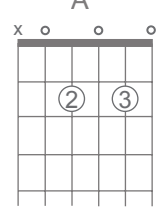
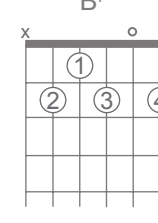
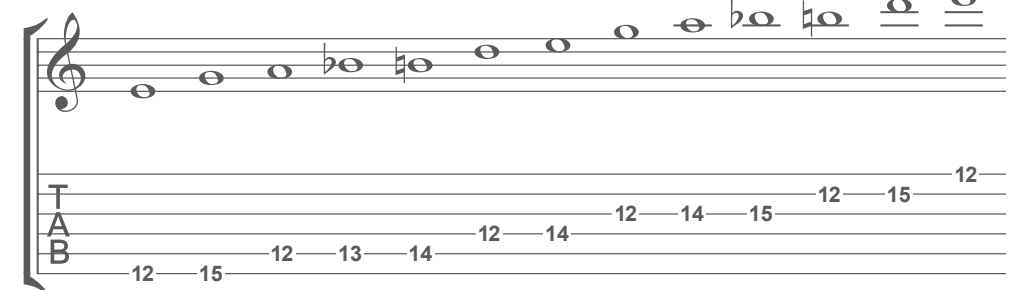
T												
A	7	7	9	9	7	7	9	9	5	5	7	7
B	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	3	3	3	3

Now you have the basic 12 bar blues progression under your belt why don't you try having a go at improvising over the top. For this you would use the blues scale. The blues scale is very similar to the minor pentatonic scale, but with an additional lowered 5th note (lowered by half a step/semitone), or blues note. To see the blues chord progressions with their relevant blues scales in every key please see the the chart on the next page.

# 12 Bar Blues Chords & Scales Chart for Guitar

Chords	I <sup>7</sup>	IV <sup>7</sup>	V <sup>7</sup>	I <sup>7</sup>	IV <sup>7</sup>	V <sup>7</sup>	Blues Scale
<b>C</b>	 C <sup>7</sup>	 F <sup>7</sup>	 G <sup>7</sup>	 C <sup>7</sup>	 F <sup>7</sup>	 G <sup>7</sup>	
<b>C#</b>	 C <sup>#7</sup>	 F <sup>#7</sup>	 G <sup>#7</sup>	 C <sup>#7</sup>	 F <sup>#7</sup>	 G <sup>#7</sup>	
<b>D<sub>b</sub></b>	 D <sub>b</sub> <sup>7</sup>	 G <sub>b</sub> <sup>7</sup>	 A <sub>b</sub> <sup>7</sup>	 D <sub>b</sub> <sup>7</sup>	 G <sub>b</sub> <sup>7</sup>	 A <sub>b</sub> <sup>7</sup>	

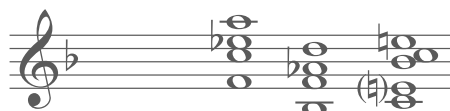
# 12 Bar Blues Chords & Scales Chart for Guitar

Chords	I <sup>7</sup>	IV <sup>7</sup>	V <sup>7</sup>	I <sup>7</sup>	IV <sup>7</sup>	V <sup>7</sup>	Blues Scale
<b>D</b>	 D <sup>7</sup>	 G <sup>7</sup>	 A <sup>7</sup>				
<b>E<sub>b</sub></b>	 E <sub>b</sub> <sup>7</sup>	 A <sub>b</sub> <sup>7</sup>	 B <sub>b</sub> <sup>7</sup>				
<b>E</b>	 E <sup>7</sup>	 A <sup>7</sup>	 B <sup>7</sup>				

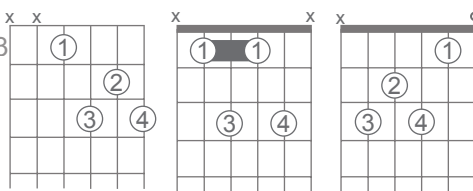

# 12 Bar Blues Chords & Scales Chart for Guitar

Chords I<sup>7</sup> IV<sup>7</sup> V<sup>7</sup> I<sup>7</sup> IV<sup>7</sup> V<sup>7</sup> Blues Scale

**F**




F<sup>7</sup> Bb<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

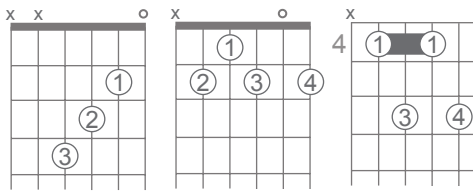




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**F#**

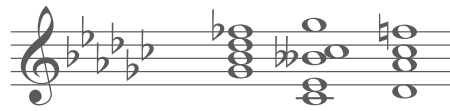


F#<sup>7</sup> B<sup>7</sup> C#<sup>7</sup>

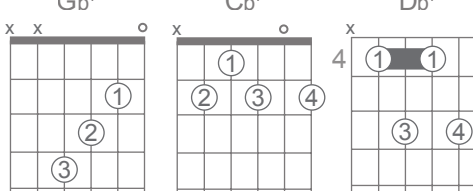




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**Gb**



Gb<sup>7</sup> Cb<sup>7</sup> Db<sup>7</sup>


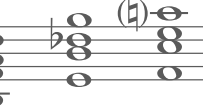
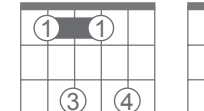
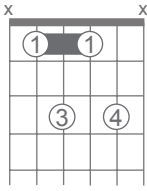
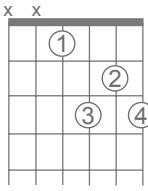
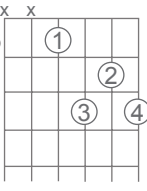
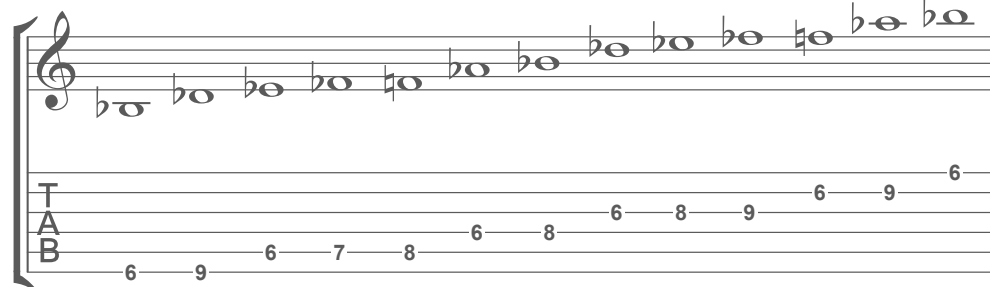
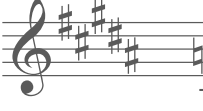
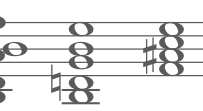
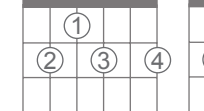
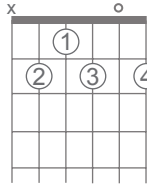
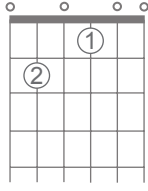
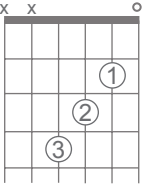
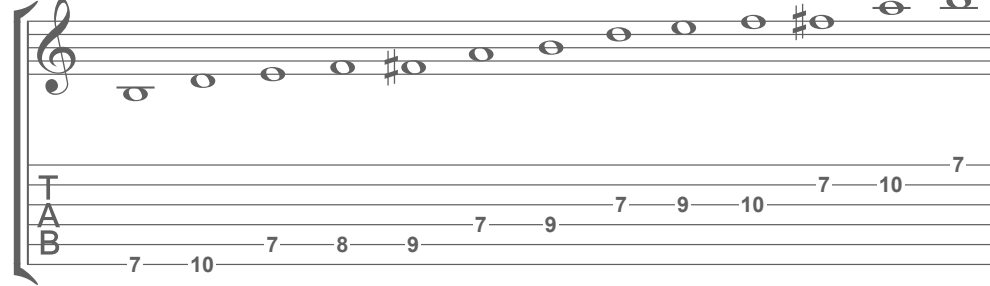


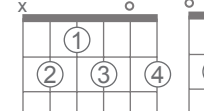
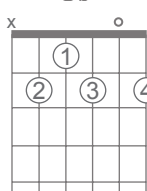
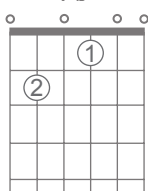
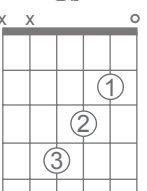



TAB: 2-5 2-3-4 2-4 2-4-5 2-5 2

# 12 Bar Blues Chords & Scales Chart for Guitar

Chords	I <sup>7</sup>	IV <sup>7</sup>	V <sup>7</sup>	I <sup>7</sup>	IV <sup>7</sup>	V <sup>7</sup>	Blues Scale
<b>G</b>							
<b>A<sub>b</sub></b>							
<b>A</b>							

# 12 Bar Blues Chords & Scales Chart for Guitar

Chords	I <sup>7</sup>	IV <sup>7</sup>	V <sup>7</sup>	I <sup>7</sup>	IV <sup>7</sup>	V <sup>7</sup>	Blues Scale
<b>B<sub>b</sub></b>	 B <sub>b</sub> <sup>7</sup>	 E <sub>b</sub> <sup>7</sup>	 F <sup>7</sup>	 B <sub>b</sub> <sup>7</sup>	 E <sub>b</sub> <sup>7</sup>	 F <sup>7</sup>	
<b>B</b>	 B <sup>7</sup>	 E <sup>7</sup>	 F <sup>#7</sup>	 B <sup>7</sup>	 E <sup>7</sup>	 F <sup>#7</sup>	
<b>C<sub>b</sub></b>	 C <sub>b</sub> <sup>7</sup>	 F <sub>b</sub> <sup>7</sup>	 G <sub>b</sub> <sup>7</sup>	 C <sub>b</sub> <sup>7</sup>	 F <sub>b</sub> <sup>7</sup>	 G <sub>b</sub> <sup>7</sup>	