

Major and Minor Pentatonic scales

In this Lead Work column I am going to look at the major and minor pentatonic scale, the pentatonic scales modes, the construction of both scales and using each scales make up to explore new pentatonic scales.

I am going to look at the C Major pentatonic scale and its fifth mode A Minor pentatonic. The first example shows the five modes of C Major pentatonic.

C Maj Pent D Suspended E Man Gong G Ritusen A Min Pent

1 2 3 5 6 1 2 4 5 b7 1 b3 4 b6 b7 1 2 4 5 6 1 b3 4 5 b7

The second example is a numerical pattern (scale degrees), played using each of the five modes over a diatonic chord from each root note. The pattern is in constant 1/8th notes:

1 - 4 - 3 - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 1+ (the plus refers to playing the tonic one octave above the previously played tonic)

C Maj Dmin7 Emin7 G7sus Amin7

This example will allow you to hear the sound each pentatonic has against its tonic tonality. These modes are now possible scale choices you can make when improvising.

Both the Major and Minor pentatonic scales are common in most styles of music and great scales to use on guitar for improvising but there are also other pentatonic scales to explore. One-way to uncover other pentatonic scale options is to analyze the make up of the Major and Minor pentatonic scale and apply to other heptatonic (seven note) scales. So if we look at the Major pentatonic scale as an Ionian scale with an omitted fourth and seventh degree and apply this to the remaining modes from C Major, we get the following.

Dm7 Em7 Fmaj7 G7 Am7 Bbm7b5

1 2 b3 b5 6 1 b2 b3 5 b6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5 1 1 2 b3 5 b6 1 b2 b3 b5 b6

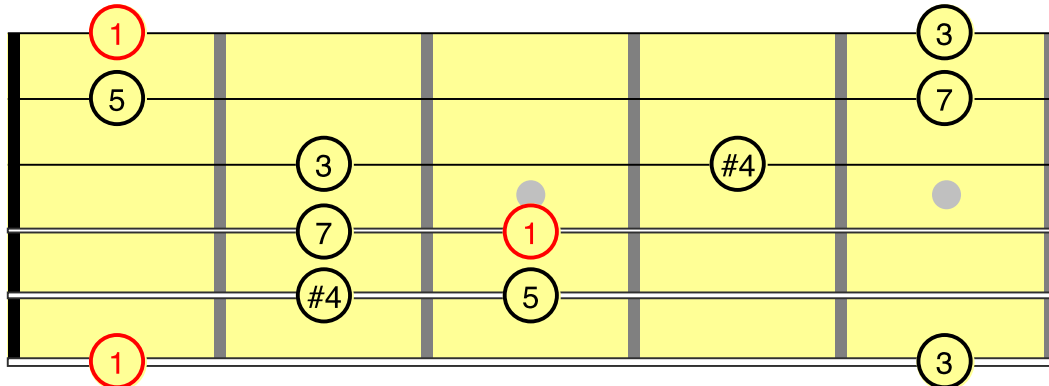
Now the same idea applied to the Minor pentatonic. If we look at it as being an Aeolian scale with an omitted second and sixth degree we get the following.

Bbm7b5 Cmaj7 Dm7 Em7 Fmaj7 G7

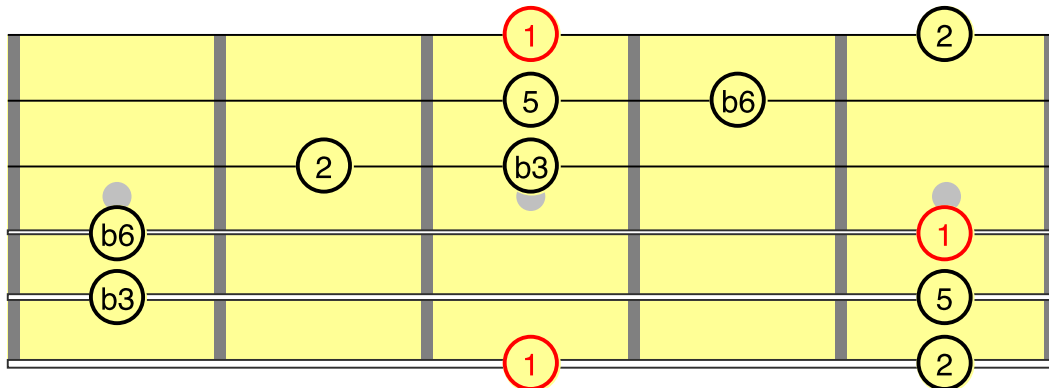
1 b3 4 b5 b7 1 3 4 5 7 1 b3 4 5 b7 1 b3 4 5 b7 1 3 #4 5 7 1 3 4 5 b7

You will notice in doing this, of certain notes we have repeated the exact make up of both Major and Minor pentatonic scales. In the Major form when a mode has a Major triad (Ionian, Lydian, Mixolydian) it will be the Major pentatonic and in the Minor form when a mode has the minor triad (Dorian, Phrygian, Aeolian) it will be a Minor pentatonic. We have also created some new pentatonic scales that you can explore in a modal setting. Particularly useful are the Lydian mode using the Minor form and the Aeolian & Dorian modes using the Major form.

F Lydian (Minor pentatonic form)



A Aeolian (Major pentatonic form)



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Always use two notes per string when you are learning these new pentatonic scales, you can apply any digital patterns you already know to each scale.