

country songs to learn on guitar

Country Songs to Learn on Guitar: Your Ultimate Beginner's Guide

Country songs to learn on guitar offer a fantastic entry point for aspiring musicians, blending relatable storytelling with accessible chord progressions. Whether you're drawn to the heartfelt ballads, foot-stomping anthems, or classic cowboy tunes, mastering a few country hits can build your confidence and expand your musical repertoire. This comprehensive guide will equip you with everything you need to start your journey, from identifying easy-to-learn songs to understanding essential guitar techniques. We'll delve into iconic tracks, common chord shapes, and practical advice for picking up your first country guitar solos and melodies. Get ready to strum your way through the heart of country music, transforming your guitar playing one song at a time.

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Why Learn Country Songs on Guitar?

Learning country songs on guitar provides a rewarding and accessible path into playing music. The genre is rich with songs that utilize a limited set of fundamental chords, making them ideal for beginners. Beyond the technical aspects, country music often tells compelling stories, allowing players to connect with the emotional core of the music as they learn. This connection can be a powerful motivator, driving consistent practice and improvement. Furthermore, the ubiquity of country music means that learning these songs opens doors to playing with others, whether at campfires, open mic nights, or jam sessions. The skills developed, such as rhythm, chord changes, and basic picking patterns, are transferable to many other musical genres, making it a

solid foundation for any aspiring guitarist. The sheer joy of playing familiar melodies and the sense of accomplishment that comes with mastering a new song are invaluable aspects of the learning process.

The appeal of country music lies in its authenticity and its ability to resonate with a broad audience. Many of the most beloved country songs feature straightforward song structures, typically adhering to verse-chorus patterns that are easy to follow. This predictability in arrangement aids in the learning process. When you decide to pick up your guitar with the goal of learning country tunes, you're not just acquiring a new hobby; you're engaging with a rich cultural heritage. The journey of learning country songs on guitar is often a personal one, filled with moments of discovery and self-expression.

Essential Guitar Chords for Country Music

To successfully tackle a wide range of country songs, a solid understanding of a few fundamental guitar chords is paramount. These basic open chords form the backbone of countless hits and are relatively easy for beginners to learn. Focusing on mastering these will unlock a vast library of music.

The "Big Four" Open Chords: G, C, D, and E

These four chords are arguably the most important for any aspiring country guitarist. They appear in an astonishing number of popular songs across various eras of country music.

- **G Major:** This chord provides a strong, foundational sound often used to open songs or provide a sense of resolution.
- **C Major:** A bright and versatile chord, C Major is frequently paired with G and D for common progressions.
- **D Major:** Known for its open and ringing quality, D Major is a staple in country music, often leading into G or E.
- **E Major:** This chord adds a different tonal color and is frequently used in conjunction with A Major.

Other Crucial Open Chords: A, Am, Em, and Dm

While the "Big Four" are essential, expanding your chord vocabulary with these additions will significantly increase the number of songs you can play.

- **A Major:** A bright and popular chord, often used in conjunction with E and D.
- **A Minor (Am):** Offers a more somber or reflective tone, providing a

contrast to the major chords.

- **E Minor (Em)**: Similar to Am, Em brings a melancholic or introspective feel to a song.
- **D Minor (Dm)**: Less common in very early country but present in many modern tunes, Dm adds a touch of bluesy or jazzy flavor.

Understanding the Power of the G-C-D Progression

One of the most common and recognizable chord progressions in country music, and indeed across many genres, is the G-C-D (or variations like G-D-Em-C). Recognizing and being able to switch smoothly between these chords will allow you to play hundreds of songs. Practicing this progression repeatedly is one of the most effective ways to build muscle memory and develop fluid chord changes.

Easy Country Songs to Start With

Beginning your guitar journey with accessible country songs is key to building momentum and enjoyment. These tracks are generally characterized by simple chord structures, steady tempos, and often a repeating melodic pattern that makes them easier to pick up.

"Ring of Fire" by Johnny Cash

This iconic Johnny Cash song is a fantastic choice for beginners. It primarily uses three chords: G, C, and D. The rhythm is also quite straightforward, typically a simple strumming pattern that's easy to replicate. Learning this song provides a great sense of accomplishment due to its widespread recognition and its relatively quick learning curve. The chord changes are predictable and occur at natural points in the lyrics, making it easier to follow along.

"Jolene" by Dolly Parton

While the iconic opening riff is a bit more advanced, the core chord progression of "Jolene" is simple, mainly relying on Am, G, and C. The beauty of this song for beginners is that even if you focus on strumming the chords accurately to the rhythm, it still sounds fantastic. Many beginners find success by learning the chord changes and a basic strumming pattern before tackling the melodic riff. The emotional delivery Dolly Parton provides can also serve as inspiration for your own playing.

"Sweet Home Alabama" by Lynyrd Skynyrd

Although often associated with Southern rock, "Sweet Home Alabama" has strong country influences and is a popular choice for guitarists. It's primarily built around D, C, and G chords. The signature riff is also a great beginner lead guitar or melody exercise once you're comfortable with the chords. Learning the song's structure and key chord changes will prepare you for many other songs with similar progressions. The upbeat tempo and familiar melody make it an engaging song to learn.

"On the Road Again" by Willie Nelson

This Willie Nelson classic is another excellent choice for its simplicity. It predominantly uses the G, C, and D chords. The song's straightforward strumming pattern and its repetitive nature make it ideal for practicing chord transitions and maintaining a steady rhythm. The positive and uplifting message of the song also adds to its appeal. Learning this song is a great way to get comfortable with playing in a major key and developing a solid country feel.

Intermediate Country Guitar Songs to Challenge Yourself

Once you've gained confidence with the basic open chords and simpler songs, it's time to explore country tunes that introduce a few more complexities. These songs might involve more challenging chord shapes, faster tempo changes, or introduce basic fingerpicking patterns and slide guitar elements.

"Take Me Home, Country Roads" by John Denver

This beloved John Denver anthem is a great step up for intermediate players. It uses common chords like G, C, and D, but also introduces Em and occasionally Am. The beauty of this song is its singalong quality and its rich storytelling. Mastering the transitions between the chords smoothly, especially during the chorus, is a good exercise. You might also start to explore simpler versions of the melody or instrumental breaks that can be played on guitar. The song's widespread popularity ensures it's a rewarding piece to add to your repertoire.

"Your Cheatin' Heart" by Hank Williams

A foundational song in country music history, Hank Williams' "Your Cheatin' Heart" is perfect for intermediate players looking to delve into more traditional country sounds. It typically uses chords like C, G, and F. The F chord, a barre chord, is often the first significant hurdle for many guitarists. Mastering the F chord and smooth transitions to other chords like C and G will open up a whole new world of songs, as the F chord is prevalent

in many genres. Practicing this song will significantly improve your barre chord technique and your ability to play in different keys.

"Friends in Low Places" by Garth Brooks

Garth Brooks' anthemic hit "Friends in Low Places" is a staple at country gatherings and a fun song to learn. It primarily uses G, C, and D chords, but the dynamic changes and the driving rhythm can be more challenging. The song often features a tempo that speeds up slightly as it progresses, requiring good timing and control. Learning to strum this song with energy and enthusiasm, while maintaining accuracy, is a great intermediate goal. The song also has opportunities for embellishments and a more complex strumming pattern that can be explored as you improve.

"Wagon Wheel" by Old Crow Medicine Show (or Darius Rucker version)

This modern country classic is incredibly popular and relatively accessible, but it offers enough to keep intermediate players engaged. The song is typically played in G and uses chords like G, D, Em, and C. What makes it intermediate is its driving tempo and the often-employed capo, which shifts the key and requires understanding how to play familiar chords in a new context. Learning the characteristic strumming pattern and the subtle variations in rhythm will enhance your playing. The song's infectious energy makes practicing it a joy.

Tips for Learning Country Guitar Songs

Learning any new skill, especially playing a musical instrument, is a journey that benefits greatly from effective strategies. When it comes to mastering country songs on guitar, adopting a systematic approach can make the process more enjoyable and efficient.

Start with a Solid Foundation

Before diving into complex songs, ensure you have a firm grasp of basic chords (G, C, D, E, A, Am, Em) and common strumming patterns. Consistent practice of these fundamentals will make learning new songs much easier.

Break Down Songs into Sections

Don't try to learn an entire song at once. Focus on mastering one section at a time, whether it's the verse, chorus, or a specific riff. Once you're comfortable with a section, move on to the next. Then, practice transitioning between the sections you've learned.

Use Online Resources Wisely

The internet is a treasure trove of information for guitarists. Websites offering guitar tabs, chord charts, and video tutorials can be invaluable. Look for resources that provide clear diagrams and step-by-step instructions. YouTube channels dedicated to teaching country guitar are particularly helpful.

Slow Down and Practice Gradually

When you first encounter a new song or chord transition, play it at a much slower tempo than the original recording. This allows your fingers to learn the movements correctly without the pressure of speed. As you become more comfortable, gradually increase the tempo.

Listen Actively to the Music

Pay close attention to the original recordings of the country songs you're learning. Listen for the rhythm, the chord changes, the nuances in strumming, and any melodic elements. Try to internalize the feel and timing of the song.

Practice Consistently

Short, regular practice sessions are far more effective than infrequent, marathon sessions. Aim to practice for at least 15-30 minutes every day. Consistency builds muscle memory and reinforces what you've learned.

Record Yourself

Recording your playing, even just with your phone, can be a powerful tool for self-assessment. You can often hear mistakes or areas for improvement that you might not notice while you're playing.

Learn to Read Chord Charts and Tabs

Familiarize yourself with how to read guitar tablature (tabs) and chord charts. These provide visual guides to finger placement and chord shapes, which are essential for learning songs.

Understanding Basic Country Guitar Techniques

Beyond simply strumming chords, country music guitar playing often incorporates specific techniques that give it its distinctive sound.

Mastering these can elevate your playing from merely playing notes to embodying the spirit of country music.

Strumming Patterns

Country strumming patterns are often characterized by a driving, consistent rhythm, but with subtle variations that add groove. Common patterns involve emphasized downstrokes on beats 1 and 3, with lighter upstrokes in between, or a more syncopated feel. Learning a few key strumming patterns will allow you to play a wide variety of country songs with authenticity.

Fingerpicking (Travis Picking)

Fingerpicking is a hallmark of many country and folk guitar styles. Travis picking, named after Merle Travis, involves using the thumb to play bass notes while the index, middle, and ring fingers pick out melodies or arpeggios. This technique creates a rich, percussive sound that is both rhythmic and melodic. Starting with simple patterns on open strings and then applying them to chord shapes is an effective way to learn.

Hammer-ons and Pull-offs

These are common embellishments used in country guitar solos and melodic lines. A hammer-on involves striking a note and then using another finger to press down on a higher fret on the same string, producing a second note without picking again. A pull-off is the reverse: you pick a note, and then pull the fretting finger off the string to sound a lower note that is already fretted or an open string. Practicing these techniques will add fluidity and flair to your playing.

Slide Guitar Techniques

Slide guitar is a deeply ingrained technique in country and blues music, creating a vocal-like quality. It involves using a smooth, cylindrical object (like a glass or metal bottleneck) on the fingertip to glide along the strings. This allows for smooth glissandos and expressive bends. While mastering slide guitar can be challenging, even a basic understanding of how to create simple slides can add a distinctive country flavor to your playing. Many country songs feature subtle slide fills between vocal phrases.

Palm Muting

Palm muting involves resting the side of your picking hand's palm lightly on the strings near the bridge. This technique deadens the strings slightly, producing a muted, percussive sound. It's often used to add a driving rhythm to songs, particularly in more upbeat country tracks, and can create a powerful, chugging effect that complements the strumming.

Exploring Different Eras of Country Guitar

Country music has a long and varied history, and the guitar's role within it has evolved significantly. Understanding these different eras can provide context and inspiration for your learning.

Early Country and Western Swing

In the early days, country guitar playing was often characterized by simple chord strumming and melodic leads played on acoustic guitars. Western swing, a fusion of country, blues, and jazz, saw guitarists like Eldon Shamblin and Bob Wills himself incorporating more intricate solos and a more driving rhythm. Learning songs from artists like Hank Williams or early Jimmie Rodgers can give you a feel for this foundational period.

The Nashville Sound and Beyond

The Nashville Sound, emerging in the 1950s and 60s, often featured more polished production and arrangements, with acoustic guitar playing a supportive role. However, artists like Chet Atkins were pioneers of sophisticated fingerstyle guitar, blending country with jazz and classical influences. This era expanded the technical possibilities for country guitarists.

Outlaw Country and the Singer-Songwriter Movement

The Outlaw country movement of the 1970s, led by figures like Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, and Johnny Cash, brought a rawer, more individualistic approach to country music. Guitar playing in this era often featured more bluesy riffs, open tunings, and a focus on lyrical storytelling. Artists like Jerry Reed also showcased impressive flatpicking and fingerstyle techniques.

80s and 90s Country

The 1980s and 90s saw a resurgence of popularity for country music, with artists like Garth Brooks, Alan Jackson, and Shania Twain dominating the charts. Guitar work in this period often incorporated more electric guitar solos, with influences from rock music. Acoustic guitar remained a central element, often providing rhythmic drive and melodic accompaniment.

Modern Country Music

Contemporary country music continues to evolve, blending elements from pop, rock, and even hip-hop. While acoustic guitar remains a core instrument, electric guitar solos and more complex production techniques are common. Artists like Chris Stapleton and Kacey Musgraves showcase a diverse range of

guitar styles within the modern country soundscape.

Resources for Learning Country Guitar

To support your journey in learning country songs on guitar, a wealth of resources is available. Utilizing these tools effectively can significantly accelerate your progress and deepen your understanding.

Online Guitar Tab and Chord Websites

Websites like Ultimate Guitar, Chordify, and GuitarTuna offer vast libraries of song tabs and chords, often with user-submitted versions that can be helpful for finding easier arrangements. Many also include interactive features like playback at different speeds.

YouTube Guitar Tutorials

YouTube is an unparalleled resource for visual learners. Channels dedicated to teaching guitar, specifically country guitar, provide step-by-step lessons on songs, chords, techniques, and theory. Searching for "[song title] guitar tutorial" or "easy country guitar lessons" will yield numerous results.

Guitar Instruction Apps

Numerous smartphone and tablet applications are designed to aid guitar learning. These apps can offer interactive chord diagrams, tuners, metronomes, song libraries, and even gamified learning experiences. Fender Play and Yousician are popular examples.

Guitar Lesson Books

For those who prefer a more structured, printed approach, guitar lesson books specifically focused on country music can be very beneficial. These often provide progressive lessons from basic to advanced techniques and include popular songs to practice.

Local Guitar Teachers

If possible, consider taking lessons from a local guitar teacher. A qualified instructor can provide personalized feedback, correct bad habits, tailor lessons to your learning style, and offer guidance specific to country guitar playing that online resources might miss.

Online Forums and Communities

Engaging with online guitar forums and communities can provide a supportive environment. You can ask questions, share your progress, get advice from other guitarists, and discover new songs or techniques recommended by fellow enthusiasts.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are some easy country songs for beginner guitarists?

For beginners, consider songs with simple chord progressions like 'Jolene' by Dolly Parton (Am, C, G), 'Ring of Fire' by Johnny Cash (G, C, D), or 'Sweet Home Alabama' by Lynyrd Skynyrd (D, C, G). These often use basic strumming patterns and common open chords.

Which country songs are popular for practicing fingerpicking on guitar?

Fingerpicking country songs like 'Dust in the Wind' by Kansas (though not strictly country, it has a country feel and is often learned by country fans), 'House of the Rising Sun' (traditional, often played in a country style), or 'He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother' by The Hollies (similar vibe) are great choices. They feature clear melodic lines that translate well to fingerstyle.

What are some country songs that use common guitar techniques like hammer-ons and pull-offs?

Songs like 'Tennessee Whiskey' by Chris Stapleton, especially the guitar solos, or intros to songs like 'Before He Cheats' by Carrie Underwood often incorporate hammer-ons and pull-offs. Practicing these techniques will add flair to your playing.

Are there any modern country songs that are good for intermediate guitarists?

Yes! For intermediate players, try 'Die a Happy Man' by Thomas Rhett, which has a nice blend of strumming and some melodic fills. 'Body Like a Back Road' by Sam Hunt also offers a good rhythm and some slightly more complex chord changes. 'Million Reasons' by Lady Gaga, while pop, has a strong country influence and a beautiful acoustic arrangement.

What are some classic country songs every guitarist should know?

Beyond the easy ones, essential classics include 'On the Road Again' by Willie Nelson (G, C, D), 'Hey Good Lookin'' by Hank Williams (G, C, D), and 'Crazy' by Patsy Cline (often played in G or C, with common jazz-influenced chords). These songs are foundational to the genre.

How can I find reliable tabs or chords for country songs to learn on guitar?

Websites like Ultimate Guitar, Chordify, and Guitar Tabs are excellent resources. Many also offer beginner-friendly versions or user-submitted arrangements. YouTube also has countless tutorial videos where instructors break down songs section by section.

What guitar tone or effects are commonly used in country music for learning songs?

For learning, focus on clean or slightly overdriven tones. A touch of reverb can add spaciousness. For a more authentic sound, consider a Telecaster-style guitar if possible. Many country players use a relatively clean amp tone, sometimes with a compressor or a bit of a 'twangy' EQ setting. Don't overcomplicate it when starting out; focus on the chords and melody.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to learning country songs on guitar, with descriptions:

1. *Acoustic Country Guitar Essentials*

This book provides a foundational approach to learning country guitar. It covers essential chords, strumming patterns, and fingerpicking techniques commonly found in classic and contemporary country music. You'll find step-by-step instructions and exercises designed to build your confidence and skill level from the ground up.

2. *The Ultimate Country Strummer's Guide*

If you want to master the infectious rhythms of country music, this is the book for you. It dives deep into various strumming techniques, including chicken pickin' accents and syncopated patterns. The guide includes numerous song examples from different eras of country music to practice with.

3. *Fingerstyle Country Favorites Made Easy*

This volume focuses on the beautiful art of fingerpicking in country music. It breaks down popular instrumental intros and melodies into manageable lessons. You'll learn techniques like Travis picking and essential country licks, with clear tablature for easy learning.

4. *My First Country Guitar Songbook*

Perfect for absolute beginners, this book makes learning your first country hits a breeze. It features simplified arrangements of beloved songs, focusing on easy-to-play chords and basic strumming. Each song includes clear chord diagrams and lyrics to get you singing along quickly.

5. *Country Guitar Riffs and Solos*

Ready to add some flair to your playing? This book teaches you how to play iconic country guitar riffs and solos. It breaks down the phrasing, bending, and vibrato that define country lead guitar. Learn to replicate the licks of your favorite country guitar heroes.

6. *Learning the Nashville Sound on Guitar*

Explore the distinctive sounds and techniques of Nashville's studio guitarists. This book delves into the nuances of country lead playing,

including steel guitar-inspired bends and chicken pickin'. It's ideal for those looking to capture that authentic Nashville sound.

7. *Country Chord and Scale Mastery*

Go beyond basic chords and unlock a deeper understanding of country harmony. This book explores common country chord progressions and the scales used for solos and fills. You'll learn how to improvise and add your own melodic ideas to country tunes.

8. *From Campfire to Stage: Country Guitar Hits*

This comprehensive collection aims to get you playing popular country songs in various settings. It offers arrangements suitable for casual jamming around a campfire or performing for a crowd. The book includes a wide range of hits, from old-time classics to modern chart-toppers.

9. *The Art of Country Guitar Accompaniment*

Focuses on providing solid and engaging guitar accompaniment for country songs. It teaches you how to effectively support vocals with various strumming patterns, arpeggios, and bass runs. Learn to be a great rhythm guitarist in a country band or with a singer.

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