

Playing Over Minor Guitar Chords

In this tutorial we'll have a look at the guitar scales, arpeggios and substitutions we can use to improvise over minor guitar chords, so we can make our guitar solos more interesting. Unless specified, we take a Dm chord as example. Here's a roundup:

1) The Dorian Scale

The 3 minor diatonic scales (Dorian, Phrygian, Aeolian) are the obvious choice for playing over minor chords. Which of the 3 scales you play depends on the harmonic setting and the function of the chords you are playing over.

The Dorian mode is played over II chords, like in a II V I chord progression.

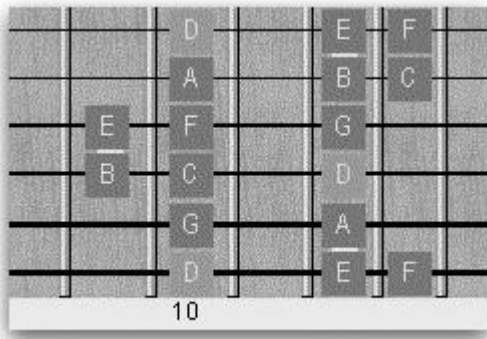
We'll take a 2 5 1 in C major as an example:

```
|Dm7   |G7     |Cmaj7  |%   |
|II     |V       |I       |    |
```

Over the Dm7 we play the D Dorian scale:

D Dorian	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
Over Dm7	1	9	b3	11	5	6	b7

Here's the scale chart for D Dorian mode in its root position:



The Dorian scale is also used to play over minor chords in modal tunes, like [So What](#).

2) The Phrygian Scale

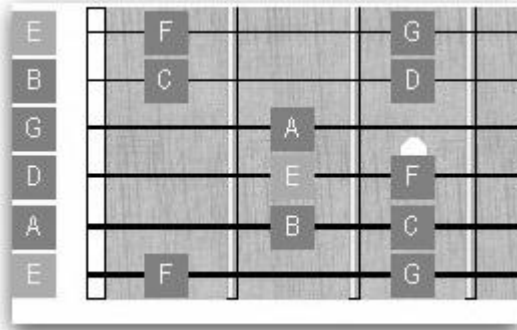
The Phrygian scale is used to play over minor chords that have the function of a III in a harmony. An example is the 3rd bar of a [Rhythm Changes](#):

```
|Cmaj7 Am7 |Dm7 G7 |Em7 A7 |Dm7 G7 |
|I VI |II V |III VI7 |II V |
```

On the Em7 in the 3rd bar we can play the E Phrygian mode. As a side note I want to point out that although you theoretically play the Phrygian mode on the Em7 in a rhythm changes, you don't think about the Phrygian mode, just think C major (did that make sense, if not, give me a shout).

E Phrygian Scale	E	F	G	A	B	C	D
Over Em7	1	b9	b3	11	5	b6	b7

The **E Phrygian scale** in its root position:

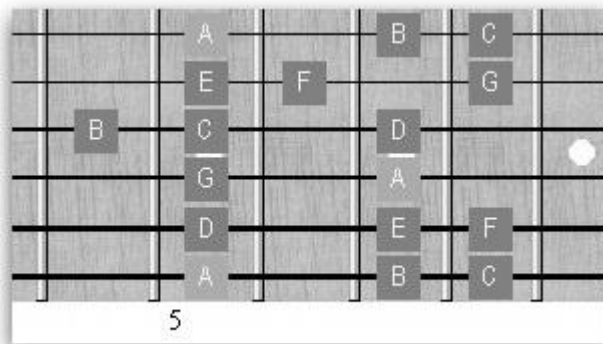


3) The Aeolian Scale

The Aeolian scale (aka relative minor scale) is used to play over minor chords that have a VI function or a I function in minor. An example of a VI is the second chord in a rhythm changes.

A Aeolian Mode	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Over Am7	1	9	b3	11	5	b6	b7

The chart for the A Aeolian scale in root position:



4) D Minor Pentatonic Scale or Blues Scale

It can't get more obvious, very useful, also in a jazz context.

D Minor Pentatonic	D	F	G	A	C
Over Dm7	1	b3	11	5	b7

5) A Minor Pentatonic Scale or Blues Scale

The A minor pentatonic scale sounds very nice over Dm7

A Minor Pentatonic	A	C	D	E	G
Over Dm7	5	b7	1	9	11

6) E minor Pentatonic Scale

The E minor pentatonic works nice if you alternate it with D minor pentatonic (on modal tunes). It creates a tension/release kind of thing (see point 10 on this page)

E Minor Pentatonic	E	G	A	B	D
Over Dm7	9	11	5	6	1

7) D Minor Arpeggio

Surprisingly the Dm7 arpeggio works very well over Dm7. See also: [Arpeggio 101](#)

8) Fmaj7 Arpeggio

An Fmaj7 arpeggio over Dm adds the 9: nice sound.

Fmaj7 Arpeggio	F	A	C	E
Over Dm7	b3	5	b7	9

9) Am7 Arpeggio

One step further is Am7, it adds the 11 to the sound.

Am7 Arpeggio	A	C	E	G
Over Dm7	5	b7	9	11

10) Em7 Arpeggio

Em7 sounds a little more distant over Dm, but works fine if you alternate it with a Dm arpeggio.

D F A C + E G B D = D Dorian Scale

Examples: Triads Over Minor Chords

Em7 Arpeggio	E	G	B	D
Over Dm7	9	11	6	1

11) Dm6 or Bm7b5 Arpeggio

Emphasizing the **6** of a minor chord works nice if the minor chord has a **tonic function** and not a sub-tonic function (like in a II V). In other words, the minor chord should be the I, not the II. In other words, the minor chord should not be followed by the V (Dm7 should not be followed by G7).

Example of a minor chord with a tonic function:

Dm7	Em7b5 A7	
Im7	IIm7b5 V	

12) G7 Arpeggio

G7 sounds ok over Dm, especially when it has the tonic function. If you use it in a 2 5 1, you can make the b(6) on Dm7 go to #9 and b9 on G7, to the 5 of Cmaj7.

G7 Arpeggio	G	B	D	F
Over Dm7	11	6	1	b3

13) The Line Cliché In tunes where the minor chord spans a couple of bars, like in a **minor blues**, you can use this little device called the line cliché. This technique is as old as the street and is frequently used by **gypsy jazz** guitarists. The line cliché is a descending line going chromatically from the 1 of a minor chord to its 6:

1 » 7 » b7 » 6

d » c# » c » b

The image displays musical notation for guitar chords in D minor. The first system contains four measures of chords: Dm, Dm/maj7, Dm7, and Dm6. The second system shows Gm7. Each measure includes a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a guitar staff with fingerings.

Measure 1: Dm
 Treble: D4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), Bb4 (quarter)
 Guitar: 7 (T), 5 (A), 6 (B), 7 (Bb)

Measure 2: Dm/maj7
 Treble: D4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter)
 Guitar: 5 (T), 6 (A), 8 (B), 5 (Bb)

Measure 3: Dm7
 Treble: D4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), Ab4 (quarter), Bb4 (quarter)
 Guitar: 5 (T), 5 (A), 6 (B), 7 (Bb)

Measure 4: Dm6
 Treble: D4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter)
 Guitar: 5 (T), 3 (A), 6 (B)

Measure 5: Gm7
 Treble: Gb3 (quarter), Bb3 (quarter), D4 (quarter), F4 (quarter)
 Guitar: 3 (T)

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