

What Good is a Diminished Chord?

Many players know how major, minor, and dominant seventh chords fit into music because they use them all the time. But, often, they are perplexed at the diminished chord. Unlike major and minor chords the diminished chord is an unstable chord—meaning it needs to be resolved to some other chord. It is because of this “need to be resolved” that a diminished chord is so helpful and can be used in all kinds of musical situations to get from one chord to another.

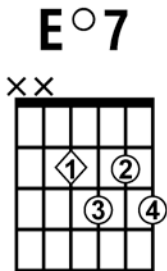
Learn how to take a bland progression and turn it into something amazing by using a few diminished chords.

Diminished Chord Forms

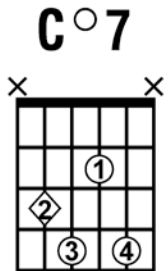
The formula for a diminished triad is 1-b3-b5. But in guitar music, diminished chords are almost always played as a four-note chord with the formula 1-b3-b5-bb7. So, while it may just be referred to as a “diminished” chord, in practice it is technically a “diminished seventh” chord. In written music, the abbreviation for diminished chord is a small circle.

On guitar, there are three main diminished chord form shapes—each with a root on a different string. (The diamond indicates the root of the chord.)

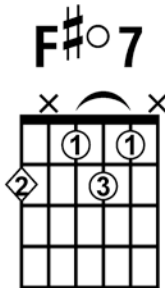
4th String Root



5th String Root



6th String Root

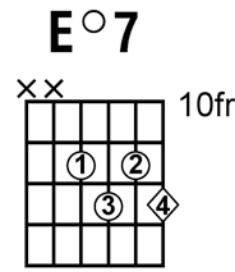
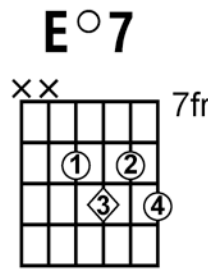
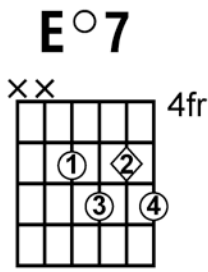
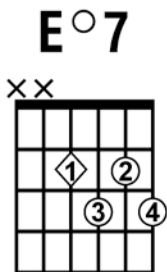


Playing Tip
Diminished chords repeat every 3 frets on the neck.

A Musical Repeating Number

All of the intervals within a diminished chord are identical. They are all 3 half steps apart—the interval of a minor 3rd. In other words, every three steps a diminished chord repeats. Think of diminished chords as a musical repeating number.

Since the intervals in a diminished chord are identical then each chord shape can be used in a repeating manner. For example, an E diminished chord can be played in four different places on the neck using the same shape. The root (diamond) moves to a different place in each form.



Connecting Progressions

Diminished chords connect chords together musically and typically work best approaching the target chord from one half step beneath. For example, if I wanted to go to a Dm7 chord then I could play a C#dim chord to lead into the Dm7.

Here are a few examples showing how diminished chords can be used to connect chords together creating much more complex progressions.

Playing Tip
You can lead into any chord by using a diminished chord a half step below the chord you are going to.

Original Progression

C F G C

Adding Diminished Chords

C E^o7 F F#^o7 G B^o7 C

Original Progression

Gmaj7 Am7 Bm7 Cmaj7

Adding Diminished Chords

Gmaj7 G#^o7 Am7 A#^o7 Bm7 B^o7 Cmaj7

For step-by-step quality guitar instruction check out the award-winning Gibson's Learn & Master Guitar course at www.LearnAndMaster.com and the lessons section at www.gibson.com for all the help you need to become the player you want to be!



Steve Krenz

As an educator, Steve is best known for the top-selling guitar instruction course, *Gibson's Learn & Master Guitar* that received the 2011 Acoustic Guitar Magazine Player's Choice Award for Best Instructional Material. As a professional guitarist in Nashville, Steve's broad playing experience includes playing guitar with a symphony orchestra, to jazz big bands, to performing with numerous Grammy-winning artists like Donna Summer, Michael W. Smith, Bryan White, The Fifth Dimension, Israel Houghton, and Tommy Sims.

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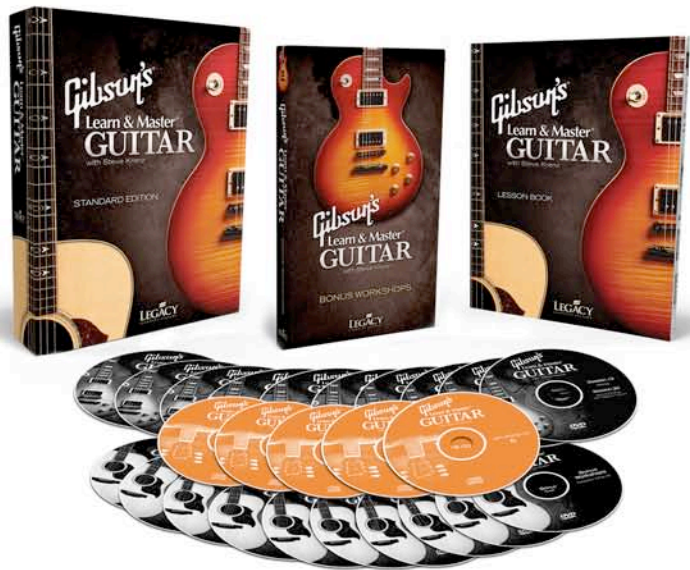
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