



**Using Capoes and Tunings to
Make Your Mountain Dulcimer
Versatile**

by

Joe Collins

www.jcdulcimer.com



What is a capo?

A capo is a mechanical device used with fretted stringed instruments. It holds all the strings down at a single fret, thus shortening the length of all the strings at once. This allows the instrumentalists to play higher on the neck in different keys or, in the case of dulcimers, modes while using the same fingering.

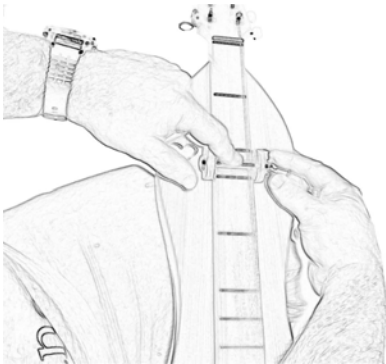
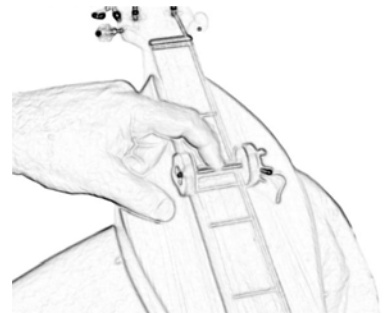
How does a Mountain dulcimer capo work?

There are several types of capoes for the mountain dulcimer, but they all work on the same principle. They have a bar covered with vinyl, rubber, leather or other substance that presses down on the strings. Two sides clamp down on the sides of the dulcimer neck, holding the capo in place. The inside of the sides should be covered with cork, rubber, or some other substance that will hold but will not scratch or otherwise damage the dulcimer neck.

What is the correct way to put the capo on my dulcimer?

Open the sides of the capo a little wider than the neck.

Press the bar of the capo straight down on a spot close to the nut side of the fret. On a right-handed dulcimer, this would be just to the left of the fret where you are placing the capo.



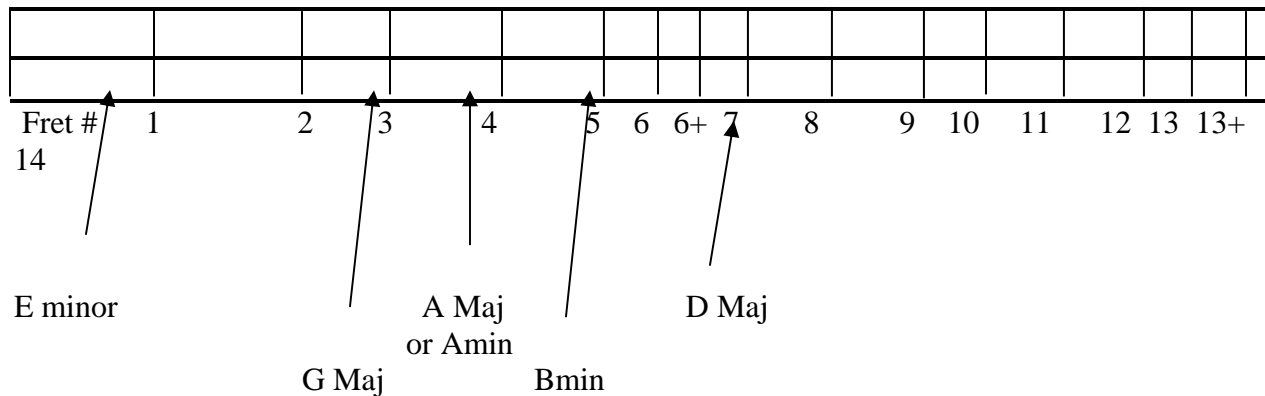
While holding the capo securely down on the strings, clamp the sides on the neck securely.

Strum your strings. If you have a buzzing sound, repeat the procedure.

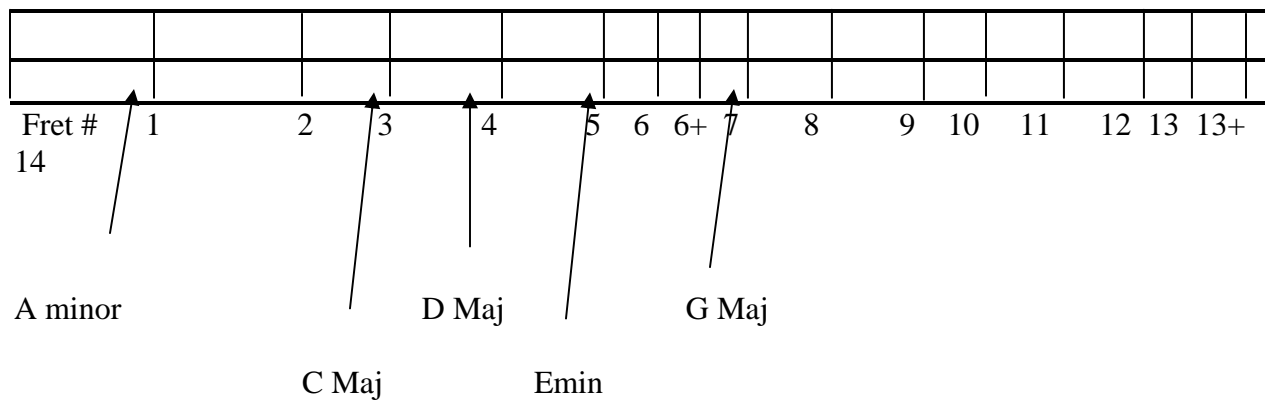
Using the Capo to Change Keys

There are a large number of keys in which one can play on the dulcimer with just two simple tunings and a capo. The three tunings I use most are Dad, DAA, and DGd. When a capo is placed on the neck of the dulcimer, one is able to play in different keys.

Capo Placement and Resulting Keys When Tuned to DAd or DAA



Capo Placement and Resulting Keys When Tuned to DGd



Of course there are many other tunings. When combined with the use of a capo, different tunings enable one to play in a wide variety of keys.

Because the strings on a dulcimer have a range of pitches, one can change keys by moving each string up or down a note or a $\frac{1}{2}$ note. Therefore, if one tightens his/her strings to EBe, one has another whole set of keys at his/her disposal.