



Understanding and Learning Shifting and Higher Positions on the Fiddle: Part Two

by Carolyn Osborne

The view for the sidebars is looking down at the fingerboard.

Sidebar: Violin/mandolin fingering charts

Mandolin fret number	Open G	Open D	Open A	Open E
1	G#/Ab	D#/Ab	A#/Bb	F
2	A	E	B	F#/Gb
3	A#/Bb	F	C	G
4	B	F#/Gb	C#/Db	G#/Ab
5	C	G	D	A
6	C#/Db	G#/Ab	D#/Eb	A#/Bb
7	D	A	E	B
8	D#/Eb	A#/Bb	F	C
9	E	B	F#/Gb	C#/Db
10	F	C	G	D
11	F#/Gb	C#/Db	G#/Ab	D#/Eb
12	G	D	A	E

“Boil the Cabbage Down” first position fingering pattern (2nd finger close to 3rd finger, typical beginner’s pattern). Tonic note is an open string (e.g., A, in Boil the Cabbage). This position is typically taught to beginners without regard to staying in a single key across the instrument. So, you get a major scale if you start on the G string 0123 and then go to the D string 0123 (G scale). You get the D scale by starting on the D string 0123 and going to the A string 0123 and the A scale is A:0123 E:0123. However, if you wanted to play a second octave of any of these scales, you would use a different finger pattern. This chart represents the beginner finger pattern, then, rather than proper notes for a particular scale.

Mandolin fret number	Open G	Open D	Open A	Open E	1 st position violin fingers
1	G#/Ab	D#/Ab	A#/Bb	F	
2	A	E	B	F#/Gb	1
3	A#/Bb	F	C	G	
4	B	F#/Gb	C#/Db	G#/Ab	2
5	C	G	D	A	3
6	C#/Db	G#/Ab	D#/Eb	A#/Bb	
7	D	A	E	B	(4)
8	D#/Eb	A#/Bb	F	C	
9	E	B	F#/Gb	C#/Db	
10	F	C	G	D	
11	F#/Gb	C#/Db	G#/Ab	D#/Eb	
12	G	D	A	E	

First position pattern where first finger is the tonic note (as in key of B on A string). This is the B scale (A:1234 E:1234)

Mandolin fret number	Open A	Open E	1 st position violin fingers
1	A#/Bb	F	
2	B	F#/Gb	1
3	C	G	
4	C#/Db	G#/Ab	2
5	D	A	
6	D#/Eb	A#/Bb	3
7	E	B	4
8	F	C	
9	F#/Gb	C#/Db	
10	G	D	
11	G#/Ab	D#/Eb	
12	A	E	

Second position (third part of Jerusalem Ridge) key of C beginning on the A string. This time, there is space between fingers 1-3, to make the first finger the tonic note. If you were to play Boil the Cabbage Down in this position, you would start with your 3rd finger. Your first finger is the equivalent of a capo. Keep in mind that you can change the spacing between your fingers to accommodate different notes (e.g., put 2 next to 1 or put 3 next to 2).

Mandolin fret number	Open A	Open E	2 nd position violin fingers
1	A#/Bb	F	
2	B	F#/Gb	
3	C	G	1
4	C#/Db	G#/Ab	
5	D	A	2
6	D#/Eb	A#/Bb	
7	E	B	3
8	F	C	4
9	F#/Gb	C#/Db	
10	G	D	
11	G#/Ab	D#/Eb	
12	A	E	

Third position (Benny Martin fiddle breaks on Dear Old Dixie and Flint Hill Special). Similar spacing of fingers as 2nd position. D scale beginning on the A string.

Mandolin fret number	Open A	Open E	3 rd position violin fingers
1	A#/Bb	F	
2	B	F#/Gb	
3	C	G	
4	C#/Db	G#/Ab	
5	D	A	1
6	D#/Eb	A#/Bb	
7	E	B	2
8	F	C	
9	F#/Gb	C#/Db	3

10	G	D	4
11	G#/Ab	D#/Eb	
12	A	E	

Further notes for the intrepid:

Notice, if you use your first finger as the capo, then between any two strings you have a whole major scale. For example, play 1234 on the D and 1234 on the A you have a scale where the tonic note is 1 on the D. Play 1234 on the A then 1234 on the E, you have a scale where the tonic note is 1 on the A. Technically speaking, each 1234 pattern is half a scale (a tetrachord). You can also change the spacing between your fingers to get any other form of scale. If you want to do mixolydian mode (a scale with a flat 7th note, common to Appalachian tunes such as Old Joe Clark and Clinch Mountain Backstep), lower the third finger (make it close to the 2nd finger) on the higher string. In other words: D1234 A12 low3 4 creates a mixolydian scale with the first finger on the D as the tonic note.

about the author

Until recently, Carolyn Osborne was the co-director of the Gahanna-Lincoln High School fiddlers, Gahanna, Ohio. She teaches in the Dept. of Education at Capital University.