

# Altered States: Mastering Substitute and Altered Pentatonic Scales

Central Coast Jazz Guitar Fest 2025

Mike Dana

## Overview

- Why pentatonic?
  - Quartal harmony connection
    - Chord in 4ths: E A D G C = Major pentatonic scale: C D E G A
  - Interesting intervallic possibilities
    - Not as “steppy” as scales
    - Not as “skippy” as apreggios
- “Natural” Pentatonic scales (major and minor)
  - Close relationship to quartal harmony
    - “Slippery” (no half steps!)
- Altered pentatonic (one or more note(s) b or #)
  - Altered note creates half steps, help create color, tension

## Natural Pentatonics

Major Pentatonic

- 1 2 3 5 6
- C D E G A

Minor Pentatonic

- 1 b3 4 5 b7
- C Eb E G Bb

*Note relative major/minor: C major pent = A minor pent.*

## Altered Pentatonics

- Major/Minor (aka Harmonic Major) Pentatonic
  - 1 2 3 5 b6
  - C D E G Ab
- Minor/Major Pentatonic
  - 1 2 b3 5 6
  - C D Eb G A
- Lydian Pentatonic
  - 1 2 3 #4 6
  - C D E F# A
- Diminished Pentatonic\* (half-whole diminished scale)
  - 1 b2 b3 b5 6
  - C Db Eb G A
- Diminished Ma7 Pentatonic\* (whole-half diminished scale)
  - 1 2 b3 b5 7
  - C D Eb Gb B

*\*Anything built on diminished scales is really cool, because you only need to internalize one shape on the fingerboard. It repeats every three frets, just like diminished chords.*

## Internalizing

- Practice these as part of **common chord progressions**. Examples:
  - ii - V<sup>7</sup> - I
  - ii - V<sup>7alt</sup> - I
  - minor ii - V<sup>7alt</sup> - i
  - i - V<sup>7</sup>/iv - I (e.g. minor blues. Cm6/9 - C7(#5#9) - Fm6/9)
  - Rhythm changes (e.g. || D13 | D7alt | G13 | G7alt | C9 | C7alt | F13 | F7alt ||
  - Turnarounds
- Learn to “**see more than one solution**”
  - C9 could be C mixo...OR C Lydian dom...OR D maj/min pentatonic
  - C7(b9#5) could be C alt...OR Gb major pentatonic...OR Ab maj/min pentatonic
- Learn to see the **patterns** when applying to progressions (*see “Beautiful Love” handout*)
- Figure out what **formulas** work for you (*mine work for me...you do what works for you.*)
- **Focus on one** of these tools at a time. When it’s pretty solid (doesn’t have to be perfect) move on.
- Apply these to **tunes you know** well first
- Practicing with sequences and patterns is good, but don’t overdo it when you’re playing “for real”
- These need to connect with
  - Your ear (*chord color*)
  - Your hands (*muscle memory*)
  - Your eyes (*on the staff AND fingerboard shape*)
  - Your heart and soul (*when to use/not use*)

## Final Thoughts

- **Listen deeply** to the players you like, and you’ll likely hear these ideas at work.
- To me, it’s always about the melody. Find a way to make these **beautiful**. It’s the painting, not the paint. 😊
- I never construct a solo or chorus out of any single idea, no matter how cool I think it is. Use these as a “**breath of fresh air**” in your solos.
- The altered pentatonics here are by no means a complete list. I’m always looking for **new ideas**, and so should you.
- **Keep in touch!** If you come up with something brilliant, let me know. Heck, let everybody know. 😊
  - mike@mikedanamusic.com
  - Facebook
  - Download these materials plus more (iReal files etc.) here:



# Altered States: Pentatonic Substitutions

## The Master List

Mike Dana - Central Coast Jazz Guitar Fest 2025

Major Pentatonic Over Major Chords							1	2	3	5	6
C Maj Pent	C	D	E	G	A	sub	notes				
C 6/9	1	2	3	5	6		Works fine...not overly hip.				
F Ma9	5	6	7	9	3	from 5	Very nice! Just the good notes. :)				
Bb Ma13(#11)	9	3	#11	6	7	from 9	Lydian (#4) sound.				

Major Pentatonic Over Minor Chords							1	2	3	5	6
C Maj Pent	C	D	E	G	A	sub	notes				
Dm 11	b7	R	9	11	5	from b7	Floaty min 11 sound				
Am	b3	11	5	b7	R	from b3	Like the blues scale				

Major Pentatonic Over Dominant Chords							1	2	3	5	6
C Maj Pent	C	D	E	G	A	sub	notes				
C7	1	2	3	5	6		Works fine...not especially "dominant".				
D9sus (D11)	b7	R	9	11	5	from b7	Floaty dom. sus sound (Maiden Voyage)				
Gb7 (b5 #5 b9 #9)	b5	#5	b7	b9	#9	tritone	GOLD! All the hip alt. dom. notes!				
G13 sus	11	5	13	R	9	from 4	Another floaty dom. sus. sound				

Minor/Major Pentatonic subs							1	2	b3	5	6
C min/maj pent	C	D	Eb	G	A	sub	notes				
C7 (in a blues)	1	9	b3(#9)	5	13		Nice in a blues for both I and IV chords				
F13	5	13	b7	9	3	from 5	Cool 13 chord				
B7 (b9 #9 #5)	b9	#9	3	#5	b7	from b9	GREAT alt dom color notes!				
Cm 6/9	1	9	b3	5	6		Very cool min 6/9 sound				
Am7(b5)	b3	4	b5	b7	R	from b3	clear half-dim. sound				

Major/Minor (aka Major b6, Harmonic Major) Pentatonic subs							1	2	3	5	b6
C Maj/min pentatonic	C	D	E	G	Ab						
Ab Ma7(#5)	3	#4	#5	7	R	from 3					Hip Ma 7 #5 sound
Dm7(b5)	b7	R	9	11	b5	from b7					Floatier half-dim sound
Fm (Ma7)	5	6	7	9	b3	from 5					I love this min/maj sound!
E7 (#5 b9)	#5	b7	R	#9	3	from #5					altered dominant
Bb13(#11)	9	3	#11	13	b7	from 9					great over lydian dominant

Lydian Pentatonic subs							1	2	3	#4/b5	6
C Lydian pentatonic	C	D	E	F#	A						
Ab7 b5 or #5, b9	3	b5	#5	b7	b9	from 3					Cool altered dominant
Gb7 b5 or #5, #9	b5	#5	b7	R	#9	from tritone					Cool altered dominant
D9	b7	R	9	3	5	from b7					basic dom. 9
C13(#11)	R	9	3	#11	13						Lydian dominant

**Diminished Pentatonics:** make sure you are using the right diminished scale for the chord! The whole-half diminished is used for diminished chords, the half-whole diminished is used for dominant chords. There are 3 “families” of diminished scales, each with four notes a minor 3rd apart. Memorize these three sets of four notes:

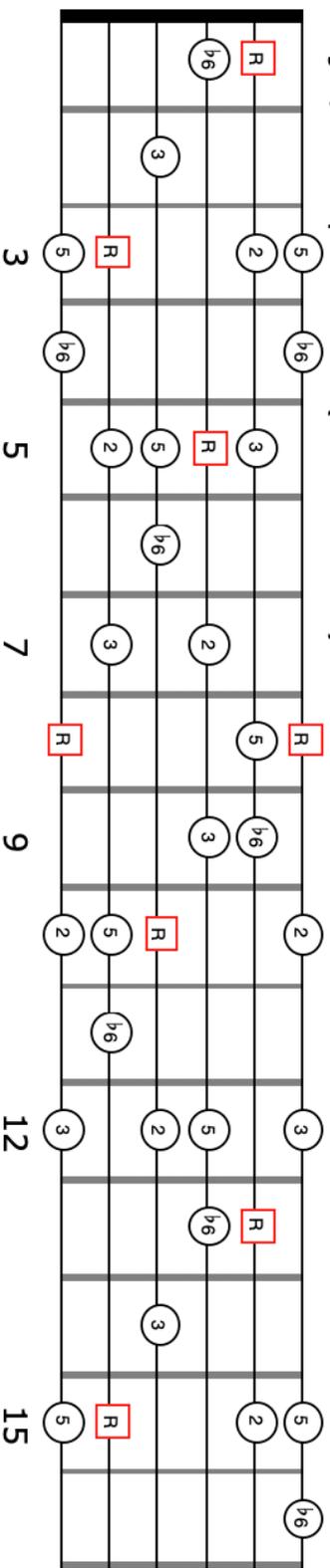
C	Eb	F#/Gb	A
C#/Db	E	G	Bb
D	F	Ab	Bb

# Altered Pentatonic Scale Positions

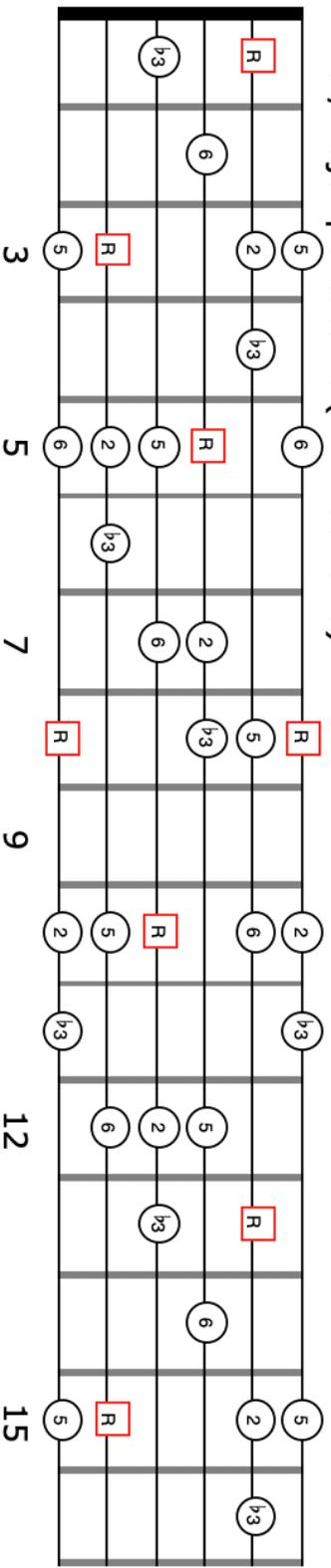
Central Coast Jazz Guitar Festival 2025

Mike Dana

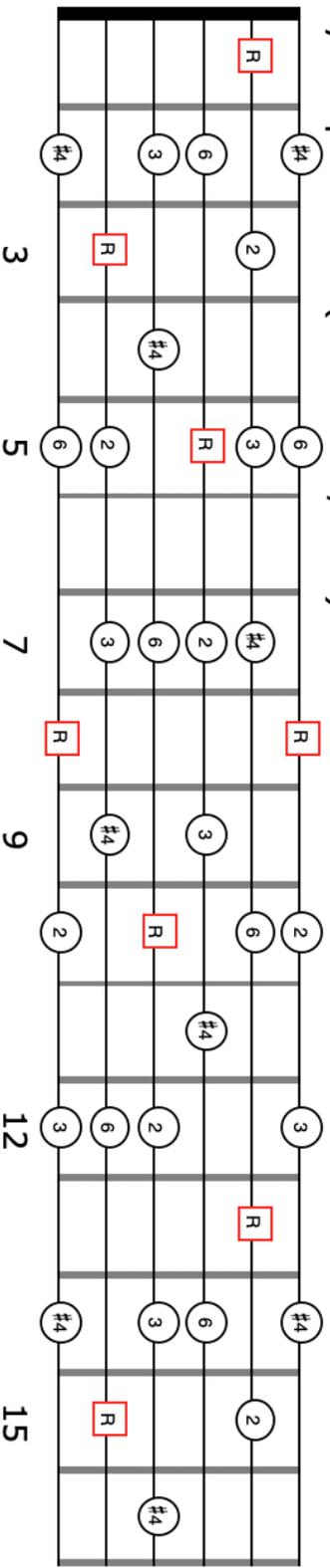
## Major/minor pentatonic (1 2 3 5 b6)



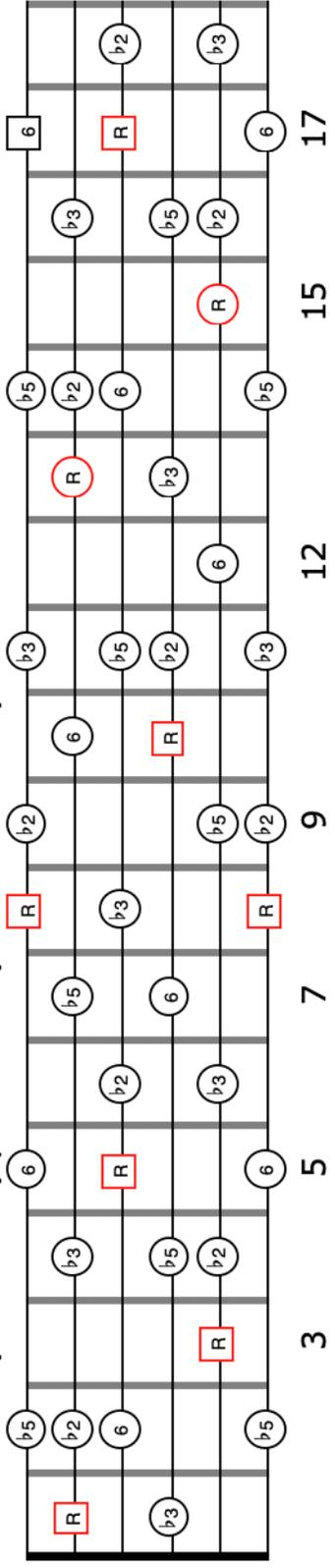
## Minor/major pentatonic (1 2 b3 5 6)



## Lydian pentatonic (1 2 3 #4/b5 6)



Diminished (half-whole) pentatonic (1 b2 b3 b5 6)



Diminished Ma7 (whole-half) pentatonic (1 2 b3 b5 7)

