

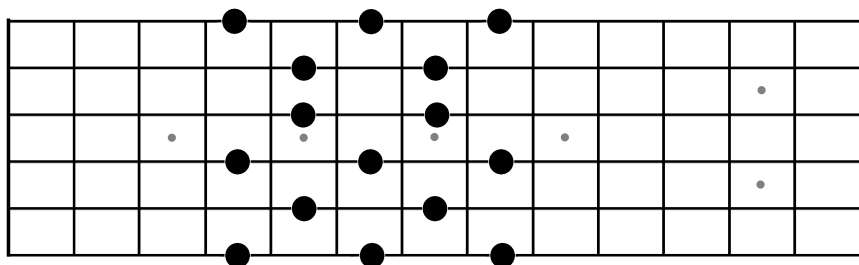
Essential Altered Scales

by Andy Drudy

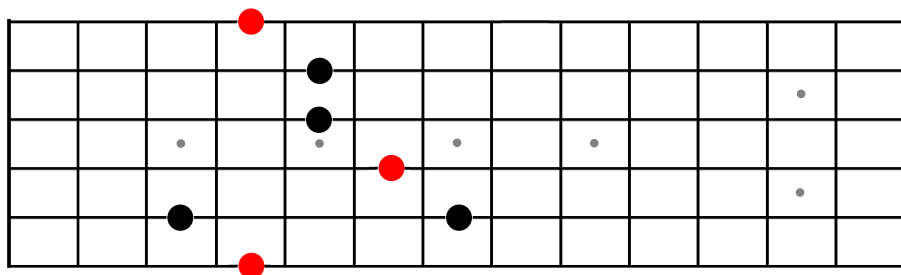
When improvising over complex harmony, eventually a player has to learn how to deal with altered dominant chords. There are four common chords that you have to deal with. Sharp 5th, flat 5th, sharp 9th and flat 9th. Lets take a look at each of these. There is a scale called the “altered scale” which is a mode of the melodic minor and contains *all* these chord tones and will therefore work over any altered dominant chord. We will look at that last of all.

The whole tone scale to deal with augmented chords of 7#5 chord types

The whole-tone scale is a scale made up of whole tones only. It contains all the chord tones contained in a 7#5 chord. The scale is as follows. Note that no root note is indicated. This is because *any* of the notes can be the root note due to the scale being symmetrical in shape.



A more focused sound can be created by using an augmented arpeggio. All the tones are a major third apart, so once again any of the chord tones can be the root note. The arpeggio can be repeated up four frets or a major third up (or down).



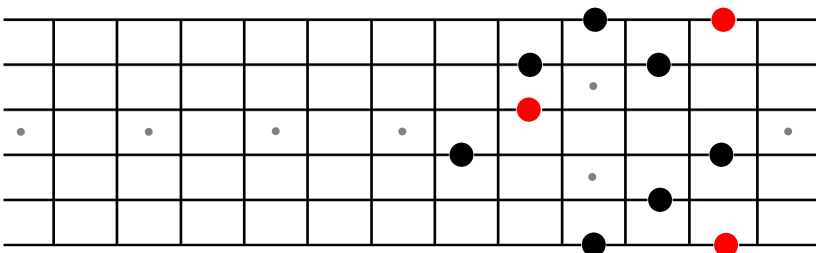
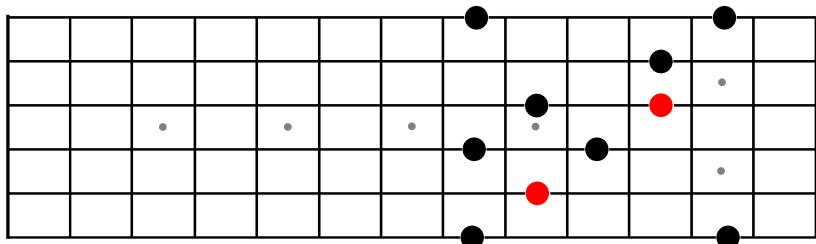
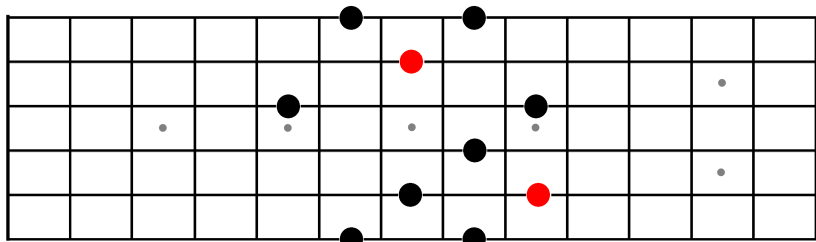
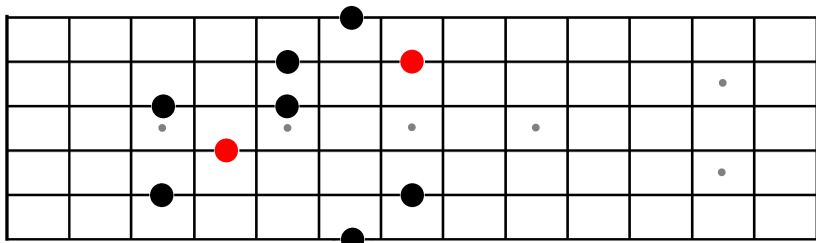
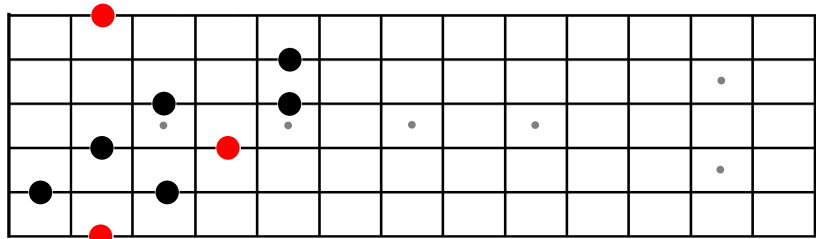
G Augmented Arpeggio.

Try improvising over following chord progression using these scales.



Dealing with a dominant flat five chord

For this chord type we need a set of arpeggios.



There are no shortcuts here. Learn them!

Try improvising over the following chord progression.

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G major. The first staff contains four measures of music, with the first two measures labeled Gma7 and the last two labeled A7(b5). The second staff contains four measures of music, with the first labeled Am7, the second D7, the third Gma7, and the fourth D7. Both staves use a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#).

Dealing with a dominant flat 9th chord

The most common occurrence of a flat 9th chord is in a minor II-V-I progression. For the II and V chord, the tonality shifts to the harmonic minor. The scale we will use is the fifth mode of the harmonic minor, which we will look at in a moment.

The arpeggio for this chord is rather more interesting. For improvising over a 7 flat 9 chord we can use a diminished arpeggio up a half step. So to play over G7 flat 9 We could use A flat diminished arpeggio.

Let us examine why this is.

a G7th consists of....

G – B – D – F

a G7th flat 9 chord consist of....

G – B – D – F – A flat

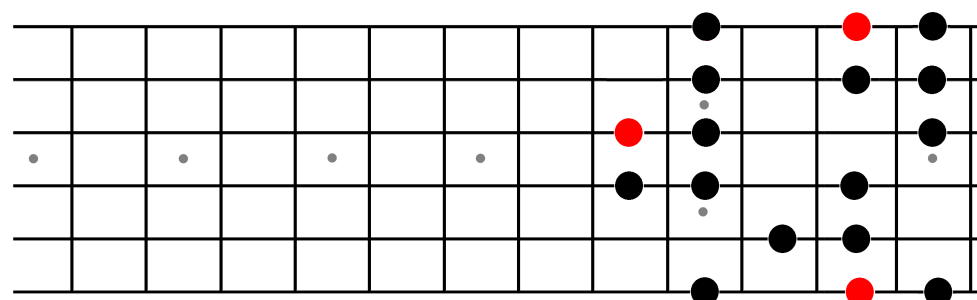
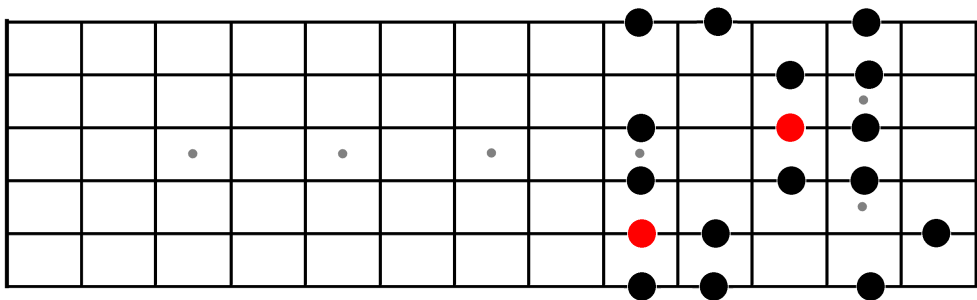
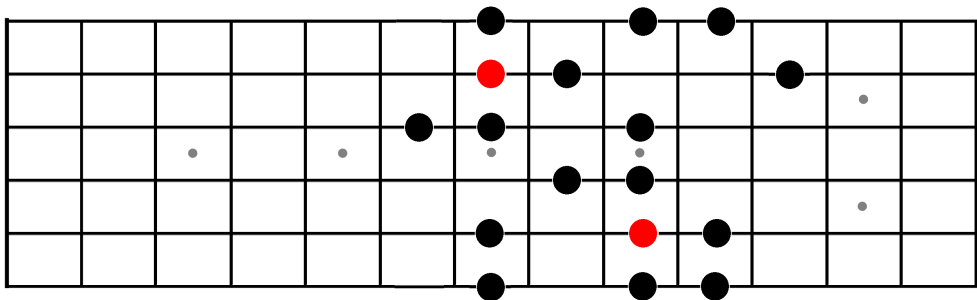
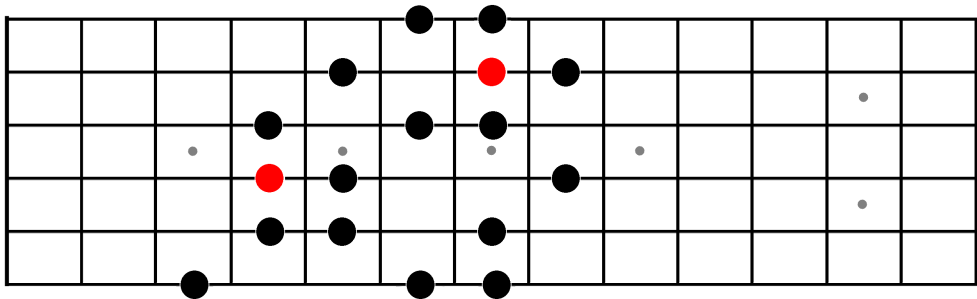
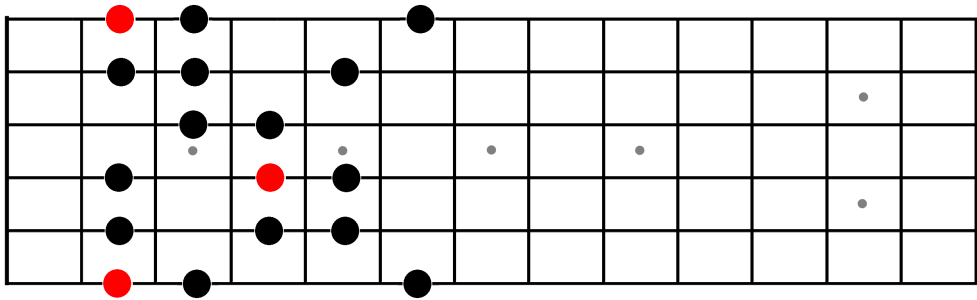
If we leave out the root note (the G)....

B – D – F – A flat

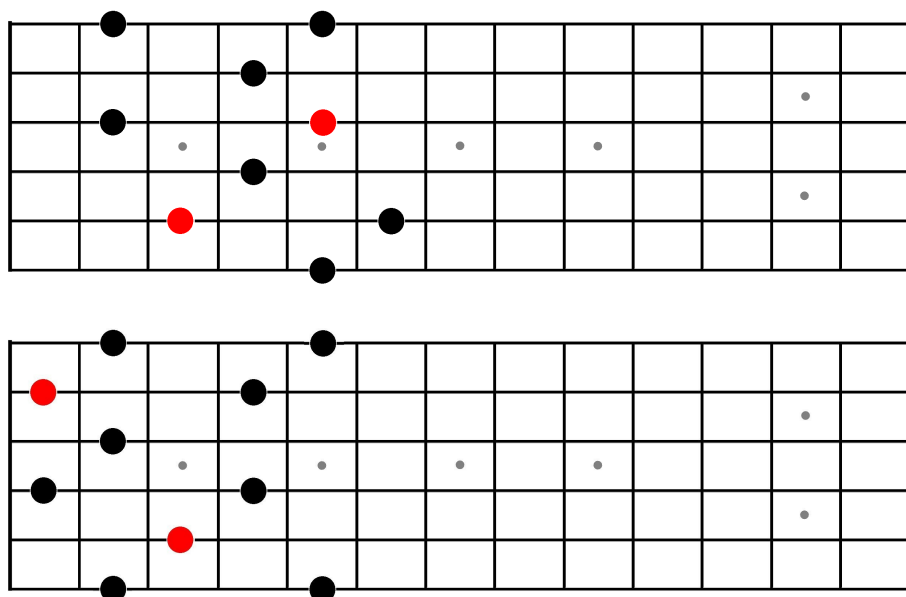
All the notes are a minor third apart and therefore a diminished chord. Any note can therefore be the root note of this chord. So, for a 7th flat 9 chord, we can use a diminished arpeggio up a half step. (G7th flat 9 > A flat dim). In this case, the flat nine becomes the root note of the diminished chord.

The scales we use for a 7th flat 9 chord, as we said earlier are the fifth mode of the harmonic minor. The patters are as follows.

7th flat 9 Scales



Diminished arpeggios are as follows. Since they repeat every minor third, we only need two patterns.



There are other patterns, but I would recommend that you try and work them out for yourselves.

Dealing with a dominant sharp 9th chord

There is one scale that you can play over *every* altered dominant scale. It is, appropriately named the altered scale. It is sometimes called the Super-Locrian mode. It is the seventh mode of the melodic minor ascending scale. In the key of C, it goes as follows....

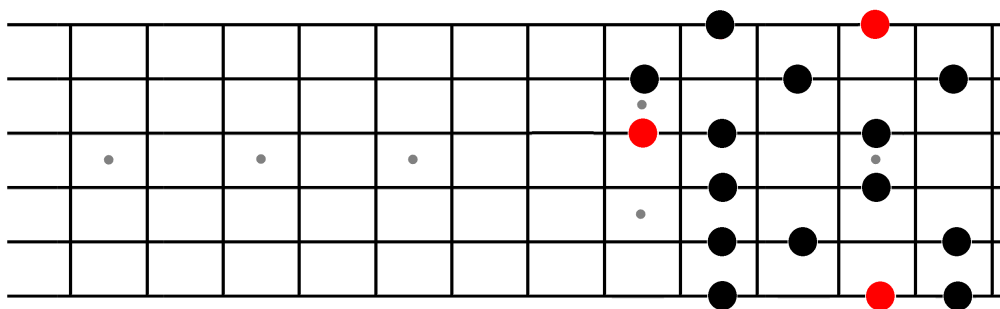
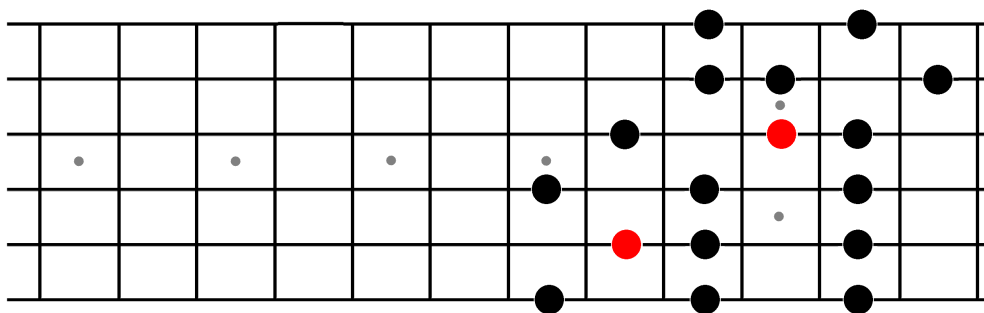
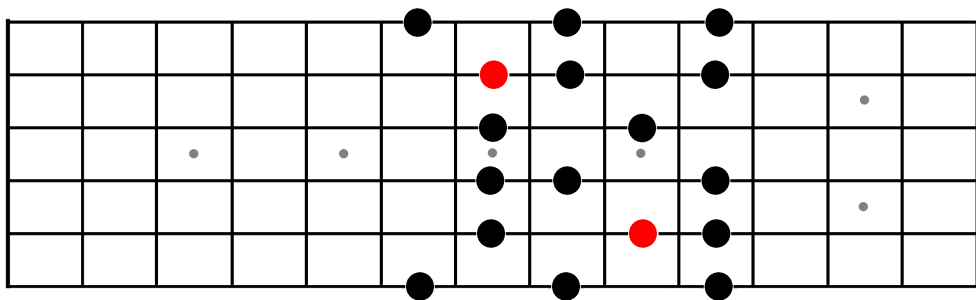
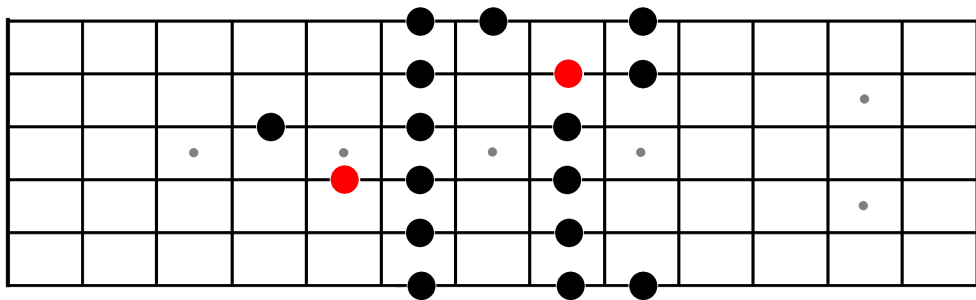
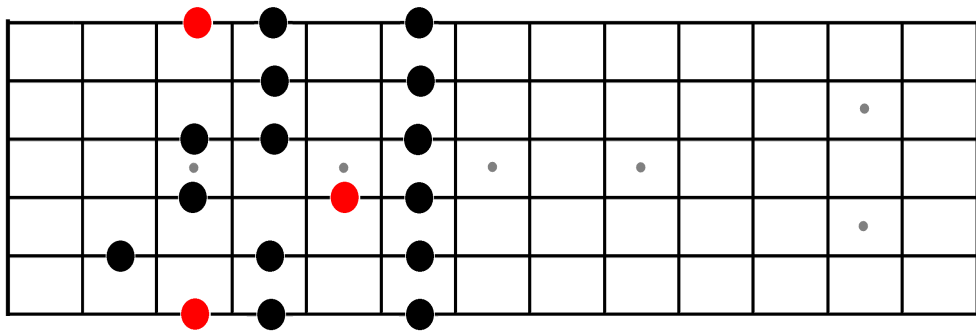
C - D flat - Eflat - Fflat - Gflat - Aflat - Bflat - C

It contains all our altered dominant tones. The sharp 5th, flat 5th, sharp 9th and flat 9th, and so, will work over any altered dominant chord. So now we have different possible scales we can play over the same altered dominant chord. Which do you use? Well, that is entirely your call. Explore the sounds of each of the scales, get them under your fingers, and then, sonically, use them as you feel appropriate.

It is important at this stage that you are familiar with the sound of each of these scales. This is the really hard work. When you have learnt the altered scales (of ever type), learn how to sing it without an aid. Remember, when improvising, your brain should be engaged in choosing the notes, not your fingers.

The patterns for the altered scale are as follows.

The Altered Scale



There are many ways and means of creating an altered sound over a dominant chord. Try substituting different arpeggios over each other. For example, experiment with playing a dominant 7th arpeggio up a half step from the chord you are playing. So over A7th, play B flat 7th, and try and resolve your line somehow back to A7th. Like the Altered Scale, this also gives you all the altered 5ths and 9ths. Resolving your line is all-important. Try the same thing up a minor 3rd (C7 over A7) or up a flat five (E flat 7 over A7). Each of these will give you a strange and new landscape to explore.

THEN.... Try playing anything over a dominant 7th chord; minor 7th arpeggios; half diminished arpeggios; diminished scales; or even completely random notes starting from any point in the chromatic scale above the root. Now we have an unlimited tonal universe of sound to explore. Good luck with that!

Rhythm

Please remember that this discussion of altered harmony is only half of the picture. Literally only half the picture. How you approach rhythm will radically effect how your phrases sound. Whilst this topic is far too broad to deal with here, it is of primary importance that you explore this field in conjunction with your choice of notes.