Sometimes ukulele songs (and those of other stringed instruments) are shown in tablature. In ukulele tablature, the four lines each represent one of the ukulele’s strings; I’ve included the string names to the left of the line to show you. Note that the “bottom” line is the “G” string.

For many folks, tablature at first seems a bit “backwards” in where you’d guess the notes to be. It sometimes helps to think of holding up your ukulele to the tabalature and you can “see” where the strings/notes are in relation to the lines.

The numbers on the line tell you which fret you need to press that string down. If there’s a “0” it means you should pluck it as an open string (no fingers on any of the frets).

If you don’t know how to read standard musical notation but you do learn to read tablature, you can quickly “teach” yourself to read simple musical notation by comparing the fingers you’re using in the tablature to the note depicted directly above it in the standard notation. Then all you have to do is memorize the “letter name” of the fingers you’re playing and you’ll also learn to read the treble clef (no bass clef for ukulele--our instruments don’t go that low).

Knowing how to read tablature allows you to venture into melody, not simply chords. You can also learn to play “chord-melody” style which blends playing melody with strumming chords; it’s pretty impressive and not as difficult as it sounds.

When you see an “X” on one (or more) of the lines, or when you see nothing at all on it, that means not to play that string at all. This is very different than having a “0” on a string—which means that you play that string but you play it “open” (with no finger on the string).

Try it for yourself; pluck each note shown once. Do you recognize the song?

Here’s how to “translate” it:

**Measure 1:** For the first two notes, hold down the second string (E string) at the first fret. For the second two notes, hold down the first string (A string) at the third fret.

**Measure 2:** For the first two notes, hold down the first string (A string) at the fifth fret. The third and final note in the measure is on the first string, third fret.

**Measure 3:** For this measure, you’re playing entirely on the first string (A string). The first two notes are on the first fret; the second two notes are “open” (no fingers) on that string.

**Measure 4:** This measure is played entirely on the second (E) string. The first two notes are on the third fret; the last note is on the first fret.
Beginner Lesson • Reading Tablature

Song: Red River Valley

This arrangement will give you practice at reading ukulele tablature in a song that you probably already know—so it’s easier to tell if you’re playing it right or not!

Ron Middlebrook included this in the book, “Ukulele Song Book in Notation and Tablature.” Middlebrook does a variety of “simple” arrangement books, including “Ukulele for Cowboys,” “Fun Songs for Ukulele” and “Aloha Collection of Hawaiian Songs.” All are available from Amazon.com.

2. From this valley they say you are going,
I will miss your sweet face and your smile
Just because you are weary and tired,
You are changing your range for awhile.

Chorus
Beginner Lesson • Reading Tablature

Song: Joy to the World

Words by Isaac Watts
Lowell Mason

1. Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King:
come! Let earth receive her King:
come! Let earth receive her King:
Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King:
Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King:
Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King:

2. Joy to the world, the Savior reigns!
   Let men their songs employ;
   while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
   repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy,
   repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.

3. He rules the world with truth and grace,
   and makes the nations prove
   the glories of His righteousness,
   and wonders of His love, and wonders of His love,
   and wonders, wonders, of His love.
You've certainly heard this song before so that makes it easier to learn tab with (because you at least know what it’s “supposed” to sound like!).

You'll notice that the start of many of the measures is more than one note being played--it's a combination of notes; to play those, only strum the strings indicated on the tablature, if there’s a “0” listed, no fingers are touching the fretboard on that string. On the other hand, if you don’t see any number at all on a string, don’t play that string at all.

If you see just two strings being played, simply pluck those two strings--but don’t forget to also finger the fretboard if needed (example: look at the second note played in the third line: it’s a pluck of the first string--the A string--with a finger on the second fret, at the same time as an open string pluck of the fourth string (the G string).

Quick quiz: Can you identify any chords you recognize? Tip: Make the shape indicated and then take a good look at it. Try it with the first note in the song.
Mark Nelson has an absolutely incredible book for developing your fingerpicking/chord soloing skills. Mark was kind enough to let our group use this this song to see if you might like this style of playing. Go to www.mark-o.com to find out about purchasing, “Learn to Play Fingerstyle Solos for Ukulele.”

The book comes with a CD so you can hear what the songs “should” sound like—and play along!
John King specializes in classical and historic songs, arranged for ukulele. This song is available on his website: http://www.Nalu-Music.com. Go there to purchase “The Classical Ukulele”—with 21 ukulele arrangements that are unbelievable—as well as an accompanying CD. The CD is great just to listen to even if you don’t think you’re up to that level of playing yet! Also head over to John’s site for well-researched and well-written history pertaining to the ukulele, its players and makers.
Amazing Grace

Ukulele Arrangement - EZ Chord Solo - Key of C

Arranged by Richard Hefner
http://www.Uke101.com
This is a fun song—it’s written in tablature, but it’s an “old-fashioned” type of tablature with a few differences. It sounds especially nice with a “roll” strum for the first beat. It can sound quite impressive, but it’s pretty simple—really!

First, you need to know it’s a waltz and that means it’s 3/4 time (three beats to the measure, quarter note gets one beat). The way Ernest Kaai (one of Hawaii’s earliest ukulele teachers) presents this song is that you’ll see the tab, broken into measures, but when there’s only one set of notes or chords (as in the first measure) you play that *three* times. When there are single notes spread across the measure, they play once each. When it simply says “one” play the chord and hold for a count of three.

The song is basically three sections, each repeated twice.

Whew! Now give it a try!