BASICS

Double stops

One way to approach the learning and lifelong development of playing scales in double stops is to treat the practising of the actual scales as the last stage of any practice session. Before practising the scales in all the different ways – starting slowly and gradually getting faster, playing in rhythms and accents and so on – first spend time on scale-studies and exercises in double stops. These engrain the necessary abilities and good habits which then lend a basis of true skill to the playing of the actual scales.

Thirds

This is a classic method of practising scales in thirds:



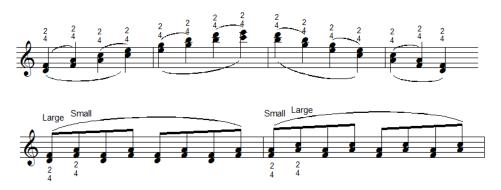
After establishing the distance and feeling of the shift (1), it is a simple matter to place the second and fourth fingers in between (2). This procedure can easily be turned into a sequenced exercise:



After the eight bars you can resolve the sequence on to a new tonic one semitone up, and continue from there. Or you can start it again somewhere else on the fingerboard.

This harmonic progression may be a little difficult for less advanced players, especially the last couple of bars, but it doesn't matter: the point is that after a few minutes spent on such an exercise an ordinary scale seems remarkably straightforward.

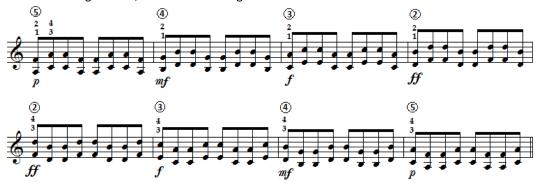
It is also good to play only the second and fourth fingers. This helps to establish in both the mind and the fingers whether a third is major and therefore 'small' (the fingers a tone-and-a-half apart) or minor and therefore 'large' (the fingers two tones apart):



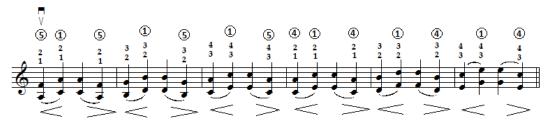
Sixths

Broken sixths are an excellent way to train a good left hand position, since you need to keep the third and fourth fingers ready, close to the string, while playing the first and second fingers. Repetitive patterns which train the changing finger patterns (a major sixth is a tone apart, a minor sixth a semitone) are very useful. Adding these two ideas together, and then adding something for the bow to make the exercise good for both hands, you arrive at the following sort of sequence:

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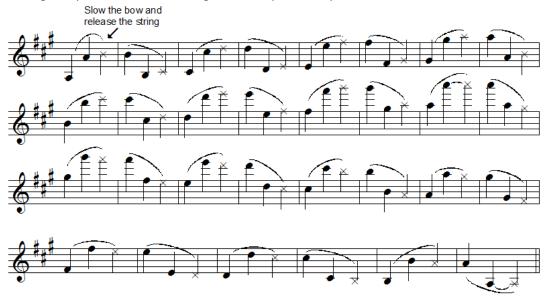
Working into and out of the bridge is an excellent way to improve tone production. See how good your ordinary scale sounds afterwards:



Octaves

One of the most important elements of a good left hand in playing octaves is that the entire hand is free of tension. One of the chief causes of tension comes from not releasing between octaves, which is like trying to move without first taking the brakes off. When playing from one octave to another, the fingers fractionally release the string.

In this simple exercise keep both fingers of the octave down on the string throughout, but play only the printed notes. The x-note in the third beat of each bar means to 'ghost' into the next stopped note. Use a tiny amount of bow and no bow pressure so that there is barely any sound, and release the string with the left finger as you move. See the string itself rise upwards as you release it.



As you release the strings (having used minimum finger pressure in the first place – just enough to stop the string cleanly), feel the entire hand release. Allow it to soften across the base joints, and in the opposition between the thumb and the fingers; feel a softening in the wrist, and a 'letting go' in the upper arm and shoulder. Then recapture the same sensations of release between the notes when you play the octaves normally.