

How to Play Pickleball - The Beginner's Guide

You've heard your friends chatting about pickleball and you've decided it's time to pick up the sport yourself, but you have no idea how to play pickleball! From scoring to equipment - our beginner's guide has everything you need to go from pickleball newbie to pickleball pro!

Pickleball could be described as a cross between tennis, badminton, and ping pong. Players play on a badminton-size court with a tennis net and use a paddle similar to ping pong. Confused yet? Don't worry - it's easy and FUN!

Pickleball is a low-impact sport that is enjoyed by people of all ages and all athletic abilities. The game is structured for limited movement on the court so there's no worrying about sprinting from one side of the court to the next. Because of this game's unique structure and rules, it's no wonder pickleball is the fastest growing sport in the country. People of all ages can not only play pickleball easily, but they can play someone of any age. It's not out of the ordinary to see seniors and kids on the same court! Because of its growing popularity, this sport is commonly played in local gyms, community centers, parks, and backyard courts.

Pickleball was created in the summer of 1965 when Joel Pritchard and Bill Bell saw their families bored with nothing to do. Determined to create a game that the entire family could enjoy, these two headed into Pritchard's garage to see what they could find. After rummaging around, they found ping pong paddles, a perforated plastic ball, and headed to the badminton court.

With some help from their friend Barney McCallum, they soon realized that you could easily bounce the plastic balls off the ground. Soon, the inventors decided to move the badminton net from its 96" height to 36" tall. A few games later, the sport we have all come to love was created: pickleball.

You may have noticed there's no mention or use of pickles anywhere. Whether you're a fan of pickles or not, this aspect of the sport often leaves newcomers confused. So, where did the name of the game come from? The Pritchard family's dog, Pickles! According to McCallum, Pickles would run up and steal the ball when everyone was playing.

PICKLEBALL RULES AND HOW TO PLAY

- Pickleball can be played as singles or doubles
- Points are scored only by the serving team
- First team to 11 points with a lead of 2 points wins the game

Scoring

- The score is called out as three numbers: 1) serving team score 2) receiving team score, and 3) server number (one or two)
- To start a match, the score is called out as “zero-zero-two”
 - In normal doubles play, each player on a team gets to serve before the serve switches to the other team. On the first serve of the game, however, only one player from the serving team may serve before it switches to the other team. For this reason, the first player to serve calls out “zero-zero-two” to indicate that they are the final server on their team before it switches.
- If a point is scored, the server moves to the left side of the court and serves again and the serving team continues alternating as points are scored
- A team scores when it is their serve and their opponent faults

Serving

After deciding which team serves first, follow these serving rules:

- The first serve must be done at the right-hand court and alternates left/right sides with each new serve
- Server must call the score before serving and keep both feet behind the back line
- The serve must be an underhand swing
- During a serve, the ball must be hit while still in the air - do NOT have the ball bounce on the ground and then hit it
- The paddle's contact with the ball must be below the server's waist (belly button level) - do NOT serve overhand
- The serve is made diagonally across the court and must land within the confines of the opposite diagonal court
- Only one serve attempt is allowed
- If the serve is a fault in a SINGLES match, the serve goes to the other team
- If the serve is a fault in a DOUBLES match, the teammate attempts a serve. If they also fault, the serve goes to the other team

Active Play

- When the ball is served, the receiving team must let it bounce before returning, and then the serving team must let it bounce before returning - this two bounce rule is referred to as "double-bounce"
- After the ball has bounced once in each team's court, both teams may either volley the ball (i.e. hit the ball before it bounces) or play it off a bounce
- You may never volley in the "kitchen", the 7' zone on either side of the net
- You may not step into the kitchen or on the kitchen line unless the ball has bounced in the kitchen. After you hit that ball, you must leave the kitchen immediately
- If a point is scored, the server switches sides and initiates the next serve from the left-hand court. This continues until a fault is made - then it is the next team's turn to serve. (SINGLES: both teams switch sides. DOUBLES: only the serving team switch sides, the opponent stays on their side)

PICKLEBALL TERMS AND LINGO

Here are six important terms to get you started:

- **Ace:** A serve that is not returned by your opponent
- **Kitchen:** The nickname for the non-volley zone that extends 7' on either side of the net
- **Dink:** A soft shot that clears the net and drops into the non-volley zone
- **Volley:** Hitting the ball in the air, during a rally, before the ball has hit the ground
- **Rally:** Continuous play that occurs after the serve and before a fault
- **Let:** A serve that hits the net cord and lands in the service court

PICKLEBALL ETIQUETTE

A little competition can be good, but this game is all about community and having fun. Keep these few things in mind when you play and you'll be sure to have a great time and make lasting friendships along the way!

- **Play with integrity:** one of the unique things about pickleball is that players can call the shots in the game they are playing. Be honest if the ball is in or out - and if you're unsure, give the person the benefit of the doubt. Remember, this game is about having fun!
- If a ball from another court comes onto your court, toss back their ball - **do not switch balls.**
- Need to pass a court that has a game going? Wait until play has come to a stop. **Walking behind active play is rude and can be dangerous.**
- There's no room for sore winners in this friendly game. If your opponent misses a shot or hits the ball out of bounds, refrain from yelling and celebrating at their expense.
- **Graciously accept play with other players:** it's likely that you will play a match with those below or above your skill level. Don't steer clear of these players! Instead, kindly accept and play a match or two.

PICKLEBALL EQUIPMENT

Ball: The pickleball is similar to a wiffle ball but more durable. There are no rules as to what color the pickleball must be, but there is a slight difference in the ball whether the

game is played indoors or outdoors. Outdoor balls typically have 40 small holes and indoor balls have 26 larger holes - this is mostly due to wind interference on the courts.

Paddle: Pickleball paddles are a small, solid paddle that is easily maneuvered by the wrist. Paddles are lightweight and typically made out of wood, graphite, or fiberglass with a special polymer core - you can shop our favorites [here](#).

Net: Pickleball nets are 36 inches tall at each end and split the court in half.