



The Basic Rules for Croquet

Croquet is one of the most enjoyed lawn games in the United States today. Equipped with your new set and an understanding of a few basic rules, you will be ready for years of pleasure in your backyard, a park, or other playing field. The fundamental rules and strokes of croquet are easy to master, but you will spend many exciting and enjoyable hours refining your strategies and perfecting your shots. Croquet is a wonderful game for parties and family gatherings because it is both extremely competitive, extremely sporting and can be played by players regardless of age.

There are several different croquet games. The rules given here are for nine-wicket croquet, the most popular non-tournament croquet game in the United States.*

* The United States Croquet Association (500 Avenue of Champions, Palm Beach Gardens, Florida 33148) is a not-for-profit organization for the development and promotion of croquet. The USCA provides detailed rule books, a magazine and other benefits. Consult the USCA rules before tournament play.

The Object of the Game

Simply, the object of the game of croquet is to pass your ball through a series of fourteen wickets arranged in a double-diamond pattern. The first player to make all the wickets and hit the stake wins the game.

The Court

The ideal croquet court is a level lawn or sand surface measuring 100 feet by 50 feet. The illustration shown on the back of this instruction sheet indicates where to place the wickets and stakes for such a court. However, endless variations are possible. You can reduce the size of the court to as little as 20 feet by 10 feet—just reduce the distances between wickets and stakes proportionally. You can set up a court around obstacles such as trees and buildings. You can also play on sloping or rolling ground. Some people who play together regularly enjoy varying the court and creating obstacles to enliven their game.

Starting the Game

There are three versions of nine-wicket croquet possible with this set: **Individual**, **Singles** and **Doubles**. **Individual** – two, three or four players each playing one ball; **Singles** – two players each playing two balls; and **Doubles** – two pairs of players each playing one ball.

In all versions, the balls are played according to the order on the stake: blue, red, black and yellow. In **Doubles**, always pair the blue and black balls and the red and yellow balls.

A flip of a coin decides who plays blue. At your first turn, place your ball at least one mallet head in back of the first wicket. Strike the ball, attempting to pass it completely through the first two wickets. You must strike the ball with the end of the mallet, never with the side. Your strike must be a clear, concise hit with *no double tapping or pushing*. Each player has one stroke per turn and can earn extra strokes in several ways.

Extra Strokes

Each time you pass through a wicket in the correct direction and order, you gain an extra stroke. For example, if you are lucky enough to pass through both wickets on your first stroke, you get two extra strokes.

If you hit another ball (but do not hit it out of bounds), you receive two additional strokes. Pick up your ball and bring it to the resting spot of the struck ball. Now you may take your additional strokes in one of three ways:

① Place your ball a mallet's head from the struck ball and take your two extra shots.

② Place your ball in contact with the struck ball and drive them both with one stroke. This is called a *split shot* and counts as your first stroke. The split shot allows you to send both balls to desired positions on the court. This stroke is one of the most important and effective shots in croquet. After taking your split shot, you have a second stroke remaining.

③ Place your ball in contact with the struck ball. Hold your ball with a hand or a foot. Strike your ball—thus sending the other ball away from you. This counts as your first shot, and you still have a remaining shot. You must be careful not to drive the struck ball out of bounds, for if you do it will be the end of your turn.

Making A Wicket

To make a wicket, the ball must go through it completely so that no part of the ball remains on the entering side of the wicket. If you can place your mallet gently on the entering side of the wicket and it does not come into contact with the ball, then the wicket is good. Remember, all wicket shots must be clean. You cannot stike against the wicket to dislodge a ball or “crush” the ball against the wicket.

You decide a wicket based on where the ball finally comes to rest. If a ball passes through a wicket and then rolls back, the wicket does not count.

You may hit another ball through the wicket from the hand-hold or split shot or just from a hit. If that is the correct wicket for that ball, the wicket counts. However, that ball is not entitled to an extra shot on its next turn.

If a ball passes through a wicket out of the proper sequence, that wicket does not count.

Deadness

You can hit another player’s ball only once. You are then *dead* on that ball until you correctly make your next wicket or hit the turning stake. Making a wicket or hitting the stake cures you of all deadness. You are then “live” on all balls.

The concept of deadness separates American from International rules and adds a whole strategic dimension to the game. Here are some points to keep in mind:

- ❶ If you hit a ball and then it rolls into a second or third ball, you are dead only on the first ball hit.
- ❷ If you hit a ball on which you are dead, your turn ends and all the balls are returned to their pre-shot positions.
- ❸ If you hit a ball out of bounds, your turn ends but you are *not* dead on that ball.

One of the many strategic uses of deadness is *blocking*. An opponent may block your wicket by placing a ball on which you are dead directly in your path. After two consecutive turns you may lift the ball and play through.

Counting Strokes

Extra strokes do not accumulate. For example, suppose you hit a ball, acquiring two extra strokes, and then with your first extra shot hit another ball. You still have only two extra shots. Two extra shots are the most you can have. Remember that when you hit another ball, the stroke ends on impact. If your ball then proceeds through a wicket or out of bounds, it does not count. Play resumes from the struck ball. Here are some examples you are likely to encounter:

- ❶ If you make a wicket and hit a ball on one stroke, you take one extra shot. (Hitting the ball is not counted, but you may strike that ball again on the next stroke and gain the usual two extra strokes.)
- ❷ If you make one or two wickets and then hit the stake, you take one extra stroke.
- ❸ If you hit another ball and then make a wicket, you take two extra strokes. The wicket is not counted and must be made again.

Remember, count your bonus strokes from the first action only; e.g., make a wicket and gain one stroke or hit a ball and gain two strokes.

The Stake

Hitting the upper stake is treated just like making a wicket. You receive one extra stroke and all deadness is removed. *Note: You must play your ball from where it lies after hitting the stake. If it caroms far afield, you will have a hard time shooting back through the wicket.*

Boundaries and Out Of Bounds

Boundaries are important because they force you to keep your shots under control. The easiest way to mark your boundary lines is to mow your playing field a little shorter than the surroundings. You may also run a piece of string around the court, securing it every few yards with a large nail.

A ball is out of bounds when more than half of the ball comes to rest over a boundary line. Replace the ball on the court one mallet head away from the line at the point it went out. The out-of-bounds decision depends on where the ball comes to rest. If the ball goes out of bounds and then bounces back onto the court, it is still in play.

Here are a few ways in which boundary play affects the game:

- ❶ If you stroke your ball out of bounds, your turn ends.
- ❷ If you hit or drive any other ball out of bounds, your turn ends and all balls are brought back to the court a mallet's head away from the line.
- ❸ If you hit a ball on which you are live and that ball remains in bounds although yours skids out of bounds, there is no penalty. Play resumes from the resting place of the hit ball.
- ❹ If you hit a ball out of bounds, your turn ends but you are not dead on that ball.
- ❺ At the end of each turn (not stroke), bring all balls close to the boundary to an even mallet's head from the line.

Finishing the Game

The player or team wins who:

- ❶ has made the most wickets at the end of timed play.
- ❷ is the first player or team to complete all wickets and hit the stake.

Endings are never simple, however. As in chess, the end game in croquet is highly strategic.

Any ball which completes all its wickets and has not hit the final stake is called a *rover*. Rover play has a series of complex and often confusing rules. The rover rules presented here are simplified. Players entering competition should learn the official United States Croquet Association rules. (See page 1)

Rovers stay in the game to help their partners and harass their opponents. A rover may hit any ball only once. (There is no wicket to cure a rover's deadness.) Other players may hit the rover as they would any other ball and receive their extra strokes. If another ball hits the rover and drives it into the final stake, the rover ball is removed from play and the game proceeds. It is always good strategy for a team to finish as close together as possible. Removal of the rover allows the other team to shoot consecutive turns – a great advantage.

Poison Play

Poison Play is a fun backyard croquet variation. Poison Play has an

elimination ending. Any ball which passes through all its wickets without hitting the final stake becomes "poison." Poison balls are free to range the court hunting other balls. As soon as a poison ball strikes any other ball, even if that ball is also poison, the struck ball is out of the game. If another player's ball hits the poison ball, the player earns only *one* extra point. The player may use the shot to try to drive the poison ball through any wicket in any direction. If the player is successful, the poison ball is out of the game. The last ball on the court is the winner.

Penalties

If a player strokes out of turn, he or she loses the next turn in proper order. All balls are replaced to pre-stroke position. For example: if it is blue's turn to play but instead black plays, all balls are replaced and red plays. The next player is yellow, not black.

If a player plays the wrong ball, the turn ends and all balls are replaced.

If a player strokes out of turn or plays the wrong ball, the opponent must call the fault before beginning the next turn. Once the opponent has taken a stroke, the fault of the previous player is automatically condoned. Any wickets, deadness, etc., which occurred during the misplay are valid and play continues.

Time

You may want to set a time limit on games. Usually the limit is between 60-90 minutes. When "time" is called, the player who is shooting is in his or her last turn. All other players will have one turn, after which the game is over and the team or player with the most wickets is the victor.

It is courteous to take your shots quickly. About 45 seconds is generally adequate time to make each stroke.

Strategy

Croquet has hundreds of strategies that you will learn as you play. You will learn them especially quickly when they are used against you by a superior player. Here are some basic strategies to remember:

① **Use the boundaries.** Since it is difficult to hit a ball near the boundary line without putting it out of bounds, use the boundary as a good place to "hide."

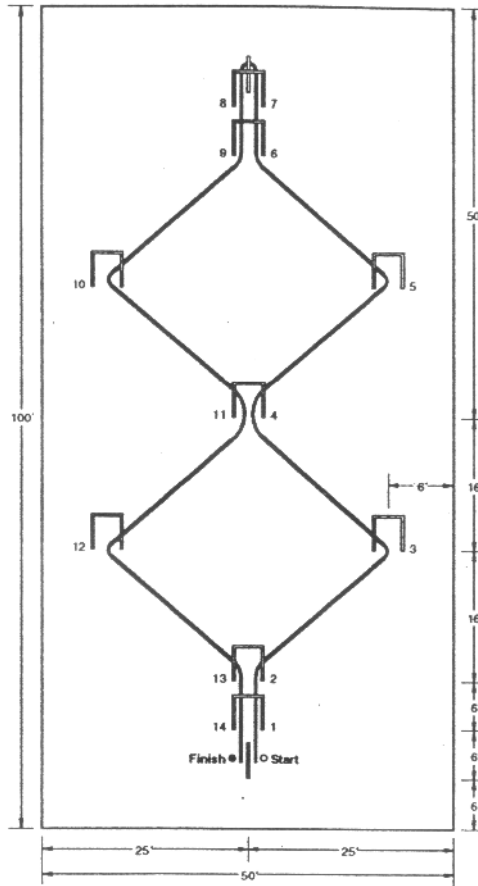
② **Play close to your partner.** Always try to stay alive on your partner's ball unless you are about to make a wicket. When in doubt about what shot to take, a safe strategy is to go to your partner.

③ **Plan ahead.** Always try to think through the most likely shots of the next three balls to play. Look for flaws in your opponent's strategy.

④ **Use deadness.** If an opponent is three-ball dead, pursue your advantage to prevent him or her from making a wicket and clearing deadness.

⑤ **Play as a winner.** Always expect to make that wicket, to hit that ball. Be surprised and shocked if you miss. If you have been playing poorly, when the game is over, set up the balls 20 feet away from a wicket and shoot until you make the wicket. Always leave the court a winner.

Standard Nine-Wicket Court



About the Author

David Turner says that he started playing croquet as a child – and never stopped. He was the Maine State nine-wicket croquet champion in 1987. David lives in Portland, Maine, where he operates an antiquarian bookshop.

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