

# Backyard Croquet: Basic Rules

The game of croquet (pronounced "crow-KAY") is a tradition of backyard recreation in America, as well as a sport that can be enjoyed by young and old alike. Whether you are a novice who plays the occasional friendly game or a determined competitor who gives opponents no quarter, you need to know the rules and have them handy for reference during a game. This special edition of the rules was prepared by the sport's governing body, the United States Croquet Association (USCA), as a guide for informal backyard play. The following rules are suggested for use in play, as it is the purpose of the USCA to standardize one set of basic rules.

Download the Basic Rules today:

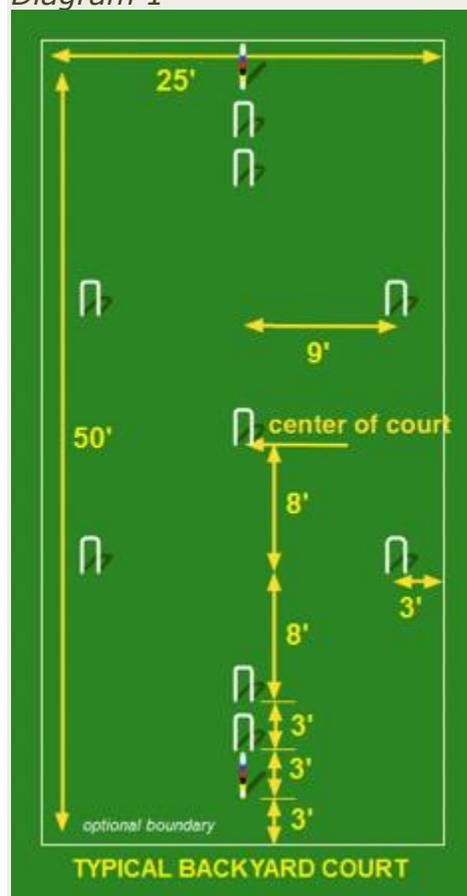
[Basic rules 5 pages](#)

[\[PDF, 246kB\]](#)

You will find some challenging options for tournaments in the Backyard Croquet: Challenging Options and frequently asked questions in the Backyard Croquet: Rules FAQ's

## The Court

Diagram 1



9-wicket court layout

A backyard croquet court doesn't have to be a perfectly manicured lawn, but short grass provides the best playing surface. If you have room, the official full-size court is a rectangle, 100 feet long by 50 feet wide. For backyard play you can adjust the size and shape of the court to fit the available space. Use string or chalk to mark definite boundaries if you choose, or just mark the corners with flags or stakes

### **The Wickets and Stakes**

The nine wickets and two stakes are arranged in a double-diamond pattern as shown in the diagram. If you are playing on a smaller court, the distances shown should be scaled down in proportion to the length and width of the court. The wickets should be firmly planted in the ground, and the width of the wickets should be uniform throughout the court.

### **The Balls**

For a two- or four-player, two-sided game, you need four balls. The colors usually used are blue, red, black, and yellow. One side (with one or two players) plays with blue and black, and the other with red and yellow. For a six-player team game, you need six balls. In team play, one side plays blue, black, and green, and the other side plays red, yellow, and orange. In "one-ball" games, you need one ball per player.

### **The Mallets**

Each player uses a mallet. Only the striking (end) face may be used to strike a ball, unless the players have agreed to allow the use of "side" shots or other shot-making variations.

### **Optional Accessories**

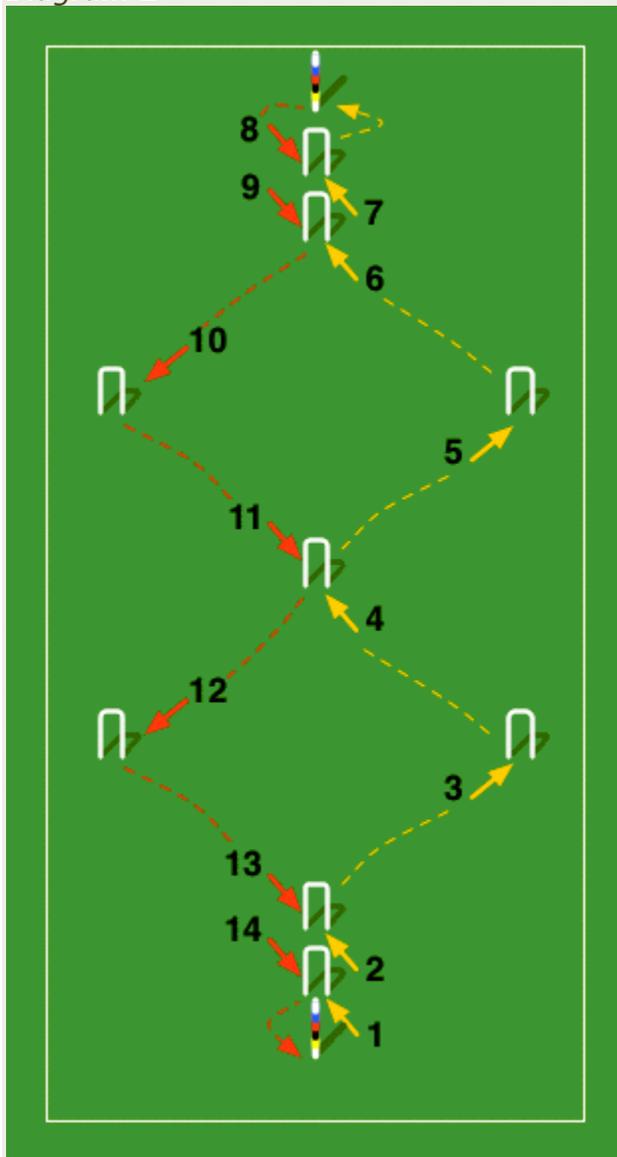
You can use colored clips or clothespins to mark the next wicket your ball must go through. The clip is picked up when a wicket is scored, then placed on the ball's next wicket at the end of the turn.

### **Object of the Game**

The object of the game is to advance your ball through the course scoring points for each wicket and stake in the correct order and direction. The winner is the first side to score 14 wicket points and 2 stake points for each of its balls. In a timed game if the time expires, the team with the most points at the end of the time period wins.

### **Starting Point**

Diagram 2



Sequence of wickets

All balls are played into the game from a spot halfway between the finishing stake and wicket #1. The order of play is blue, red, black, and yellow. When four balls are played with two players, the sides are blue/black against red/yellow; with four players (doubles) each player plays one color ball.

## Order of Play

The sides should toss a coin or hit closest to the middle wicket to determine the order of play. The side winning the coin toss has the choice of playing first blue/black or second with red/yellow. The order of play throughout the game is blue, red, black, yellow. When six balls are played, the order of play throughout the game is always blue, red, black, yellow, green, and orange. The sides can be played by teams of two consisting of

blue/yellow, red/green, and black/orange or teams of three consisting of blue/black/green and red/yellow/orange)

Many croquet players like to play singles with only one ball per side, the winner being the player who advances his or her ball around the court first. This popular variation is played with the same rules as regular singles or doubles croquet, but any number of players from two to six can play. The colors may be drawn by lot to determine the order of play is blue, red, black, yellow, green, orange throughout the game.

After all balls have started the game, play continues in the same order until a ball is staked out. When a ball is out of the game, the remaining balls continue in the same order, skipping the ball that has finished the course.

## **Shots**

If a player plays out of turn, there is no penalty. Any ball moved during the out-of-turn play is replaced to its position prior to the error and play recommences properly. If an out of turn is initially condoned (not discovered) but then later discovered, only the last ball played out of turn is replaced and the correct ball then proceeds. Example: if red plays, then blue plays, then yellow plays, yellow is replaced, and then red plays correctly.

If the striker takes a swing at his/her ball and misses entirely, the miss counts as a shot and the turn ends, unless the striker had a second "bonus" shot.

If the striker's mallet accidentally hits another ball other than the striker ball, the shot must be replayed, but with no loss of turn.

## **Turns**

If a player plays out of turn, there is no penalty. Any ball moved during the out-of-turn play is replaced to its position prior to the error and play recommences properly. If an out of turn is initially condoned (not discovered) but then later discovered after other balls have been played, only the last ball played out of turn is replaced and the correct ball then proceeds. Example: if red plays, then blue plays, then yellow plays, yellow is replaced, and then red plays correctly.

If the striker takes a swing at his/her ball and misses entirely, the miss counts as a shot and the turn ends, unless the striker had a second "bonus" shot.

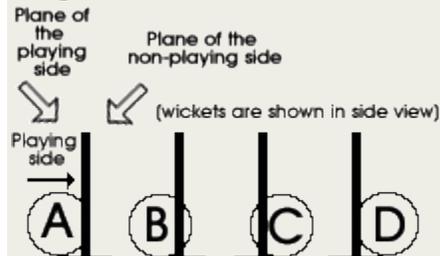
If the striker's mallet accidentally hits another ball other than the striker ball, the shot must be replayed, but with no loss of turn.

## **Scoring Wicket and Stake Points**

Each ball can score wicket and stake points for its side only by going through a wicket or hitting a stake in the proper order and direction. Going through a wicket out of order or in the wrong direction is not counted as a point gained or lost. A ball caused to score its wicket or stake during another ball's turn earns the point for its side, but no bonus shot is earned

as a result. A ball scores a wicket point only if it comes to rest clear of the playing side of the wicket. If a ball passes through a wicket but rolls back, it has not scored the wicket. If a ball travels backwards through its wicket to get position, it must be clear of the non-playing side to then score the wicket in the correct direction. Because wickets can be loose in the ground, it's best not to run the side if the mallet head up or down either plane of the wicket. It's always better to use your judgment sighting by eye.

*Diagram 3*



*Scoring a wicket: A has not started scoring the wicket; B has. C has not finished scoring the wicket; D has.*

### **Bonus Shots**

The striker earns one bonus shot if the striker ball scores a wicket or hits the turning stake. The striker earns two bonus shots if the striker ball hits another ball (a "roquet"). You are "dead" on a ball for extra shots until you clear your next wicket or on the start of your next turn whichever comes first. However, the maximum number of bonus shots earned by a striker is two; there is never a time when a striker is allowed three shots. (See the "Exceptions" section below for examples.)

If two bonus shots are scored by striking another ball, the first of these two shots may be taken in any of four ways:

1. From a mallet-head distance or less away from the ball that was hit ("taking a mallet-head").
2. From a position in contact with the ball that was hit, with the striker ball held steady by the striker's foot or hand (a "foot shot" or "hand shot").
3. From a position in contact with the ball that was hit, with the striker ball not held by foot or hand (a "croquet shot").
4. From where the striker ball stopped after the roquet. (If a boundary is in use and the striker ball went out of bounds, the ball should be measured in one mallet length from where it crossed the boundary).

The second bonus shot after a roquet is an ordinary shot played from where the striker ball came to rest, called a "continuation shot".

Bonus shots may not be accumulated. Upon earning a bonus shot by scoring a wicket, hitting the turning stake, or roqueting another ball, any bonus shot previously earned is forfeited. For example, if a ball roquets a ball and in that same stroke the striker ball hits another ball, the second ball hit is not a roquet and remains where it comes to rest (with no deadness incurred on that ball).

Exceptions: Two extra shots are earned when the striker ball scores two wickets in one

shot. If the ball also hits the turning stake after scoring two wickets, two strokes are earned, not three. Conversely, if the striker ball scores the seventh wicket and hits the turning stake in the same shot, it earns two shots. After the striker ball roquets another ball, it does not earn any extra shots for hitting it again in the same turn before scoring the next wicket in order. However, there is no penalty for hitting the ball again.

### **Wicket and Roquet**

When the striker ball scores a wicket and then in the same shot hits another ball, only the wicket counts and the striker has earned only the one extra shot for scoring the wicket. The striker may then roquet any ball to earn two extra shots. When the striker ball roquets another ball and then goes through a wicket, the wicket has not been scored but the striker earns two extra shots for the roquet.

## **The Boundaries**

If boundaries are established, whenever more than half of a ball (50%+) crosses the inside edge of a boundary, it is "Out of Bounds" and should be brought inbounds and placed one mallet length (or 36 inches) into the court. If players are using mallets of different lengths, agree to a common distance you'll measure in during the game. The ball should be placed 90 degrees inbounds and perpendicular to the line and not diagonally from the line. (Exception: When the striker ball has just roqueted (hit) another ball, the striker may choose to place it in contact with or up to a mallet-head from the ball that was roqueted.) All balls are also immediately brought in a mallet length from the boundary when they are less than that distance from the boundary, except for the striker's ball when the striker has an extra shot.

If more than one ball crosses the boundary on the same spot, the striker may measure any ball inbounds first and then place the other(s) up to a mallet-head's length away from it on either side.

## **Rover Balls**

After a ball scores all of the wickets in the course, its player may choose to keep it in the game as a "rover" to help advance that side's remaining ball(s) and to prevent the opposing side from advancing. During this ball's turn, it may hit any other ball only once per turn, gaining extra shots accordingly, but it does not earn any extra shots or wicket points for running a wicket. Any player may put a rover out of the game by causing it to hit the finishing stake. The rover's side earns the point for the stake, and the order of play continues without the staked-out ball.

## **Time Limit Game**

If time does not permit a game to be played to the stake, a time limit may be set beforehand. A kitchen timer works well to alert players to the end of the time limit. When the time limit is reached the game is over. This is known as "sudden stop". If the score is tied in the "sudden stop" format, the ball closest to its contested wicket gets an extra point for the win.

