



Pickleball is played outdoors and indoors on a 44'x20' court divided by a net 34" at center, 36" at sideline, with four service receiving areas and a unique 7' non-volley zone (NVZ) aka The Kitchen. Solid paddles and special balls similar to Wiffle balls are the only equipment a player needs.

Pickleball is most often played as doubles although it can be played as singles. Recreational and tournament play value good sportsmanship and sociability.

Some Terminology:

1. The Non Volley Zone (NVZ or Kitchen) is within and including the line 7' from the net.
2. Volley - hitting the ball in the air before it bounces.
3. Groundstroke - hitting the ball after it bounces.
4. Rally - a series of groundstrokes and volleys.
5. Dink/Dinking - hitting the ball softly into the NVZ so that it bounces in the NVZ.
6. Lob - a ball hit high in the air over the heads of the other team.
7. Overhead - a volley shot hit from over the head after the other team lobs a ball.

RULES: following are the basic rules which applies to recreational doubles play -

1. Games are played to 11 points with only the serving side scoring points; however, when many players are waiting to play games might be played to 7 or 9 points, or rally scoring might be used.
2. The first team to serve begins from the right-hand court. If

they win the point, the serving team switches position and the server serves from the left-hand side. This continues to alternate until the first team loses the point at which time they remain in position and the other team becomes the serving team beginning serve from their right-hand court. However, at this point and for the rest of the game, each side has both players on each team serve, i.e., it's only the first team serving beginning a game that has only one server. So, after the team loses the first point, the other team player then begins serving from the position they were in when the point was lost.

3. The score must be called before each serve and announced as the team serving score, opponents score, and whether it's the first or second server of the side, for example, 3,1, serving 2. At the start of each game the serve would be called 0, 0, 2 (or some people say 0, 0, start).

4. Games must be won by two points.

Serving and the Double Bounce Rule: Serves must land in the diagonal service box past the NVZ (kitchen) line/ sidelines with other lines being "in" before the receiving team can hit them (first bounce) and when returned to the serving team it must bounce (second bounce) before it can be struck by the serving team. After that balls can be struck before (volley) or after bounces except that incursion violations of the NVZ are not allowed.

Serving Technique: Traditional serves must be hit with an underhand motion with the ball being contacted on the upswing and below the level of the waist (belly button) and the paddle head below the wrist. Either forehand or backhand serves are allowed. Spin can be imparted in the toss only by hand. The top of the paddle must be at or below the wrist at contact. [See this](#) for a video on legal serves. An alternative Drop Serve can be used [Drop serve video for details](#). Drop serve is DROPPED from the hand and can be hit in any manner after it bounces.

Serving Lets Must Be Played: Any served ball that lands in the correct court is good even if it hits the net.

Double hits/carries: unlike most racquet sports, these are legal in pickleball IF they occur in a continuous motion.

Line calls: the team on the side on which the ball hits calls balls in or out; if they are in doubt they can ask the opposing team but then must accept their call; otherwise, if your side is in doubt and the other team can't/won't make a call then the call must be "in" as there are no do-overs. An "out" call must be made or signaled immediately; it is not necessary to call a ball "in" if you play it.

THE KITCHEN aka Non Volley Zone: If you are touching the kitchen lines or inside the kitchen you cannot VOLLEY a ball. If you are behind or to the side of the kitchen lines you can reach over it to volley but you cannot touch the playing surface. If a ball is dinked into the kitchen, i.e. bounces in the kitchen, you can step into the kitchen to play it. Momentum into the kitchen is not allowed after a volley - i.e. losing your balance, volleying from outside the kitchen but running/falling into it, etc.. If inside the kitchen you are considered inside until you establish both feet outside it - i.e., if you jump back in the air to get outside it but volley a ball before landing you have committed a kitchen violation. You can jump over the kitchen line from outside it to another point outside it to make a volley (called an Erne).

The Net: You cannot touch the net with your paddle or your person. You can return a wide ball to the other side without going over the net: ATP (around the post)!

Player positions at start of point: the receiving team will have the receiver at or near the baseline, the partner will be very close to the kitchen line. The serving team will have the server serving anywhere behind and between the sideline and the center line; the partner will be close to the baseline - remember the double bounce rule which requires the serving side to let the ball bounce when it is returned.

General Play and Strategy: generally points are won or lost up at the NVZ (kitchen). The receiving team already has one player near the kitchen and the receiver will return the ball deep into the serving side's court so they can advance quickly to the kitchen line. The serving side will then attempt to also move up to the kitchen line by, if possible, hitting a soft shot (dink) into the NVZ (the third shot drop), a hard low drive, or a lob. If successful then both sides will be up near the NVZ where a series of dinks and/or volleys will decide the point. **THIS ISN'T THE WAY IT ALWAYS GOES, THOUGH!!!**

Dinks and dinking: Dinks are soft shots that drop into the NVZ preventing or making difficult aggressive hits or volleys by the other team, and usually result in an exchange of dinks until someone makes an error: hitting the ball too high, out of court, or into the net. Effective dinking is a key to advanced play.

Third Shot Drop: the third shot drop is also a necessary skill for advanced play. It is a soft shot played from deeper in the court by the serving team especially after the return of serve. Hitting this successfully allows the serving team to advance to the NVZ line. It can also be played any time a team is forced back from the NVZ.

Lobs: a lob is a high shot over the heads and paddles of the opposing team with the goal of driving them back from the NVZ or even being a winning shot. This is also a skill shot as a short or low lob will be aggressively returned.

SAFETY: running backwards can be hazardous so especially for lobs it is better for your partner to come from the side to return the ball. Balls straying onto the court should be called out and the point replayed within reason.

ETIQUETTE: play safely, play to your opponents' abilities, no distracting noises (except communicating with a partner) or actions, it's only a game. Have fun!

Equipment: After you are hooked on the game you'll want to buy a paddle. Almost any paddle in the \$50-\$70 range will be good. Get a few balls for indoor or outdoor play. Outdoor balls have smaller holes and are less subject to wind. Buy balls that are certified for tournament play by USAPA. Onix makes a good ball for recreational play, Franklin X-40 is another good brand and very often used in tournament play as are Durafast 40. Paddles and balls can be purchased at places like Dick's, Amazon, and [Pickleball Central](#). Pickleball Central has a lot of information on paddles (can get confusing, newbies ask to try out some of the different paddles you'll see at the Y or Rec), a 30-day return on paddles, fast shipping and free shipping over \$70 which is easy to reach with a paddle and some balls. They also will give you 5% off if you use the code at checkout CRSTURBRIDGE. Sturbridge Pickleball will also get a 5% credit on your purchase. Feel free to ask the experienced players any questions about equipment.

Advanced play and ratings: pickleball welcomes players of all abilities. Strive to improve your playing level. Practice and seek instruction from the more advanced players as they will be glad to help you. Understand that advanced players will sometimes want to play a few games together. The IFP skill rating are appended at the end of this guide - it gives you an idea of where you stand. USAPA tournaments are using a different system but the IFP is a good reference especially for recreational players.

USAPA: The USA Pickleball Association has a website at <https://www.usapa.org>. Here you'll find a [free download of complete rules](#), [Places To Play](#), player rating skill levels, tournament information, and more.