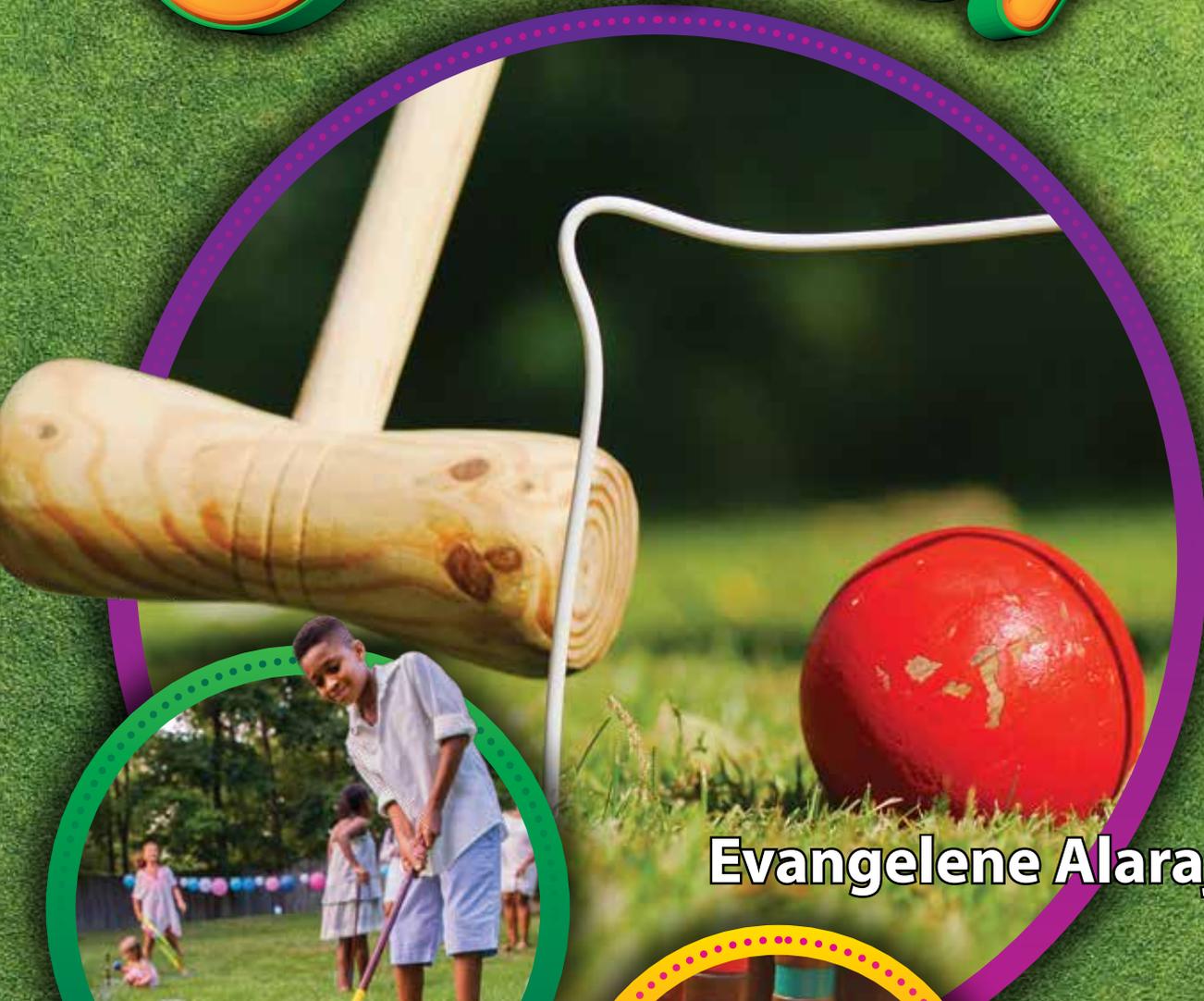
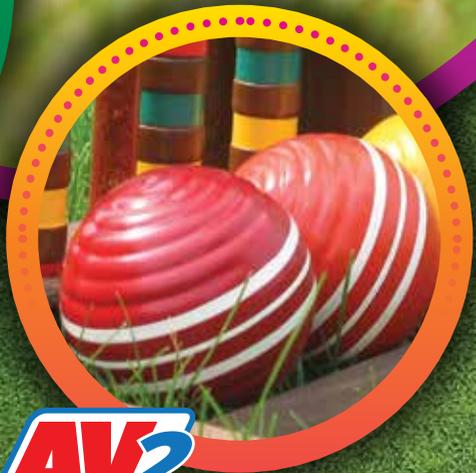


# Croquet



Evangelene Alaraj



Backyard  
Games



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# Croquet

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# What Is Croquet?

A backyard is a place for fun and games. People often hold parties in their backyard. Sometimes, they get together for more informal gatherings. Games are a popular activity for either event.

Croquet is a stylish backyard game. Its hoops and colored balls turn a normal lawn into a country club. Players strike balls through hoops called wickets. The goal is to finish the course first. Balls must pass through an order of wickets, earning a point with each pass.

Like most games, croquet developed over several centuries. French villagers played a game called *paille maille*, meaning “ball” and “mallet.” Using a shepherd’s crook, they hit the balls through the hoops. Eventually, the game traveled to England, under the name *pall mall*.

Over time, a new style of *pall mall*, called croquet, became popular in England. Businesses saw an opportunity. They made thousands of rule books and equipment sets. Soon after, Americans developed an interest in playing. Backyard croquet is the American style of the game.

Early croquet balls were made from wood and the hoops from bent willow branches.



# Timeline

Once considered a game for kings and queens, croquet has become a game for the masses. People from all walks of life have come to enjoy its calm but competitive nature.

After an early form of croquet travels from France to England, King Charles II builds a pall mall court of powdered cockleshells. Players use mallets, wooden balls, and hoops decorated with flowers.



American writers and movie producers on the East and West Coasts become big fans of the game. In 1946, the two sides meet for an East–West Croquet Championship. The East Coast wins the cup after an 11-hour final game.



The World Croquet Federation (WCF) forms. It begins to organize international championships.

1660s

1800s

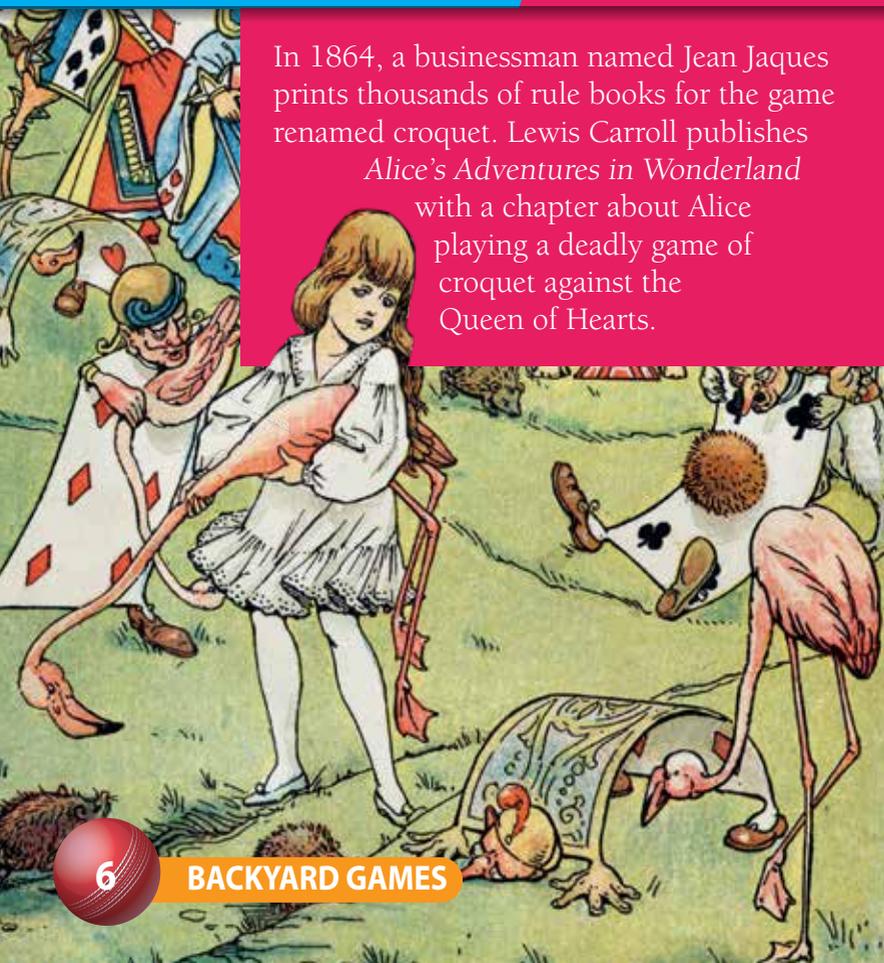
1879

1920s–1950s

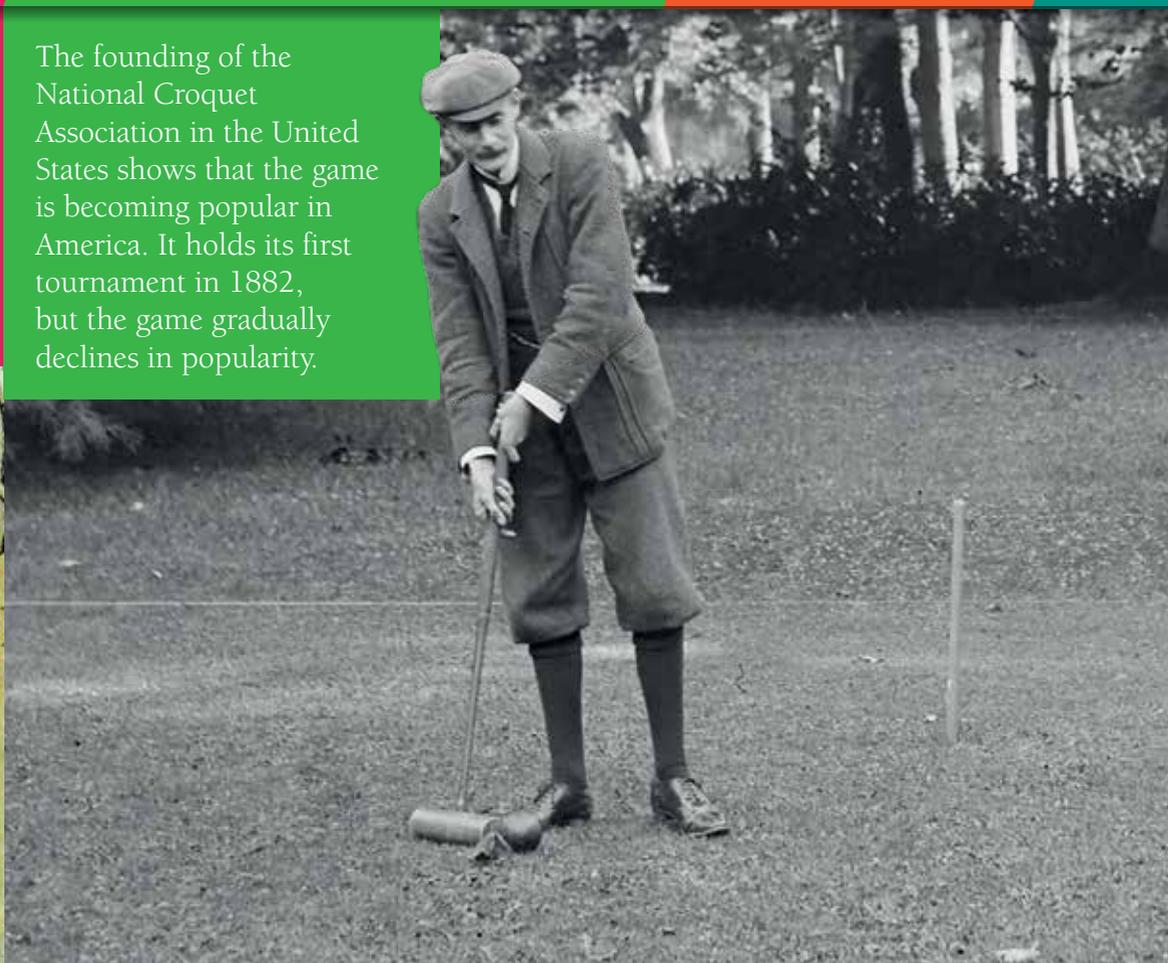
1986

2021

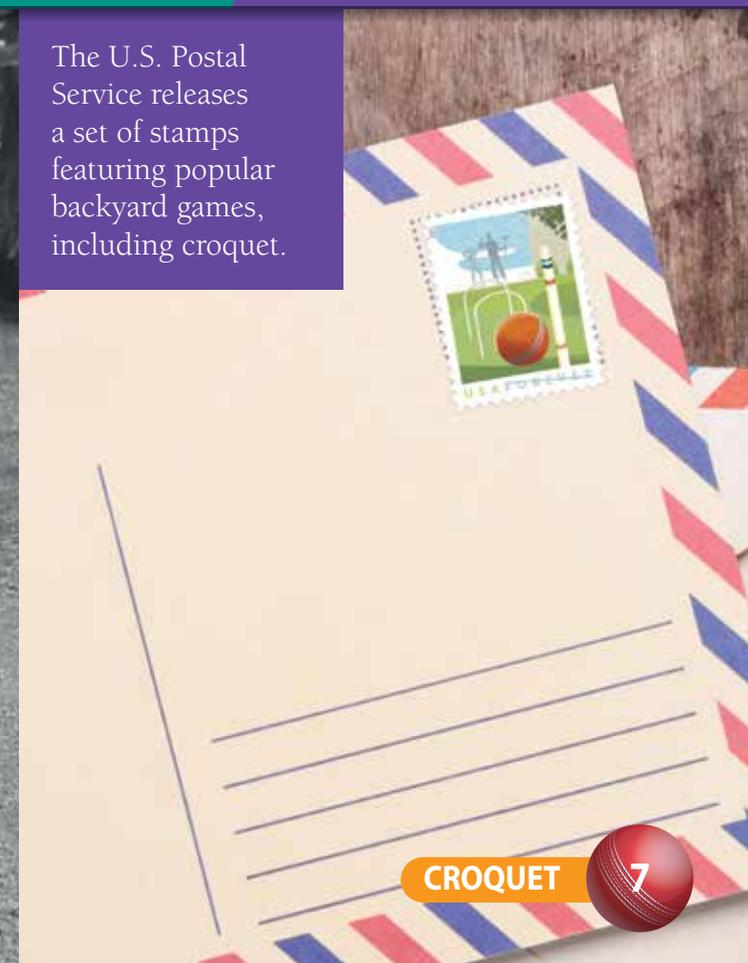
In 1864, a businessman named Jean Jaques prints thousands of rule books for the game renamed croquet. Lewis Carroll publishes *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* with a chapter about Alice playing a deadly game of croquet against the Queen of Hearts.



The founding of the National Croquet Association in the United States shows that the game is becoming popular in America. It holds its first tournament in 1882, but the game gradually declines in popularity.



The U.S. Postal Service releases a set of stamps featuring popular backyard games, including croquet.



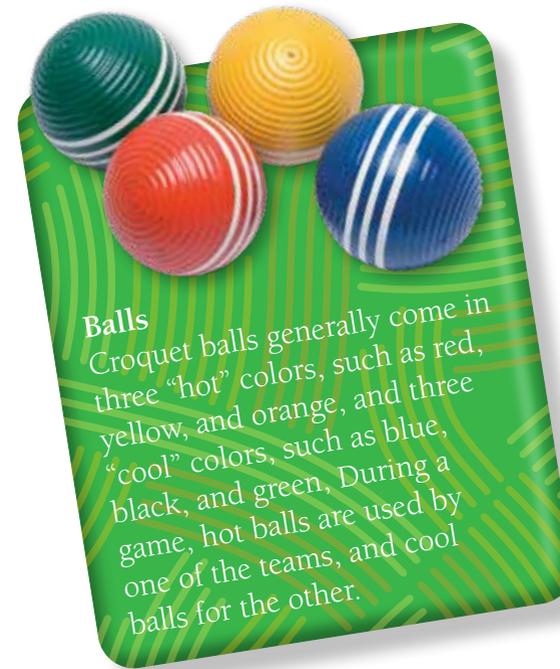
# What You Need

Playing croquet requires several pieces of equipment. These can be found at most sports stores, where they are often sold as sets, with all of the items together. A croquet set generally comes with six mallets and balls, nine wickets, and two stakes.

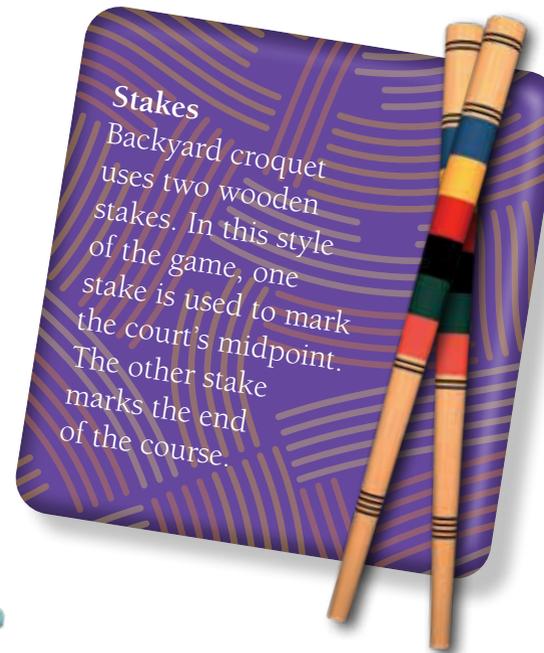
With some imagination, people can make their equipment. The queen in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* uses flamingos for mallets and hedgehogs for balls. In real life, a person could use **recycled materials**.



A croquet set has enough equipment for six people to play.



**Balls**  
Croquet balls generally come in three "hot" colors, such as red, yellow, and orange, and three "cool" colors, such as blue, black, and green. During a game, hot balls are used by one of the teams, and cool balls for the other.



**Stakes**  
Backyard croquet uses two wooden stakes. In this style of the game, one stake is used to mark the court's midpoint. The other stake marks the end of the course.



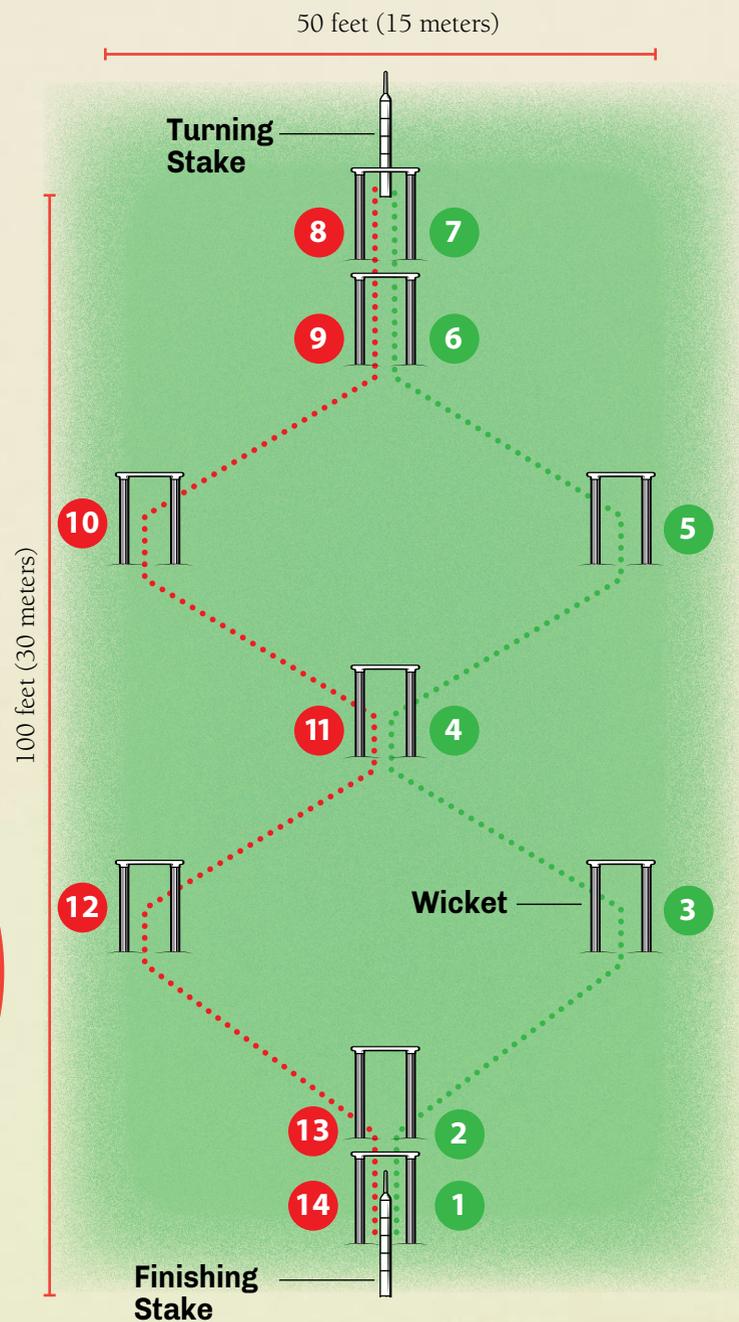
**Mallets**  
Croquet mallets often have strips of color on the handles. These match with the colors of the balls.



**Wickets**  
Wickets are hoops made of flexible metal. They can bend to fit into the ground more easily. An official game uses rectangular iron wickets.

# The Court

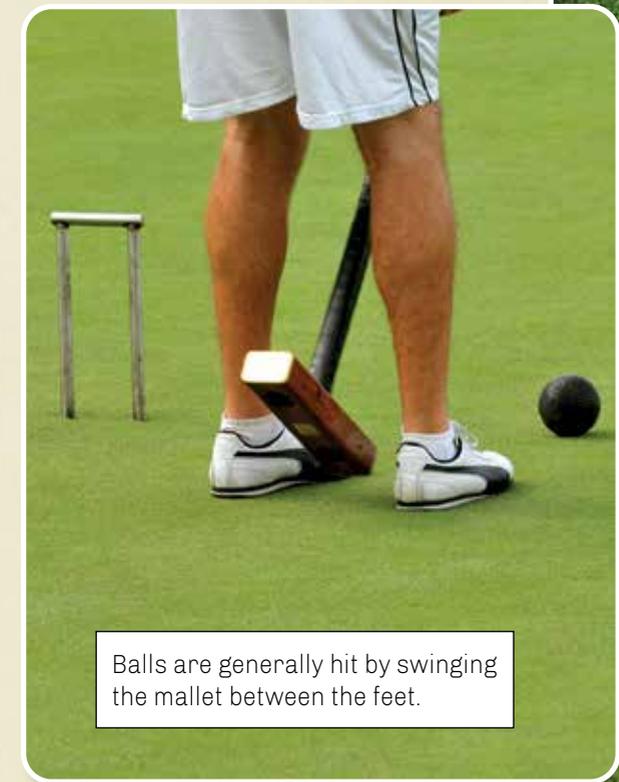
Croquet is played on a court. A backyard with a big lawn can be a croquet court. The size of the court depends on the style of the game. Backyard croquet is the American nine-wicket style. Its official court size is 100 feet (30 meters) long by 50 feet (15 m) wide. Casual games may not need all that space. For a smaller court, keep the length twice the size of the width.



Croquet stakes typically measure about 18 inches (46 centimeters) in length.



The lawn is the surface of the court. Long grass slows down a ball. Bumps in the soil cause it to change direction. In a backyard court, grass should be about a quarter of an inch (6 millimeters) long. Using a **lawn roller** keeps the court flat and smooth.



Balls are generally hit by swinging the mallet between the feet.

Wickets and stakes mark out the course. The distances between wickets, stakes, and borders should be no less than about three feet (1 m). Players **maneuver** balls through the wickets. In an official setup, wickets form a double-diamond pattern meeting at the center of the court. The stake at the opposite end of the court is the “turning” stake. Once reached, players turn and begin their way toward the “finishing” stake.

Association croquet (AC) is the most popular version of the sport worldwide. AC uses a six-wicket course. This style of play is more complicated and needs extra space. An official court size is 105 feet (32 m) long by 84 feet (26 m) wide. The course’s six wickets are in an hourglass pattern. Players loop around wickets before reaching the center stake, which is the end point of the game.

# Rules of the Game

Croquet is for two to six players. In a game, each side may have one, two, or three players. Single players and teams of two get two balls. Three-person teams get three balls, one for each player.

## Taking Turns

A coin toss decides which side goes first. The starting team gets the “cool” blue, black, and green balls. Turns follow the color order on the stakes. Blue goes first, then red, and so on. Some players only follow this order for the first shots. Bonus shots come from passing a wicket, hitting the turning stake, or hitting an opposing ball.

## Getting Points

Players gain points by passing a wicket or stake in the correct order. They must play in the direction of the course. Players do not lose points for **illegal** shots. If players send the ball in the wrong direction, balls are simply returned to their original starting position.

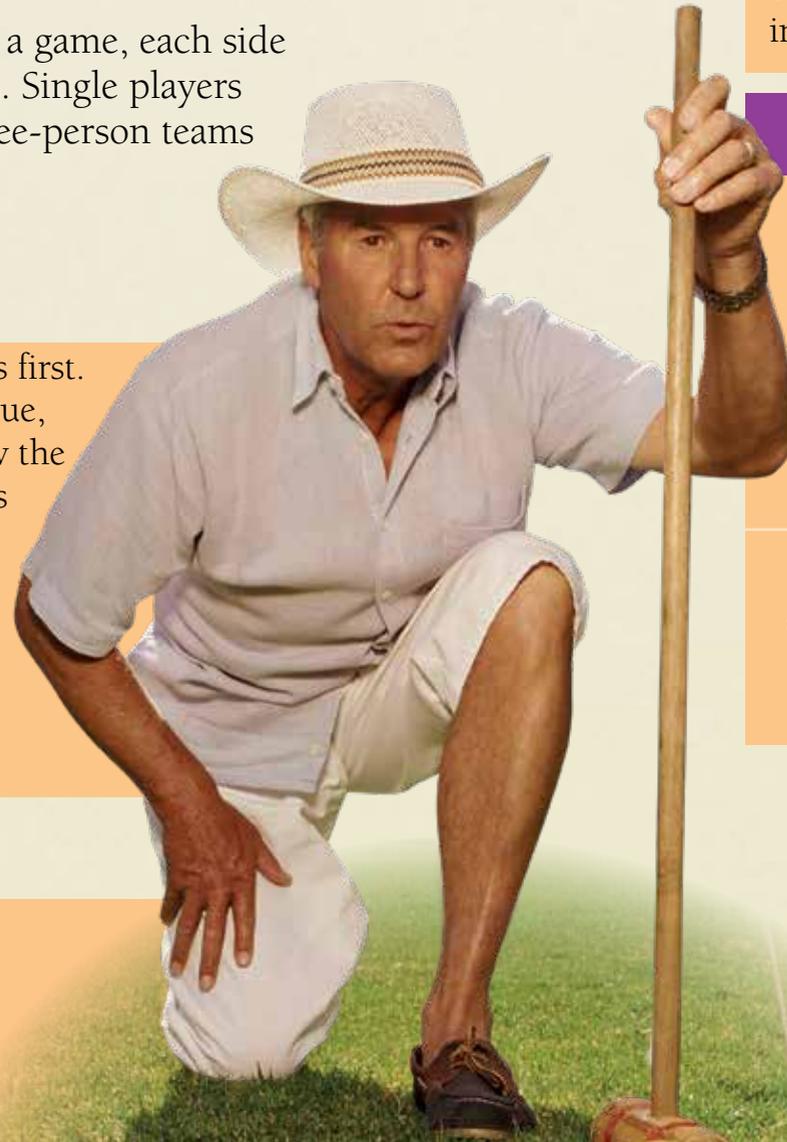
## Scoring a Game

Balls get one point for passing a wicket or hitting a stake. There are no ways to score extra points. In nine-wicket croquet, each ball can earn a total of 16 points on the course. A team with two balls needs 32 points in total. Playing three balls requires 48 points to win.

## Winning Ways

Croquet is a race. The goal is to finish first. An average game lasts one or two hours. Certain variations can make the game shorter or longer.

- 1 One style of play is to agree on a time limit. When time is up, the side with the most points is the winner.
- 2 In golf croquet, teams play until one side earns the majority of points. For example, if the point limit is seven, the winner is the first side to earn four points.



A well-played game can be appreciated by all players.



# A Game for All

At least 10,000 men and women play croquet competitively in the United States and Canada. Each year, Canadians alone buy about 100,000 croquet sets. Many thousands of people are playing the game just for fun. Game **variations** give both beginners and expert players a chance to compete. In a **casual** game, players can follow all the rules or only some.

There are about 200 croquet clubs across the United States. Larger clubs offer programs to instruct new players. The sport's low level of intensity means almost anyone can play.



Members of croquet clubs generally play in white clothing.

Out of all styles, golf croquet (GC) is most accessible. Championship events include women, teenagers, and people over 50 years old. Many players find golf croquet easier to learn and more fun to play. They learn basic croquet skills, without needing to follow all the strict traditions.



Players of any age have a chance at winning a game of backyard croquet.

## Champion!

In 2019, Soha Mostafa of Egypt won the Women's GC World Championship. She competed against 56 athletes from eight countries.

## Gold Croquet!

Golf croquet is the fastest growing style of the game. **Egypt** was the **first** country to play it competitively.



# Making It Big

Beyond the backyard, fierce competitors play to win national and international croquet titles. The World Croquet Federation (WCF) takes the lead in organizing key championships. These events occur in **venues** around the world. Association croquet and golf croquet are the two styles played at an international level.

The United States Croquet Association (USCA) organizes tournaments within the United States. When American players compete internationally, they follow AC rules. At home, players prefer the American, nine-wicket style.



Formal association croquet tournaments take place on well kept lawns used only to play this game.



## Reg Bamford

Reg Bamford was born in South Africa. He began to play croquet at the age of nine. Soon, he was competing at a high level.

In 2001, Reg won the AC World Singles Championship for the first time. He was 34 years old. Since then, he has won the championship four more times.

Reg was inducted into the WCF Hall of Fame in 2011. He holds more than 50 individual title championships and several world championship titles. His most recent AC World Champion title was won in the year 2020, in Australia. In 2005, Reg became the only person to have played croquet at the North Pole.



# Being a Good Sport

Rules establish the way a game is to be played. They provide the players with direction and keep the game moving forward. In croquet, there are rules for the game and behavior. Following them keeps the game fun and safe for everyone.

Showing good sportsmanship is important during a croquet game. Even if the game is causing frustration, it is important to stay calm. Players are not to shout or throw mallets at any time. In an official game, a player may be **disqualified** for behaving this way.



There are many different techniques for hitting the ball through the wicket, but all need to be played safely.

To avoid injuries, players should stay out of the way of play. During a shot, only the **striker** is on the court. Everyone else waits to the side.

In a backyard court, there may be hidden bumps and holes in the lawn. Players can look for these while they set up the course. Proper lawn care lowers the chance of injuries.

For children, croquet sets can come with soft foam mallets and balls. This helps prevent accidents.



Being patient while another player sets up his or her shot is a sign of good sportsmanship.



# A Healthy Game

People can improve their health by playing croquet. The game stimulates both mind and body, without causing stress. In addition, the outdoor setting improves mood and focus.

Doing gentle exercise over a stretch of time can build strength and **flexibility**. When playing croquet, participants perform **low-impact** movements for one or two hours during a game. The repetition tones muscles and loosens joints.



Seniors can especially benefit from the light activity of a croquet game.

Croquet is a puzzle-solving game. Players plan ways to get ahead while blocking the other side from advancing. This strategic thinking improves focus and concentration. At the same time, social activity lowers stress and increases positive emotions.



Croquet is a good way to develop body coordination skills.

## Exercise!

Studies show that spending at least **120 minutes** outdoors every week improves health and mood.

## Stepping Up!!

According to the USCA, a **croquet match** equals about **2 miles** (3.2 kilometers) of walking.



# Croquet Quiz



1

What color of clothing do croquet players often wear?

2

What was croquet first called?

3

What famous children's story has a queen who plays croquet?

4

How many balls come in a croquet set?

5

What are the hoops used in croquet called?

6

Which color of ball goes first?

7

How many croquet clubs are there in the United States?

8

At which unusual location did Reg Bamford play croquet?

ANSWERS  
1 Pall mall 2 Alice's Adventures in Wonderland 3 Six 4 Wickets 5 Blue 6 About 200 7 The North Pole

# Key Words

**casual:** friendly and open, not formal

**disqualified:** removed from a competition for breaking the rules

**flexibility:** having the ability to bend and move in all directions

**illegal:** not allowed, against the rules

**lawn roller:** a large lawn tool with a heavy roller to flatten the ground

**low-impact:** exercises that put little to no stress on the body

**maneuver:** to move something carefully or with difficulty

**recycled materials:** used materials, such as wood or metal, that are made into something new

**striker:** the player who hits or shoots the ball in a game

**variations:** different rules or ways to play the game

**venues:** the places or stadiums where large sports events happen

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