

How to Play Bocce Ball

Co-authored by **28 contributors**

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Bocce ball, also called bocci or boccie, is a relaxed but strategic game with an ancient lineage. Although probably emerging from ancient Egypt, bocce started to hit its stride with the Romans and Emperor Augustus. It gained massive popularity with the influx of Italian immigrants at the turn of the 20th century. Today, bocce is a calming, competitive way to spend a few hours outdoors in the pleasant company of friends.

Things You'll Need

- Bocce ball set.
- 8 x 60 feet of playing area.
- Spray paint or something to mark the ground for foul lines.
- [optional] - regulator peg (for a formal game)

Part
1

Part 1 of 3:

Getting Started

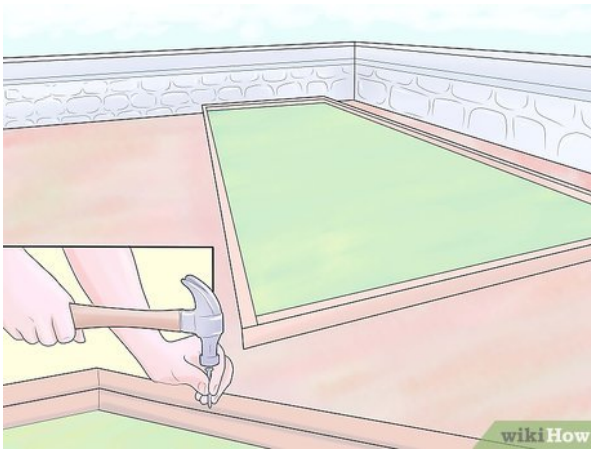


1 Gather your bocce ball set. Standard bocce sets contain 8 colored balls — 4 balls each to a color, typically green and red — and one smaller ball, called the jack or pallino.

- Different skill levels are often associated with different sizes of bocce balls. Smaller balls tend to be used by beginners and kids, while the larger ones are used by professionals. Regulation-sized bocce balls have a standard diameter of 107 mm (4.2 inches) and a standard weight of 920 g (~2 lbs).
- Standard bocce sets will run you at least \$20, but if you're going to buy a professional set, you could need more than \$100.



2 Choose your teams. Bocce ball can be played by two single players pitted against one another, or by two teams with two, three, or four players each. Teams of 5 or more are not advisable, as fewer balls than players means that not everyone will get a chance to bowl.^[1]



3 Set up your game area, known as "the court." If you don't have a bocce court, you can always play in open space, although a **defined court** is preferred.^[2] A regulation court is a maximum 4m (13 feet) wide and a maximum 27.5m (90 feet) long, although any rectangular court measuring about 13'x90' should do.^[3]

- Regulation bocce courts have a raised barrier around the edge of the rectangle. In most cases, this raised barrier measures a maximum of 20 cm (~8 in) high.
- Mark a foul line, if not already given, beyond which players cannot step as they bowl a bocce ball.
- Some players prefer to pound a regulator peg in the exact center of the court. This is the point beyond which the jack or pallino must pass when it is thrown out at the beginning of the game. This is one variation of how many people play bocce, although it is not standard.

Part
2

Part 2 of 3:
Playing



1 Flip a coin or randomly decide which team gets to throw out the jack. It doesn't much matter who gets to go first, as teams alternate throwing out the jack at the beginning of each new frame.^[4]



2 Throw out the jack into a prescribed zone. The team that won the coin toss or was randomly selected to start gets two opportunities to throw the jack into a zone 5 m (~16 feet), which ends 2.5 m (~8 feet) from the endboard of the court. If the team that first throws the jack fails to get the jack into the prescribed zone, the second team gets to throw out the jack.

- An alternate set of rules says that the jack need only travel past a regulator pin that marks the middle of court.
- If you're not playing bocce on a court, feel free to throw the jack wherever, provided that it's far enough away from players so that gameplay doesn't become too easy.



3 After the jack is successfully thrown, throw out the first bocce ball. The team that threw out the jack is responsible for throwing out the first bocce ball. The aim is to get the bocce ball as close to the jack as possible. Players who throw out the bocce ball must stand behind the fault line, which is approximately 10 feet (3.0 m) above the bottom of the baseboard.^[5]

- There are several ways to throw a bocce ball. Most tend to throw the bocce underhanded, with their palm cupping the underside of the ball, and either lobbing the ball higher into the air or bowling the ball from closer to the ground. Some, however, choose to throw the ball cupping it from the top instead of from the bottom, and lobbing it the same way they would have an underhand throw.



4 Let the second team bowl their bocce ball. The team which hasn't yet bowled gets a chance to now. One player from their team bowls, trying to get the ball as close to the jack as possible.

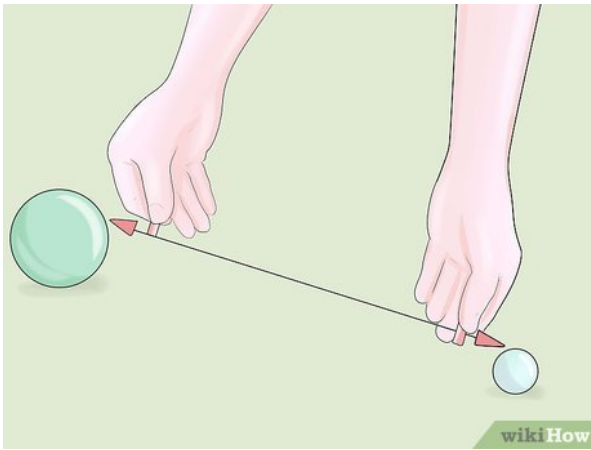


5 Decide which team gets to continue bowling all their remaining bocce balls. The team whose bocce ball is farthest away from the jack now gets to bowl its remaining three bocce balls in succession, each time trying to get as close to the jack as possible. (Note: International rules always give the next bowl to the team farthest from the jack as opposed to the rules outlined here).^[6]

- It is acceptable to hit the jack when bowling with a bocce. The only practical effect of hitting the jack is that it readjusts the nucleus of where you want to aim.
- If the bocce ball is touching the jack, it's typically called a "kiss" or "baci." This throw is usually worth two points if the bocce ball remains touching the jack at the end of the frame.



6 Allow the team who hasn't completed their throws to bowl out. At the end of the frame, all 8 bocce balls should be clustered at various distances around the jack.

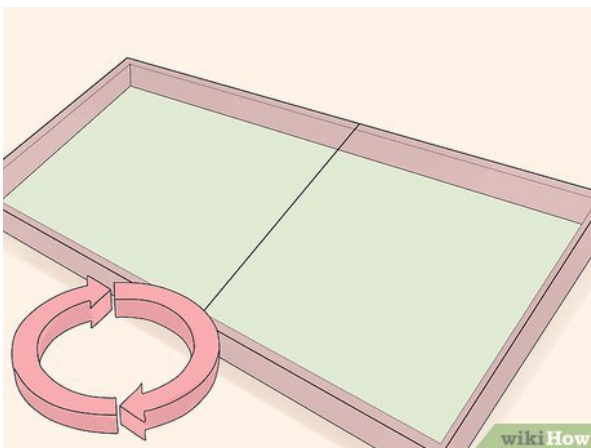


1 Measure which team's bocce is closest to the jack. After everyone is done tossing, the team that collects points is the team whose ball is closest to the jack. This team will collect one or more points, depending on the position of their other balls, while the other team won't score any.^[7]



2 Score one point for each ball from the winning team that is closer than the closest ball of the other team. Depending on the rules you choose to use, bocce balls that are touching or "kissing" the jack at the end of play count as two points instead of one.^[8]

- If the two teams balls are equal distance away from the jack, no points are awarded and another frame is played.



3 Switch ends on the bocce court and play another frame. At the end of each frame, tally the points. Start the next frame at the opposite end of the bocce court.



4 Continue playing until a team gets 12 points. Alternately, play until a team reaches either 15 or 21.[9]



Community Q&A

Question

Can I just play in a yard?



Community Answer

Yes, of course! You can play anywhere that you'd like. It's also a popular beach game.

Helpful **63** Not Helpful **17**

Question

What happens when I hit the Jack and it moves?



Community Answer

It's acceptable to hit the Jack. The rules don't change, the closest to the Jack rule still applies for scoring.

Helpful **137** Not Helpful **38**

Question

Can I play the ball off the wooden sides of the court?



Community Answer

Yes, you can play a ball off of the rail. It makes for some very fun shots.

Helpful **101** Not Helpful **28**

Question

When there are teams, are there four bowlers for each set?



Community Answer

Generally, yes, but there could be only two unless the rules being used prohibit it. More than four really defeats the purpose of teamwork.

Helpful **77** Not Helpful **27**

Question

Who starts first on the second round?



Joseph Trzaska
Community Answer

Each round is begun by opposite teams, so if Team A threw out the jack and bocce ball first, then Team B would do it the next round.

Helpful 23 Not Helpful 5

Question

Can kids play without a strict adherence to the rules?



Lissa LaLiberte
Community Answer

I don't see why not. Use a small space in your yard and let them have fun. You can vary the rules to make it closer to "official" as they grow. The point of any game is to have fun!

Helpful 34 Not Helpful 12

Question

When playing on a court, are you allowed to hit the back wall, or is the ball considered dead?



Community Answer

If the ball hits the back wall without touching another ball on the way, the ball is dead and removed from the court. If it touches another ball before hitting the back wall, the throw is valid and the ball remains where it stops.

Helpful 84 Not Helpful 40

Question

Do I get three points if three balls of the same color are closest to the jack?



Community Answer

At least three. If, somehow, all three were "kissing" the jack, you would get six points, two for each ball kissing the jack.

Helpful 67 Not Helpful 31

Question

Will it still count if you bounce the ball off the back board?



Community Answer

If your ball bounces off the back board before it touches another ball, it is removed from the court. If it touches another ball on its way to the back board, it remains on the court where it stops and is counted as a valid throw.

Helpful 104 Not Helpful 48

Question

Is there a penalty for hitting the back wall?



Community Answer

If the ball hits the back wall without touching another ball, it is removed from the court. If it touches another ball on its way to the back wall, it remains where it stops and is a valid throw.

Helpful 74 Not Helpful 40



Tips

- To enjoy it more, you may want to not keep score.



Warnings

- Do not throw bocce balls. They are somewhat heavy and very hard, and you may actually crack someone's skull.

Expert Interview

Thanks for reading our article! If you'd like to learn more about bocce courts, check out our in-depth interview with [Sina Kamran](#).

References

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