PICKLEBALL RULES FOR BEGINNERS: YOUR FIRST GAME

Rules 4, 5, 7, 8, 10 and 11, USA Pickleball Official Rulebook (2026 edition) Last checked Nov 1, 2026

By Julien Levadoux

> **Serve underhand and diagonally. Let the serve bounce and let the return bounce. Don't volley from the kitchen, the 7-foot zone by the net. Only the serving side scores, games go to 11 (win by 2), and in doubles the score is called as three numbers.**

Pickleball is easy to start and the rules fit on one page. Here's what you need for your first game of doubles, the way most people play.

THE COURT

The court is 20 by 44 feet, the same for singles and doubles. The net is 34 inches high in the middle. The **kitchen** (officially the non-volley zone) is the 7-foot area on each side of the net. Behind it, each side has a right and a left service court.

THE SERVE

- Serve **underhand**, from behind the baseline, **diagonally** into the service court opposite you. It has to clear the kitchen; a serve on the kitchen line is short.
- Either hit it out of the air, swinging upward with the ball below your waist, or **drop it and hit it after it bounces**. The drop serve is easier to get right when you're new.
- You get **one try**. A serve that clips the net and lands in is good.

LET IT BOUNCE TWICE

The **serve** must bounce before it's returned, and the **return** must bounce before the serving side hits it. After that, you can volley or let it bounce. This is the rule beginners forget most, and it's why the serving side stays back at the start of each rally. More in serve rules and the two-bounce rule.

THE KITCHEN

You can't **volley** (hit the ball in the air) while you're touching the kitchen or its line, and if a volley carries you into it afterward, that's a fault too. You can walk into the kitchen to hit a ball that has bounced; just get both feet back out before your next volley. See the kitchen rule.

SCORING

- **Only the serving side scores.** Win a rally when you're receiving and you just get closer to serving.
- Games go to **11, win by 2**.
- In doubles, call **three numbers** before you serve: your score, their score, and whether you're server 1 or 2. The game starts **"0-0-2"** because the first side to serve only gets one server.
- When your side wins a point, you and your partner **switch sides**, and the same player serves again. When you lose a rally, your partner serves. When you both have lost a rally, the serve goes to the other side.
- Quick check: the player who served first for your side is on the right when your score is even, and on the left when it's odd.

The full walk-through is in how pickleball scoring works. Or let the score tracker call it.

FAULTS THAT END THE RALLY

Hitting out or into the net. Letting the ball bounce twice. Volleying in the kitchen. **The ball hitting you or your clothes** (only your paddle, and your paddle hand, may touch it). Touching the net. See the full list of faults.

LINE CALLS

You call the lines on **your** side. A ball **on the line is in** (except a serve on the kitchen line). If you're not sure, it's in: give your opponents the benefit of the doubt. See line calls.

OPEN PLAY MANNERS

Most courts run **open play**: players waiting for a court put their paddles in a rack or line, and the next four up take the next free court. Say hello, tell your group it's your first time, and ask what scoring they use (side-out or rally scoring). Call the score loudly enough for everyone to hear. Yell "ball on!" if a stray ball rolls onto your court, and replay the rally. When the game ends, meet at the net and tap paddles. More in open play etiquette and pickleball terms.



Current as of Nov 1, 2026. Follows the USA Pickleball Official Rulebook, 2026 edition. Rules change: the latest version is always at **pickleballrulesguide.com/rules/your-first-game**.

Explained in our own words; not an official ruling. © 2026 Paris Supply Group LLC. Free to print and share.