

The Game of Horseshoes

Here is the information to get started:

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The game of horseshoes has been enjoyed for centuries. Historians credit the Greeks with a game called quoits for the game's origins, but nobody knows when the use of rings in quoits shifted to the use of horseshoes.

The beauty of pitching horseshoes is that it is simple, requires simple equipment and can be played by almost everyone. Although a few people take it very seriously, for the most part it is an enjoyable [backyard](#) pastime during which you can carry on a conversation and barely break a sweat.

The “almost everyone,” of course, rules out a few people. Your 2-year-old will not be able to throw a 2½-pound shoe the required distance. And you may need to keep an [eye](#) on the kids to make sure no one is beamed during the game. Your kids can begin learning the game, however, with a set of plastic horseshoes and a shorter playing field.

Do not be fooled by the simplicity of horseshoes. Pitching horseshoes may be easy to learn, but it is not so easy to become a skilled player.

Simply put, horseshoes involves two opposite playing pits with a stake in each. Players toss horseshoes from one stake pit to the opposite stake in an attempt to get a “ringer” – a horseshoe landing around the stake. Normally two players play against each other, but doubles are also possible. A turn consists of each player throwing their two horseshoes at the same stake by turn, tabulating the score, then pitching to the opposite stake. One player throws both of his horseshoes while the opposing player keeps a polite distance. Fewer points are given if the horseshoe leans on the stake or is close, and points can also be cancelled out for various reasons. The game is played for a certain number of innings (20 for official games) or to a set number of points (15 or 21 for backyard horseshoes).

Horseshoe Rules

Aside from a few common-sense rules about standing apart for the pitch (to keep everyone safe), and being polite not to talk or make rude exclamations during a service, the rules are all about points. Keeping score can be a little confusing at first, but, to keep it all straight, have these rules handy when you first begin.

- **Rule 1:** Ringers are awarded 3 points. To qualify as a ringer, a straight edge must be able to touch both points of the horseshoe.
- **Rule 2:** If nobody scores a ringer, the closest horseshoe to the stake scores one point. This includes “leaners,” or horseshoes touching the stake but not qualified as a ringer. The horseshoe does not have to lean to qualify as a leaner, and the points remain the same no matter how close the leaner is as compared to another leaner.
- **Rule 3:** Give two points to the player who threw both horseshoes closer to the stake than his or her opponent's.

- **Rule 4:** For the “closest to the stake” points, horseshoes must be within 6 inches of the stake to qualify.
- **Rule 5:** Cancellation rules: The twist in the game of horseshoes is the ability to cancel out your opponent’s points, allowing for strategy within the game. If one player scores a ringer, the points will be cancelled if the opposing player tops it with another ringer during the same turn. The same rule applies for all other equal plays during the course of one turn. For instance, if both players throw a ringer and a leaner, no points are awarded. If one player throws two ringers, and the other player throws one, the player with two ringers gets three points for that turn.
- **Rule 6:** If a player scores one ringer and has the closest horseshoe with his remaining play, the player gets points for both.

Set Up Your Horseshoe Playing Field

The stakes should be positioned 40 feet apart. If you want a temporary horseshoe playing court, simply push the stakes into the ground. (A mallet will be useful to tap them into hard dirt.) The stakes should have 15 inches of clearance above the ground. You may lean them slightly inward toward each other, no more than 3 inches off vertical. Make a more permanent backyard field by digging a 4-inch deep rectangular pit around each stake, measuring 31 inches wide and 43 inches long. Fill each pit with sand, sawdust or a fine filler substance.