

# Everything you'll ever need to know about Marbles.

*Information extractions from the Imperial Marble Company, Los Angeles CA*

**Marble HISTORY!** Marbles are small, hard balls made from clay, stone, wood, glass, steel or any other suitable material. They have been made for thousands of years and games with marbles are popular in countries around the world.

**DEVELOPMENT AND HISTORY** The earliest marbles were made of flint and stone and baked clay. Examples have been found in archaeological sites around the world and some of these, from Rome and ancient Egypt, can be found at the British Museum.

There are frequent references to marbles in Roman literature and it is probably fair to assume that the Romans took this popular form of entertainment with them to all parts of their empire.

For centuries thereafter the marbles were made of common stone or in some cases, real marble. China and crockery marbles were introduced around the year 1800 and before that glass marbles had been made in Venice. However, it was only when a German glassblower invented a tool called the marble scissors in 1846 that production became quick enough to make the sale of glass marbles to the public an economic proposition. These marbles became increasingly popular throughout Europe and America. An enormous variety of colors were used and intricate patterns were created within the glass.

Clay marbles began to be produced in bulk from about 1870 onwards on both sides of the Atlantic. In the 1890's the first machines for the manufacture of glass marbles were introduced. However, machine production remained low until the 1914-18 war in Europe cut off supplies of marbles to North America. This stimulated the machine production of glass marbles in the U.S.A. This production technique and the machines themselves are now found in many countries, east and west.

At the time of writing, there are only thought to be three people in the world making glass marbles by hand. One of these modern, handmade ranges is available through the House of Marbles and one can still sometimes find early examples in antique shops. However they are much sought after as collectors' items and are becoming increasingly scarce. A marble made of pure, ground marble, or other suitable stone, is highly prized and regarded as being the most accurate for shooting. They are expensive and therefore they are rare. Conversely, clay marbles are very inexpensive, but they tend to be inaccurate in dimensions and dull in appearance and, although they were once the most common of marbles, lack of demand has made them hard to find. These days, marbles are made from all sorts of materials, but glass remains by far the most popular. Glass lends itself to machine production and provides an article that is appealing to the eye and the touch.

**MACHINE MANUFACTURE** The actual manufacturing process seems easy, although technically it is quite difficult. The glass is melted in a furnace and poured out. Different colored glasses are injected into the flowing glass if inserts are required in the marble. As

the glass descends from the furnace, shears cut it into small cylinders of a regular size. These drop into moving, mechanical rollers that round them off and leave them to cool.

**NAMES** Names given to marbles vary considerably from town to town within each country. The best marbles are often known as ALLEYS. A marble actually being used by a player is often called a TAW or SHOOTER.

Marble games are generally played with cheaper glass marbles, but where expensive ALLEYS are used in games where fines are imposed, or where marbles are lost and won, it should be agreed in advance that fines or losses should be paid in cheap marbles and not ALLEYS.

**SHOOTING** The most common method of shooting a marble along the ground is known as 'FULKING'. The knuckle of the forefinger is put on the ground and the marble balanced in the bent forefinger. The thumb is put behind the forefinger and then released with whatever force is required.

This method, however, is less accurate than 'KNUCKLING DOWN' which is the method used by experts. The marble held above the first joint of the thumb by the tip of the forefinger. The top of the thumb is held by the middle finger. The hand kept quite still with the knuckle on the ground. The thumb released with the required force. With practice, great accuracy may soon be obtained with this method.

When aiming, it should be remembered that the target should be steadily looked at, its exact position being thoroughly taken in by the eye while the marble is held in the hand. The eye directs the brain which automatically directs the hand.

## The GAMES!

**ARCHBOARD** (or Bridgeboard) For this game a piece of board is required with 7 or 9 arches cut in it. The central arch is numbered 0 and the other arches increase in value to the outside of the board, i.e. 3, 2, 1, 0, 1, 2, 3. One player is made bridgekeeper, the others shoot marbles at the arches from a distance of 4' to 5' (1.5m). Those that fail to pass through an arch are taken by the bridgekeeper. For every successful shot the bridgekeeper must pay the shooter the corresponding number of marbles, the same size as the one shot, to the number written above the arch through which his marble passed. A marble passing through the center arch marked 0 is returned to the shooter with no reward. Every player should take his turn at keeping the bridge.

**BOUNCE ABOUT** This game, for two to four players, is played by throwing marbles and not shooting them. Medium sized marbles are best suited for the game and are called 'BOUNCERS'. The first player throws his bouncer forward about 5' (1.5m). The second player throws his to try and hit it. The third player throws to try and hit either one on the ground and so on. If a bouncer is hit the owner must pay the successful thrower one marble. Bouncers are generally not forfeited.

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**BOUNCE EYE** A circle 1' (30cm) in diameter is marked on the ground. Each player puts one marble in a pool in the center of the circle. The players take it in turns to stand over the circle and drop a marble from eye level into the pool of marbles. Any marbles knocked out of the ring become the property of the player. If a player fails to capture any marbles with a drop, that marble he has dropped remains in the pool. The game continues until the pool is dry.

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**CONQUEROR** This game is similar to BOUNCE ABOUT but the marbles are shot and any size of marbles may be used and by any number of players. An order of play is decided. The first player throws forward a marble to whatever distance he chooses. He will generally choose the distance at which he personally shoots with the greatest accuracy. The next player then shoots at this marble. If he hits it he captures it and it becomes his property. He then throws out a new marble to restart the game. If he MISSES it however, his marble remains in the field. The third player then shoots at either Marble capturing whatever he hits, but leaving his marble in the field if he misses. If a marble is shot with force and bounces off several marbles in the field, then all those hit are captured. In this game there are no niceties. If a player shoots with a rare and expensive ALLEY he may have the advantage of accuracy over the other players, but stands to lose his ALLEY to another player should he ever miss.

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**DIE SHOT** A die is balanced on a marble which has been ground down slightly for stability. As in Archboard, players take it in turns to be the keeper of the die. Any player wishing to have a shot pays the keeper one marble. He then shoots at the target from a predetermined distance. He must pay one marble for each shot he makes. If a player knocks the die off the marble with his shot, he receives from the keeper the number of marbles corresponding to the number shown uppermost on the die.

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**DOBLERS** A game for any small number of players. Each player contributes one or more marbles to a straight line of marbles spaced so that there is room for two marbles to pass through the gaps. Each player then shoots in turn and may keep any marbles he hits. The players TAW remains where it lies at the end of his turn and subsequent turns are

played from where the TAW lies. A player whose TAW is hit by another TAW must add one marble to the line.

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**EGGS IN THE BUSH** This is a guessing game which requires no skill but is nevertheless entertaining. A player picks up a number of marbles with one hand and asks the other players to guess the number. Those guessing correctly are paid that number of marbles by the questioner. Those guessing incorrectly must pay the questioner the difference between the number guessed and the number actually held. Players take turns to be the questioner.

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**HANDERS** (or Tip-Shears) A game of chance for several players which requires little skill. A hole 3" (8cms) wide is made about 1' (30cms) from a wall. Each player throws a marble at the hole, from a predetermined spot, to decide the order of play. The person whose marble is closest to the hole starts, the second closest goes second, etc.. Each player then contributes two marbles to the first player who throws them all at the hole. Any marbles that go in the hole are pocketed by the thrower. This does not apply to those that have rebounded off the wall, which remain in play. Those remaining are handed to the second player who makes his throw, and so play continues. When the marbles are exhausted a new contribution is made by all and the second player in the first round starts the second round. All players should have a turn at the first throw of a round.

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**HUNDREDS** A game for two players. Draw a small circle or make a small hole a suitable distance from the shooting spot. Both players shoot a marble towards the circle. If both or neither marble stops within the circle both players shoot again. If, however only one players marble stops within the circle, that player scores 1 points and goes on shooting, scoring 10 points each time his marble stops in the circle. This continues until he has scored 100 or until he misses. When he misses, the turn passes to his opponent who shoots and scores until he misses. The first player to reach 100 points is the winner and the loser hands over a predetermined number of marbles.

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**INCREASE POUND** A game for several players. Two circles are drawn. One circle 8" (20cms) in diameter known as the pound and around it another of 11" (3.5m) diameter called the 'bar'. Each player puts one or more marbles into the pound. The first player shoots a TAW, from any point on the bar, at the marbles in the pound. Any marbles he knocks out of the pound become his property. If he fails to capture even one marble, his TAW remains where it stops, even if that is with in the bar and outside the pound. If it stops within the pound it must be lifted and a marble paid to the pound. Subsequent players may shoot at the pound or at an opponents TAW. If a TAW is struck by another

**TAW** the owner of the struck TAW must pay one marble to the pound. As well as this fine, the owner of the struck TAW must give any marbles he has captured so far in the game to the owner of the shot TAW that struck his TAW.

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**LAG OUT** An order of play is decided by any number of players. Each player in turn throws a marble at a wall so as to make it rebound. the marbles are left where they fall until one player's marble rebounds and lands on another. That player then claims all the marbles on the-floor and play is restarted.

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**LONG TAW** For two players. Each player contributes a marble and these are placed approximately 6' (2m) apart. The players withdraw a further 6' and the first player shoots his TAW at the first marble. If he hits it he pockets it and shoots at the second marble. If he hits that, he wins the round and the game starts again. If he fails to win the round outright the opponent shoots at the marbles and at the TAW. If the marbles are hit the result is as described for the first player. If he hits the TAW he captures whatever is on the ground.

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**ODDS or EVEN** A guessing game similar to Eggs in the Bush except that one has to guess whether there are an odd or even number of marbles in the hand of the questioner. Those who guess correctly receive a marble, those who are incorrect give one to the questioner. Each player takes it in turn to ask the question.

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**ONE STEP** This game is played like Dobblers except that a player takes one step and throws his TAW from a standing position when making his first shot. Subsequent throws are also made from the standing position but without taking a step. A successful ,throw entitles the player to another throw from the spot where the TAW lies.

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**PICKING PLUMS** For a small number of players. A straight line is drawn on the ground and each player contributes one or more marbles, which are placed in a row on the line about 2 marbles widths apart. Another parallel line is then drawn about 6' (2m) away. Players stand behind this second line and take it in turns to shoot at the line of marbles (plums). A shot which knocks a plum out of line entitles the player to the plum, but not to a second shot. Play continues until all plums are picked.

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**PYRAMID** As in Archboard and Die Shot, someone has to be the keeper of the pyramid. This person draws a circle approximately 1' (30cms) in diameter and places three marbles on top of these three to form a pyramid. The keeper then charges the players a marble for each shot at the pyramid. Any marbles knocked out of the ring becomes the property of the shooter and the pyramid has to be rebuilt by the keeper using his own marbles.

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**RING TAW** This is one of the best known and most popular of all marble games for a group of players. As with 'INCREASE POUND', two circles are drawn on the ground. The inner circle should be about 1' (30cms) in diameter, the outer should be about 7' (2m) diameter. Each player puts an agreed number of marbles into the inner ring. The order of play is decided and the players take turns to shoot their TAW from any point on the outer ring, at the marbles in the center. Any marbles knocked out of the center ring are pocketed by the shooter and he is entitled to shoot again from the spot where his TAW lies. When a shot is unsuccessful play passes to the next player and the TAW remains on the ground where it comes to rest, if that spot is within the outer ring. The next player may then shoot at the marbles in the center or at any of his opponents TAWS. If he strikes a TAW, the owner of that TAW has to pay him one marble and he takes another shot. The shooter may not strike the same opponents TAW twice in succession. The game continues until the ring is cleared.

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**RINGER** Two to six can play. A circle 5 to 10 feet in diameter is marked on the ground. Thirteen marbles are placed on a cross that is marked at the center of the ring. Two lines, each about 9 inches long for the cross. One marble is placed at the center, and three each on the four parts of the cross. Each marble lies about 3 inches from the next one. Each player uses a larger marble, the shooter, to "shoot" the small marbles out of the ring. The player who shoots the most marbles out of the ring wins the game.

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**SPANNERS** A simple capturing game for two players. The first sends forth a marble. The second shoots to hit it and capture it. However, if his marble stops within a span of the opponents marble he still takes it. A span is the distance between the spread thumb and forefinger of the biggest hand available. If he is unsuccessful, play passes to his opponent. who in turn tries to capture his marbles.

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**THREE HOLES** A game for several players. Three holes or circles are made approximately 3" (8cms) in diameter and about 5' (1.5m) apart. They are numbered one, two and three and must be shot at in that order. Players retire to a point about 5' (1.5m) from the first hole. They take it in turns to shoot their marbles into each hole in succession. If a player misses, his TAW remains in the field until it is his turn again.

After a player has gained the first hole he may shoot at the opponents TAWS as well as the remaining two holes. A person whose TAW is hit by another must pay the shooter one marble. When a player has shot into all three holes successfully he claims one marble from each of the other players. He may then start again at number one.

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**AND SO** We have now described the best known marble games. There are, of course, many others and many variations of the games described. Another way of playing with marbles is to use them to make indoor miniatures of games usually played outside. The most obvious of these is Marble Bowls. However, croquet, golf and snooker can all be played with marbles on a carpet. With some cardboard, a pair of scissors and ingenuity, the necessary equipment can soon be made.