

## Croquet: A History

Croquet is a classic yard game that has been played for centuries all over Europe. A game similar to croquet is believed to have been played in Ancient Rome. The current version of croquet, however, originated in about the 14th century by French peasants who used wooden mallets to hit wooden balls through wickets made from willow branches.

Croquet became popular in Ireland in the early eighteenth century and transferred to England around 1851. It quickly became popular and spread throughout the colonial empire, reaching virtually every area of British colonial rule by the year 1870. Traditionally, croquet was played on a professional playing field, with the grass trimmed, similar to a golf course. At the turn of the century, however, Americans, disagreeing with new English rules outlawing mallets with rubber heads, and introducing a six-wicket court, maintained their own version of nine-wicket croquet. Many Americans also developed a more simple and rugged version of nine-wicket croquet, which could be played casually in their own backyards. This is the version of croquet that many Americans know and play today. The well trimmed croquet field is still used in professional play, both in America and at the international level.

Croquet was a popular game among the youth of the British Empire, who could use it to socialize and flirt without their parents constantly peering over their shoulders. It was initially more popular among women, but in 1874 there was a decline in the popularity of the game among women, because it was becoming too scientific. The game also decreased in popularity as lawn tennis began to replace it, bringing in more money than croquet.

As the game's popularity declined in England, it increased in America. In 1865, the Newport Croquet Club in Rhode Island was formed. In 1871, Milton Bradley published "Croquet and Its Principles and Rules." In New York, in 1882, twenty-five clubs from the National American Croquet Association. The game met with some setbacks in America, when in the 1890's, the game was condemned by the Boston clergy, who spoke against it because of its association with drinking, gambling, and licentious behavior. Croquet was played as an Olympic sport in the 1900 and 1904 Olympic Games. Croquet is more popular as a competitive sport outside of the United States. It began to catch on more in the United States again, in the 1960's. In 1969, the first six wicket croquet tournament was held in at the Colony Hotel in Palm Beach between the New York Croquet Club and the Palm Beach Croquet Club. Several other clubs eventually joined in, and once creating a uniformed code of rules, they established the United States Croquet Association, under Jack Osborn. Since 1980, croquet professionals in North America have grown from about fifty to around 4000. Croquet is now played in over twenty countries as a competitive sport. National tournaments are held often within these countries, and international tournaments are held at the international level.

Many associations and clubs have now been established in the United States and the international standards of croquet are being played more often by American croquet players. Most Americans, however, still play the more simple and casual backyard, nine-wicket version of croquet. Many Americans also play "poison croquet," which is similar to nine wicket croquet, but is not played in teams. Instead, each player competes for him/herself to see who can hit their ball through all of the wickets first, making their ball "poison" and then eliminating the other players by hitting their balls with the poison ball.

Peter Jay is a yard game enthusiast with Yard Game Central and a manager and web administrator with Play Croquet . For information about a Croquet set, visit [www.PlayCroquet.com](http://www.PlayCroquet.com).