

How to play PACHISI



Equipment:

Fabric board - in the shape of a cross with a central square and 4 arms made up from 3 columns of 8 squares. Three of the squares on each arm are marked with a cross or other embroidered detail, these are called castles. The large central square is called the charkoni.

Counters - 16 beehive shaped pieces: 4 black, 4 green, 4 yellow and 4 red

6 Cowrie shells - which are used like dice to determine the number of moves, depending on whether they land with the mouth of the shell up or down. If you throw 0, 1, or 6 cowries with mouth up – you get a higher score and/or a grace.

Cowrie scoring values:

- 2 cowries with mouths up = 2 moves
- 3 cowries with mouths up = 3 moves
- 4 cowries with mouths up = 4 moves
- 5 cowries with mouths up = 5 moves
- 6 cowries with mouths up = 6 moves + grace
- 1 cowries with mouths up = 10 moves + grace
- 0 cowries with mouths up = 25 moves + grace

A grace score also means that you can start to play another counter instead of taking the move; it also gives you another go.

Aim of the game:

To move all 4 pieces down the middle column of the nearest arm, all around the edge of the board (moving anticlockwise) and back up the same arm to get into the Charkoni. The pieces which have completed the journey are placed on their side to distinguish them from the ones which haven't yet started. Pachisi is a team game so it is only won when both partners have got all their pieces home.

Instructions:

The partners sit opposite one another (yellow & red play against black & green). If there are only 2 players then each player takes two colours.

Put all the counters in the Charkoni (central square). All players throw the cowries – the highest score goes first.

The first player throws the cowries and moves a counter the number of squares indicated by the score. You can only start to move the other three counters once you have a grace score (i.e. throw a 0, 1 or 6). You can choose whether to move the number indicated by the dice (25, 10 or 6) or to bring a new counter into play.

More than one piece from the same side can occupy the same square (the counters are designed to sit on top of one another). A piece is not allowed to finish on a castle square that is occupied by one or more enemy pieces.

If a piece finishes on a non-castle square inhabited by one or more enemy pieces, the enemy pieces are captured. Captured pieces are returned to the Charkoni from where they must start again with a grace. A player making a capture is allowed another throw of the cowries to be taken immediately. Moving is not compulsory and a player may decide not to move after throwing the cowries. This is typically done in order to remain safely within a castle square or to help a partner. A common strategy is for a piece to remain upon the castle square at the end of the third arm until a 25 is thrown, thus allowing that piece to finish without risk.

Pieces finish the game by re-entering the Charkoni after completing a circuit of the board. However, a player is only allowed to move a piece into the Charkoni by throwing the exact number required.

And if you want to make it harder:

- Seven cowry shells can be used instead of six. Different amounts can be allocated to the different permutations of cowries. Sometimes there are only 2 grace numbers - 10 and 25.
- Pieces can finish in the Charkoni only with a grace throw.
- A square occupied by two or more pieces cannot be passed by an opposing piece. This rule, which is possibly a non-Indian modern invention, naturally changes tactics significantly since, whereas in the basic rules outlined above it is inadvisable to put two pieces from the same side on the same square, under this variation, putting two pieces from the same side together is a good defensive strategy.
- If three graces are thrown in a row, a penalty is forfeited. The commonest penalty is for the turn to be missed, any pieces moved being returned.
- Some versions play the grace throws differently. Instead of using the actual amount of 6, 10 and 25 to enter or re-enter a piece, the amount thrown can only be used to move a piece already on the board in the normal way. The grace is played separately and allows a single piece to be moved one square on the board or a single piece to be moved from the Charkoni onto the first square of the arm.
- Each turn consists of two parts - first the cowries are thrown one or more times according to the numbers thrown. And only once throwing is completed are the piece or pieces are moved according to the cowry throws. So, to begin a turn, the player throws the cowries. If a grace is thrown, the player is allowed another throw and so on until a 2, 3, 4 or 5 is thrown. Then, for each throw made, the player moves one piece as indicated by the amount on the cowries. So if three throws were made, the player might move:
 - 1 piece 3 times
 - 1 piece twice and another once
 - 3 pieces once each.