

CANASTA - 10 EASY STEPS:

Written By Joseph Andrews, Copyright Newt's Games & Playing Cards
No unauthorized reproduction.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Canasta is a unique South American card game of melds and strategy, and a member of the Rummy card family. It was introduced to the United States in 1949, having started in Uruguay. Within a few months, Canasta became an overnight sensation. For the next several years it was the #1 card game in America. Bridge players, in particular, were enthralled with this new game. The United States Playing Card Company (Bicycle) manufactured special edition decks. All kinds of thematic souvenir products were distributed--including coffee mugs, ash trays, place mats, key chains and other trinkets. Variations on the rules and structure of the game then followed. After a 10-year run, the interest gradually waned and traditional games such as Hearts, Spades, Bridge and Poker regained popularity. Canasta (which means "basket") still has a loyal following. A similar game called "Hand and Foot" (see separate article) has attracted attention. Canasta is also played online at various sites. Here is the way to play this Classic game.

2. PAIRS:

This is the most popular variation. Four players in two partnerships are required to play the basic game. Variations for 2 to 5 players are also popular. Two regular decks of cards and four jokers are combined into one deck. Partnerships may be determined by drawing cards or by prearrangement. The deck is shuffled and cut and 11 cards, face down, are dealt to each player. The undealt deck (called the "stock") is then placed face down in the middle of the table and the top card is turned over. If the top card is a Joker, Deuce or Three, it must be returned to the stock and a new upcard drawn until a "Natural" card appears. The opponent to the left of dealer plays first and draws a card.

POINT VALUE OF THE CARDS

Each Joker=50 Points
Each Deuce or Ace=20 Points
Each King, Queen, Jack, 10, 9 and 8=10 Points
Each 7, 6, 5 and 4=5 Points
Each Black Three=5 Points
Each Red Three=100 Points

Note: Jokers and Deuces (of all suits) are "Wild." All other cards are designated as "NATURAL" cards.

3. RED THREES

Red Threes are "bonus" cards. If a player is dealt any red Threes, he must place these cards face down on the table before the hand commences and replace them from the stock. Subsequently, any player who draws a red Three from the stock (or by picking up the "pile") must place the red Three on the table. If a team makes no melds when the hand is over, the point value of the red Three is deducted from their score. If any player does not drop a red Three at first opportunity, he is penalized 500 points!

4. OBJECT OF THE GAME

Points are scored by completing Melds and collecting Bonus cards. The typical game will have several deals. The point limit is determined prior to the start of the game. The standard limit is 5,000 points; this may be changed by mutual agreement.

5. MELDS

Melds (or "sets") are made up of three or more cards of the same RANK, including wild cards. Sequences, as in Rummy, do not count in the standard game. A Meld must have AT LEAST TWO NATURAL cards and NEVER more than three wild cards. Black Threes are melded only when a player is going out of the hand. Finally, melds are counted ONLY if they are on the table (exposed).

CANASTA - 10 EASY STEPS --- CONTINUED

Written By Joseph Andrews, Copyright Newt's Games & Playing CardS, No unauthorized reproduction.

6. MINIMUM COUNT

The initial meld of the hand must equal the designated point requirement for that hand. Remember, the individual cards have their own point VALUES. These are added together. The minimum count required for each team depends on their score prior to the deal in progress.

Here is the table:

TOTAL SCORE (POINTS)--MINIMUM COUNT

Negative or Minus Score=0 Points

0 to 1499=50 Points

1500 to 2999=90 Points

3000 (or more)=120 Points

The partnership plays as a Team. All melds and red Threes are placed in front of one member of each team. After making melds during a turn, a player then discards one card on to the discard pile. Players may drop cards onto their partner's melds as long as said melds are on the table. Player MAY NOT drop cards onto their opponents' melds.

7. CANASTAS

Canastas are melds with seven or more cards of the same rank. A partnership must have at least ONE Canasta in order to go out. There is Bonus for each Canasta. Natural Canastas (no wild cards) are worth 500 points and mixed Canastas (with wild cards) are worth 300 points.

8. MORE ON MELDS

Any cards left in a player's hand are subtracted from their side's score. A player must always meet the minimum point requirement for his side's first meld. Illegally melded cards will result in a 100-point penalty. A side may not pick up or take the discard pile until they have completed their first meld.

9. THE PILE

A side may use the top card of the discard pile to make their first meld. The pile is said to be "FROZEN" if it is topped by a black Three or a wild card. Other cards are then discarded on top of the pile. The pile remains frozen until a player holding a natural matching pair takes it. The pile can always be refrozen by dropping a black Three or another wild card.

10. GOING OUT

When a player discards his last card by melding or dropping a card onto the pile, he "goes out," meaning the hand ends and the deal is scored. His side must have at least one Canasta on the table.

There are Bonuses that apply here:

Going out=100 points

Each red Three=100 points

Each natural Canasta=500 points

Each mixed Canasta=300 points

Points which remain in the partner's hand are subtracted from the points claimed for melds and bonus cards. It is possible for a team to have a minus score. There is a lot of strategy in this game. The idea is to create as many different melds as possible. Taking the pile is usually good technique; however, it may backfire if you get stranded with a fistful of penalty points for cards in your hand!

This article is only a primer on this fascinating and complex game. I suggest that you reference one of many published books on the game. As stated above, Variations for 2 to 5 players are popular and worth exploring.

Check out these (related) games at your convenience:

Pennies From Heaven

Hand and Foot

Mexicana Canasta

For more information, check out the Google Site.....

www.newtsgames.com