

## Pétanque in public parks & places



Pétanque is an easy, social game that originated 100 years ago in the South of France, as a simpler version of other traditional outdoor bowling games. The object is to toss or roll a number of “boules” (hollow metal balls, roughly the size of an orange) as close as possible to a smaller wooden target ball. No special skill is required, seniors can play with children, and the equipment is inexpensive. Each player just brings his or her 3 “boules”.

From France the game spread throughout Europe and now you can find folks playing in almost every town or city, either at their home, at a dedicated club, or in public parks, large and small.

Though similar to games like the Italian “bocce”, shuffleboard and lawn bowling, there's an important difference in that it does not require any infrastructure. Horseshoes comes close, minus the stake. A patch of dirt or fine gravel of about 12 by 40 ft is enough for a game of up to 6 players.

Though often used, the term “court” is misleading. A better term is “terrain”, because it is a matter of surface, not shape or size. This also means that the area is not necessarily for the exclusive use of pétanque. The 95% of the time when no pétanque play is going on, such an area can be used by others, and for other activities.

### Surface & shape

The ideal texture of a pétanque terrain is basically the same as a crushed stone drive- or walkway, topped off with a 1 inch layer of 1/4” minus, also called screenings. Quite hard and resistant, but the finer surface softens the impact of the landing “boules”, and prevents them from rolling too far. Baseball diamonds can be used, though the clay sometimes tends to be too soft.

The shape of the area does not matter. It is best to fit the terrain into the natural surroundings. If trees are available for shade, even better.

Borders are not needed for the game, but may be useful to separate it from the surrounding surface or to prevent grass from growing over. Wooden beams, rocks, pavers or flower beds are all possibilities. If and when a tournament attracts more players than usual and square footage is at a premium, it is easy to mark off individual “courts” with twine for the day.

This means that making an area suitable for pétanque play is merely a matter of bringing in a couple of truckloads of (various grades of) crushed stone, and the use of a compactor. If weeds could become an issue it is recommended to start with inexpensive non woven weed barrier.

Nice additions, depending on the available budget, are benches and picnic tables. Again, these can be used by the general public year round.

### Maintenance

Maintenance is limited to an occasional raking to soften up the top layer and to clear the area of leaves if applicable.

### Impact

Pétanque players love to share their experience and skills with newcomers and public pétanque areas inevitably become a relaxed meeting place for people from all walks of life and of all ages. Besides laughter and high fives one will hear little noise. And the more play areas there are in a town, the easier it is for players to walk over there as opposed to driving.

## Examples



### **Bryant Park, 42<sup>nd</sup> St, Manhattan, NY**

In the 1980's, Bryant Park had deteriorated into a rather seedy city park, but thanks to a well designed renovation it has now become an oasis that attracts thousands of daily visitors.

There is a +/- 50' x 30' crushed stone area in the NW corner, surrounded by trees, where in the summer members of the local club - La Boule NY - give free lessons to anyone who would like to learn the game. When no one is playing people just sit there, to read, enjoy lunch or check their email. On a few weekends per year, for tournaments, the club can also use the walkways in the park.

This arrangement is working out very well for both organizations. The park is pleased with the extra attraction, and the club with their play area.

[www.bryantpark.org](http://www.bryantpark.org)

[www.labouleny.com](http://www.labouleny.com)



### **Seaside, FL**

The local pétanque club plays on the crushed stone driveways around the Chapel.

Also most parking areas in the town are crushed stone.

### **Chicago, IL**

The entire area around Buckingham Fountain has a fine layer of decomposed granite which is excellent for pétanque.

### **Greensboro, NC**

An impromptu Sunday afternoon game in Bicentennial Gardens. An existing driveway was patched up with screenings by the Parks Department for a festival.



### **Golden Gate Park, CA**

The meeting place of the oldest pétanque club in the country, founded in 1959.



### **Detroit, MI**

Detroit Pétanque Club plays almost daily, at downtown Campus Martius and Cadillac Square.



**Mc Allen, TX**  
A young player on a jogging trail  
in Schupp Park.



**Portland, OR**  
Jamison Square, downtown.



**New York, NY**  
Washington Square Park, another  
one of La Boule NY play areas.



**Lafayette, CA**  
Play area in Lafayette's Community Center.  
Free shaped, resembling a Mediterranean  
garden.



**Gainesville, FL**  
A sandy/stony trail  
in Alfred A. Ring Park.



**San Rafael, CA**  
Marin County Civic Center.  
Home of the local pétanque club.

## Other resources

[www.usapetanque.org](http://www.usapetanque.org) the USA Pétanque Federation  
[www.petanque.org](http://www.petanque.org) international online magazine  
[www.petanque.us/map](http://www.petanque.us/map) map of public pétanque spots in the USA

---

Pétanque America was founded in 1991 to promote pétanque in the USA and to provide players with equipment at affordable prices. We organize pétanque events and tournaments, assist parks departments, landscape designers, schools, resorts and any other organization interested in the game.



**Pétanque America** Phone: 800-682-2557  
1438-A East Oak St 904-491-1190  
Fernandina Beach, Email: [PetanqueAmerica@gmail.com](mailto:PetanqueAmerica@gmail.com)  
FL 32034 Fax: 904-491-1189  
**[www.petanque-america.com](http://www.petanque-america.com)**