PICKLEBALL SPORT / FREE GUIDE

Pickleball Gear for Beginners

What you need to play your first game

For your first pickleball session, you need access to a paddle, the ball your group uses, suitable shoes, and a court with a net. You may only need to bring the shoes yourself. Ask the organizer what the session supplies before ordering a set. A lesson, open play session, or game with friends can give you a better idea of what to buy than a long product comparison at home.

Start with the place you're going to play. A recreation center with a wood gym floor may use a different ball and have different shoe requirements from a dedicated outdoor court. An indoor facility with a textured hard court may play more like the outdoor venue. If you know the surface, the group's ball, and what equipment is available, you can build a first kit around one actual session.

First-game gear checklist

Item	Bring, borrow, or buy?	Check before you spend
Paddle	Borrow one for a lesson if possible. Buy one when you know what feels manageable.	Grip circumference, handle length, and how quickly you can get it into position.
Balls	Ask whether the group supplies them. Buy a small pack if you need your own.	Exact model, color, and selected pack count.
Court shoes	Bring shoes permitted by the venue that fit securely during side steps.	Court surface, sole requirements, heel fit, and return policy.
Net	Use the court's net or the organizer's equipment.	Buy a portable net only if you have permission and space to set up your own court.
Bag	Start with a backpack you already own.	The longest paddle you carry should fit in the compartment you plan to use.
Water and towel	Pack both for your session.	Keep drinks sealed and separate from items you want to keep dry.

Check what your first session provides

Send the organizer a short message before buying anything. You can ask, "I'm coming for the first time. What surface are we playing on, do you supply paddles or balls, and are there any shoe requirements?" If the answer is that balls are provided, ask for the exact model anyway. That gives you something concrete to look for when you want to practice.

For a group class, ask whether the paddle is included in the fee and whether you'll be allowed to try a second one. At open play, ask how equipment is shared. A friend might bring extra paddles, but the handles may differ enough that you'll want to arrive early and try them. For a public court, verify whether it has permanent nets and whether reservations or shared-court rules apply. That distinction matters far more to your first outing than a new accessory.

Put the details in your phone. Record the venue, the surface, the ball, and the one thing you still need to bring. If you play at a second venue later, make a second entry. You'll avoid trying to remember which facility uses which model or requires clean, non-marking soles.

Choose a first paddle you can use comfortably

A standard or wider all-court paddle is a sensible starting point for many new players. A wider face gives you more room across the paddle when contact drifts toward the sides. A standard shape is worth trying alongside it if you prefer a little more reach. Compare actual handle dimensions and listed weight, since two paddles advertised for beginners can feel quite different in your hand.

Grip the paddle as you would during play. Check that the handle feels secure during gentle swings without constant squeezing. If you use two hands on the backhand, place both hands on the grip before you buy. Your top hand should have somewhere comfortable to go. If the handle feels crowded at rest, you'll notice it more when you have to change grips quickly.

Try a simple demo if you can. Use the same ball with both paddles. Hit a few easy serves, block some volleys, and play several soft shots near the kitchen. See whether you can recover to a ready position comfortably. Think about what you could repeat after an hour of play, since a paddle that feels lively on a single swing can feel different during a long game. Read the paddle buying guide

Match the ball to the surface and the group

Indoor models commonly have fewer, larger holes. Outdoor models commonly have more, smaller holes. You'll often see 26-hole indoor balls and 40-hole outdoor balls, but those numbers describe common designs. Your venue's playing surface and the exact ball your group uses are more useful buying clues. The LTA's equipment guide explains the common indoor and outdoor designs. LTA pickleball equipment guide

A community-center gym may choose a ball designed for smoother floors. A dedicated hard court inside a building may use the same ball as nearby outdoor courts. If you switch between both, start with the ball you'll use most often. Add a second small pack when you know you'll play at both places regularly. Keep the models in separate pockets or label the containers.

When ordering online, verify the selected color and pack count. Product images often show several balls, and a listing can have multiple configurations. When you're trying a new model, a small pack is easier to commit to. If your group already supplies a suitable ball, there's no urgency to buy one just for the first outing. Compare indoor and outdoor balls

Check shoes before you upgrade anything else

During pickleball, you'll start, stop, shuffle sideways, and move forward from a ready position. Try shoes with your playing socks. Walk, stop, and take a few side steps on a clean indoor surface where you can still return the shoes. Look for a secure heel, enough room for your toes, and a fit that keeps your foot from sliding sideways inside the shoe. Lace both shoes before deciding. A shoe may feel fine when you're seated and quite different on a side step.

Read the manufacturer's surface guidance and ask the facility about its own requirements. A gym may ask for clean, non-marking soles. A dedicated outdoor court may call for a different outsole from your usual indoor shoe. If you already own court shoes suitable for the venue, start there. Use the first few sessions to find out whether fit, traction, or comfort gives you a concrete reason to shop. See the court shoe and bag guide

Three beginner setups for different places to play

A beginner class with loan equipment

Bring suitable shoes, athletic clothes, water, and a towel. Arrive early enough to ask how to borrow a paddle and which ball the class uses. If there are two paddles to try, notice differences in the grip and how each feels on a short volley. Take a photo of the label if you like one. You leave with useful buying information even if you spend nothing on equipment that day.

Weekly open play at a dedicated court

Bring one paddle you can use comfortably and a small pack of the group's preferred ball if players supply their own. An existing backpack can hold the paddle, a drink, and a towel. Check that the bottle stays upright and the zipper closes without pressing hard on the paddle face or handle. Once you know what you carry every week, you can decide whether padded storage or a separate shoe compartment is worth it.

A group that wants to set up its own court

First confirm that the space can be used for pickleball. Ask who provides the net and whether temporary markings are allowed. Check the playing area and the room around it before shopping. If your group needs a net, compare the full setup dimensions, storage length, and what comes in the package. Look at how many people are needed to carry it from the car and whether the frame and net fit where you'll store them. Browse nets and sets

Buy upgrades when you can name the problem they solve

After several sessions, write down any issue you notice more than once. If a handle gets slippery during long games, an overgrip might be enough. If wet shoes touch a towel or the paddle face in your backpack, a ventilated shoe pocket could help. If your paddle feels slow at the net, compare another shape and balance before assuming that a more expensive version will solve it.

It also helps to keep a simple purchase order. First cover what the next session requires. Then replace anything that repeatedly interrupts play. Finally, consider convenience upgrades. A second paddle is useful if you want a backup or often bring a guest. A large bag can make sense for a tournament day with extra clothes and multiple paddles. Those are specific situations you can plan for once you know your routine.

Beginner pickleball equipment questions

Do I need a pickleball set?

A set can make sense if two or more people need paddles and you've checked that the included balls and net match your plans. For a class with loan equipment or a court with a permanent net, individual purchases give you more control over what you bring home. Check the contents carefully. A listing called a set may include paddles and balls but no net.

Do I need an approved paddle?

Ask the organizer which rules apply. If you plan to enter a USA Pickleball-sanctioned event, check the exact paddle model in the current equipment database before buying. The model and version matter, especially when a manufacturer sells several paddles with similar names. Approval tells you about eligibility under the applicable rules. Use the fit and demo checks above to decide whether you want to play with it. USA Pickleball approved equipment database

How many balls should I buy?

For practice, start with a small pack of the ball your group plays with. If you'll share a basket for drills, ask what your group already owns before buying in bulk. Compare pack sizes after you know the model works on your surface and the color is easy for you to see there.

Compare the gear you're ready to buy

As an Amazon Associate, I earn from qualifying purchases.

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