

Summer Games You Can Play With a Drink in Hand

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If the only activity you're getting these days is the mad dash from one air-conditioned building to another, and the beverage you reach for most is water, you're not alone. It's summer, after all, which means soaring temperatures and life-sucking humidity, a combination that may have hydration at the top of your mind and athletic endeavors at the bottom.

Still, you don't have to give up all non-essential movement or limit your liquid intake to H₂O for an entire season. Instead, why not get out and play a game or "sport" that scores low on the sweat-o-meter, has a high fun factor and is leisurely enough to enjoy with a fruity summer cocktail in hand. Below are some old favorites. Grab a shady spot, a cool drink and let the games begin . . .

BOCCE. There are a handful of bocce courts in the area and even a D.C. bocce league (<http://www.dcboce.com/>), but all you really need to play the game is a bocce set and a flat surface of grass or dirt (and, of course, if you're planning to include cocktails, your best bet is your own back yard). The game, played on a court that's about 10-feet wide and 90-feet long, involves one small target ball, or pallino, and eight larger balls, which are rolled toward the target. The object is to get your balls closer to the pallino than your opponent's, and yes, it's fair to knock their balls or even the pallino farther away. Typically teams of two or four play, but you can also play one-on-one. The best news: You don't have to be athletic to excel. "No matter what your age or physical limitations are, it's something you can do, as long as you can roll a ball," says Traci Peters, president of the American Bocce Association. "It is all about having fun."

Gear up: You can pick up a bocce set for as low as \$20 to \$40 at sporting goods stores.

Drink up: Nothing says summer like a Bellini, the fruity cocktail made with sparkling wine and peach puree. Or, if you want to channel the old Italian men who fit the game's traditional stereotype, try a shot of grappa.

CROQUET. We have the British to thank for this garden classic, which involves using a wooden mallet to knock balls around a grass court, proceeding through wickets and hitting stakes in a prescribed order. The game is played by two to eight players and, despite its image as a genteel sport, "it's not a slow game," says three-time U.S. Croquet Association champion John Osborn. "It really is a race. The first team or player to make their way around the court is considered the winner." Going through wickets, hitting the appropriate stake or hitting other players' balls entitles you to more shots, which gets you through the course more quickly.

Of course, the more players, the more beverage breaks you can take, which means that even if you assume a less-than-leisurely pace, you can still enjoy the game and an icy concoction. Still, you'll need two hands to hit properly, so unless you have one of those drinking hats tricked out with cup

holders and straws -- which we don't recommend for aesthetic reasons -- you'll have to put down your cocktail when it's your turn to play.

Gear up: Grab a set at a sporting goods store (they start around \$30) and hit the lawn.

Drink up: We recommend something to honor the game's founding nation. How about a Pimm's cocktail (Pimm's No. 1 and lemonade dolled up with a cucumber slice and a sprig of mint for good measure)?

DARTS. Ironically, the game in which you throw very sharp, pointed objects is also the one that's probably most closely associated with drinking. Go figure. The good news is that there's no shortage of establishments where they not only permit you to drink while you play, they positively encourage it. And tossing a dart is something that's easily accomplished with one hand, which is, well, handy for drinking. Hang the board inside or outside with the center of the bull's-eye 5 feet 8 inches from the floor and mark a throwing line 7 feet 9 inches (or eight feet if using soft-tipped darts) from the face of the board (insider's tip: call the line an oche -- rhymes with hockey -- and people will think you're an expert). Each player gets three darts, which he throws, one at a time, at the dartboard. There are various games and scoring methods but most dartboards come with instructions.

Gear up: If you choose to play at home instead of a bar, you can pick up a dart board set at a discount department store for as low as \$15.

Drink up: Darts screams for beer. We recommend a Victory Prima Pils, an award-winning beer with loads of flavor yet still light enough for summer.

HORSESHOES. This is one game where even the experts (yes, there are experts) admit there is little or no tactical thinking. Or, as National Horseshoe Pitchers Association Publicity Director Casey Sluys says, "There isn't a whole lot of psychological stuff going on in horseshoes." Instead, winning in horseshoes is purely a matter of accuracy, which is a good thing if you want to give your noggin a rest and a bad thing if you've never thrown a two-pound weight 40 feet before. Still, for backyard fun, you can't go wrong, provided you don't actually hit anyone, of course.

The game, which grew out of the ancient game of quoits, is played by two to four players on a playing area that's six-feet wide and features two stakes planted 30 to 40 feet apart. Players throw their horseshoes underhand toward the stakes, attempting to get a ringer -- which happens when the horseshoe completely encircles the stake -- or, failing that, trying to get as close as possible to the stake.

Gear up: You can buy a game set for about \$15 and mark out a playing area anywhere with a relatively flat surface (you don't want to be throwing uphill).

Drink up: In keeping with the equine theme, try a mint julep (bourbon or brandy, sugar, mint and crushed ice), the traditional drink of the Kentucky Derby.

SHUFFLEBOARD. Common perceptions aside, you don't have to be a retiree in Florida or a cruise ship passenger to play shuffleboard. You can play the game anywhere there is a flat, hard surface -- think driveway, carport or patio. Other than the strength it takes to push the cue hard enough to

shoot a disc, shuffleboard doesn't take a great deal of athletic prowess, which makes it ideal for a casual game coupled with cocktails.

To win, players accrue points by shooting a disc into specified spaces marked on a six-foot-wide and 39-foot-long court. There's some strategy involved, including making shots that block opponents' and knocking their discs out of point range. "It's a lot like a pool game," explains Walt Wedel, National Shuffleboard Association president, who admits the game is mostly played by older people but says it does draw a younger crowd in some resort areas.

Gear up: You can pick up the required equipment for about \$60 at a sporting goods store and mark out a court yourself. Or, if you're too commitment-shy to paint marks, buy a kit (also about \$60) with a plastic roll-out court: Should things not work out between you and shuffleboard, you can always stash it in your coat closet next to your pogo stick.

Drink up: We recommend something that says eternal summer: a daiquiri (rum, lime and powdered sugar). In keeping with the game's image, serve it up in an old-fashioned glass.

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