

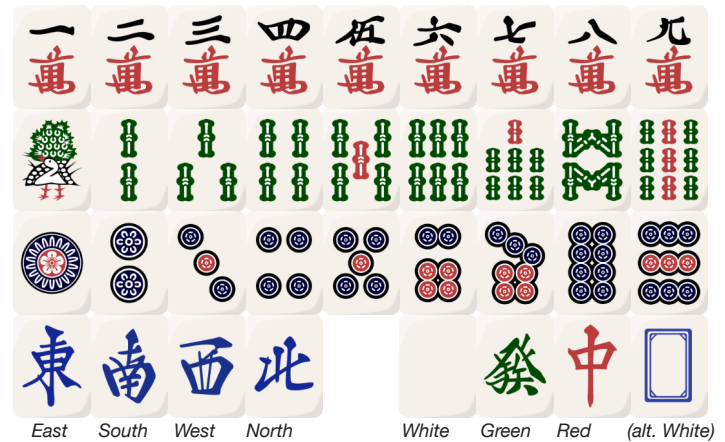
Riichi Mahjong - Beginner's FAQ

moonpost mahjong merch: <https://moonpost.com/mahjong>

What is Riichi Mahjong?

Maybe you've heard about it in an article or saw it played in a movie or an anime. It's kind of like gin rummy and poker but with tiles instead of cards. Four players compete to create winning hands. It's the Japanese version of mahjong and is a bit different from the Chinese or American game you might have seen before. Any mahjong set could work for playing Riichi as it uses the 136 basic tiles (but often includes special all-red 5 tiles).

Players always start with 13 tiles and every turn they draw 1 and discard 1 to build a winning hand. When your last tile completes your hand of 14 tiles you do not discard. You need four sets of three (either three in a row of the same suit like 4-5-6, or a triplet of the same tile) and a matching pair to have a winning hand. Suits can never be mixed for a set. First person to complete their hand wins the round and scores points based on how valuable their hand was to make.



Where's the big pyramid stack of tiles?

That's Mahjong Solitaire, a tile-matching game that is *played with* mahjong tiles and gets called 'mahjong' but the actual game is a four-player match that combines **luck and strategy**.

Do I need to pay to play? Do I have to buy a card to play?

No. You can easily find meetups or mahjong clubs in most urban areas and they'll gladly welcome new players to their ranks. Many will set up teaching sessions for new players, so just ask! Although, it is certainly common to see great low-cost beginner classes offered through community centers that are worth taking.

Once you learn how to play, look for open game sessions at community centers, libraries, or at bars, coffee shops, and restaurants (if at any of the latter, buy some snacks and tip the staff!).

In regards to having a special card to play, that is a feature unique to American mahjong. Each year the National Mahjong League (**NMJL**) publishes an official card of standard hands for the year. Riichi hands (called "yaku") do not change and there are almost 40.

What about other tiles: flowery-looking things and jokers and birds and boxes?

The 1 tile of bamboo always features a bird. Just remember that birds sit on trees and bamboo is like a tree. The rectangular box is the white dragon but in standard riichi sets the white dragon is just blank.

Those other tiles are a standard part of a Chinese/Hong Kong or American mahjong set. Jokers are only part of American mahjong. The extra tiles that look like flowers are flower tiles, but there are also season tiles (typically flowery or nature themed) used in some mahjong variations.

Can I play riichi online to learn the game?

One of the most popular ways to play riichi is through the app/website called **Mahjong Soul**, which is free. You can learn the game, practice, and compete in ranked matches to build your skills and reputation. One thing to keep in mind about Mahjong Soul is that, while the game is totally free, they will try to get you to buy special characters or outfits or add-ons or loot boxes (it is what is commonly known as a *Gacha game*). Just ignore all that. <https://mahjong soul.yo-star.com/>

If you already know how to play, the free website riichiadvanced.com lets you play against the computer or friends.

To learn tile efficiency (what to discard): <https://euophrys.itch.io/mahjong-efficiency-trainer>

Any other good resources?

Sure, there is a great color reference sheet a lot of players print and laminate: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/18hxO5DMVAqxSNV9VvpjAg6YjyPVAMzyS>

This fun printable guide might be useful: <https://zoepardus.itch.io/riichi-mahjong-zine-getting-started>

Once you understand the game and the hands (yaku), the free book, **Riichi Book 1**, is always recommended to intermediate players (*there is no book 2*): <https://raw.githubusercontent.com/dainachiba/RiichiBooks/master/RiichiBook1.pdf>

I want to buy my own set of tiles. Where do I go?

Do you want a 'universal' set for playing other types of mahjong or just riichi? American mahjong tiles are thinner as they need tile racks for each player. Chinese and Japanese tiles are thicker as they don't use racks and stand up on their own.

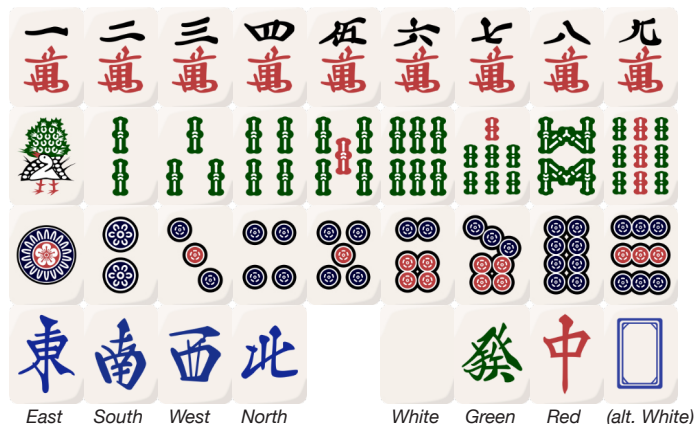
Many riichi players like and recommend the **AMOS Masters** or **AMOS Complete Gear** set of **standard 28mm** tiles which includes everything except a 'junk mat' for the table. Note that a riichi-specific set of tiles will not include flowers, seasons, or jokers so **cannot** be used for other forms of mahjong. This set also does not have arabic numerals so you will have to learn the traditional characters. Most riichi sets use very dark colors so tiles that have green on them are more black than green.

Yellow Mountain Imports makes all kinds of sets. Besides their riichi-specific sets, the Chinese 'small' sized set is **30mm** tall and numbered and works great for riichi, but note that it does *not* come with red fives (you'd have to paint them red yourself). The symbol colors are bright and clearly engraved.

Riichi Mahjong - A Compact Guide

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Riichi (Japanese) Mahjong is a 4-player tile game where players compete to create a winning hand. A standard winning hand consists of 14 tiles in 5 blocks: 4 sets + 1 pair (e.g., 123, 456, 777, EEE + 99). To start, players shuffle tiles then each builds a wall of face-down tiles, 17 tiles long and 2 tiles high. Dealer rolls 2 dice to determine from which tile wall, and where to split, to create dead wall. Dealer takes first four stacked tiles, then each other player, until they have 12. Dealer then takes next 1st + 3rd tiles, others take 1. Dealer starts the game by discarding their extra tile (players have 13 tiles until completing their winning hand).



Tile Types

There are 136 tiles (4 of each tile) in 3 suits and the Honor tiles.
Manzu / Characters: Numbered 1-9 (represented in text as 1m, 2m, 3m, 4m, 5m, 6m, 7m, 8m, 9m)
Souzu / Bamboo: Numbered 1-9 (represented in text as 1s, 2s, 3s, 4s, 5s, 6s, 7s, 8s, 9s) and the 1 tile always has a bird on it
Pinzu / Dots: Numbered 1-9 (represented in text as 1p, 2p, 3p, 4p, 5p, 6p, 7p, 8p, 9p)

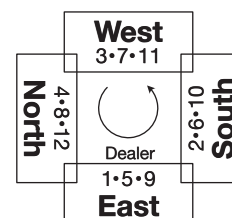
Wind Tiles: East, South, West, North (represented as E, S, W, N)

Dragon Tiles: White, Green, Red

Simples/Basic: Number tiles 2-8 of any suit

Terminals: 1 and 9 of any suit

Honors: Wind tiles and Dragon tiles



Round & Seat Winds

Round/Prevailing Wind: Games are typically 1 (East Wind only) or 2 full rounds (East Wind and South Wind)

Seat Wind: Each player also has a seat wind (East/South/West/North)

East player is always dealer: play moves counter-clockwise until each player has been East dealer in both rounds
Matching round/seat winds in your hand are worth bonus points.

Calling Tiles (Opening Your Hand)

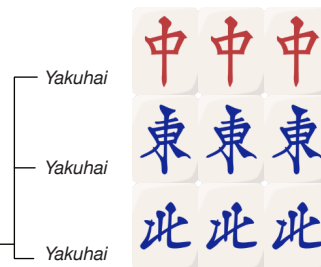
Chii: Call a tile from player *on left* to complete a sequence (e.g., 4-5 + call 6)

Pon: Call a tile from *any* player to complete a triplet (e.g., 7-7 + call 7)

Kan: Call a tile to make a quad (4 identical tiles); draw replacement tile (from dead wall) and reveal +1 dora
Note that opening your hand prevents Riichi but allows faster completion.

Basic Yaku (Winning Patterns)

Riichi (1 han) - Declare ready with any *concealed* hand; pay 1000 points to table; cannot change hand
Yakuhai (1 han) - Hand has triplet of dragons OR your seat wind OR round wind. +1 each set
Tanyao (1 han) - All tiles are simples (2-8), no honors or terminals (1,9)
Toitoe (2 han) - All sets are triplets (no sequences)
Honitsu (2 han) - One suit + honors only (+1 if concealed)



Dora Tiles (Bonus)

Dora indicator (3rd top tile in dead wall) is revealed at start; the **next** tile in sequence is dora

Example: If indicator shows 6 manzu, then 7 manzu is dora

Red 5 tiles are dora (red fives are common but optional)

Each dora in your hand adds +1 han (worth more points)

Important: Dora is not a yaku.



Tanyao



Dora Sequences:

Numbers: 1→2→3→4→5→6→7→8→9→1 (cycles back)

Winds: East→South→West→North→East (cycles back)

Dragons: White→Green→Red→White (cycles back, alphabetical)

How to Win

Ron: Win by taking another player's discard - they pay you

Tsumo: Win by drawing the winning tile yourself - all players pay you

Key Rules

Your discarded tiles go face-up in front of you, 6 tiles per row.

You need at least 1 yaku to win (dora alone doesn't count).

Each player draws (or calls) 1 then discards 1 each turn unless the new tile completes their winning hand.

Furiten: If the tile you are waiting on to win your hand is already in your discard pile then you must self-draw to win (you cannot call another player's discard).

Dead wall: The last 7 stacks (14 tiles) are never drawn (except for kan replacements), so hands can end in a draw.

Tenpai: A ready hand needing one final tile. When a round ends in exhaustive draw, if you are tenpai you still score some points.

Scoring: It can take many games to learn how to score winning hands; be patient and seek help from experienced players. Points are calculated based on **han** (yaku + dora) and **fu** (hand composition).

Tenbou (Point Sticks)

Each player starts with 25,000 (casual) or 30,000 (tournament) points.

1x 10000, 2x 5000, 4x 1000, 10x 100

