



MANCALA

VARIANT LIBRARY

The world's most-played family of count-and-capture games

8 VARIANTS	2 PLAYERS	6+ AGE
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VARIANT LIBRARY

Mancala is a family of count-and-capture games originating in Africa and the Middle East, with a history spanning at least 3,000 years. Players sow seeds or stones around a board of pits, capturing when sowing lands in the right conditions. The same fundamental mechanic produces dozens of culturally distinct games across Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean.

This library includes 8 playable variants from across the Mancala family.

WEST AFRICA

- ♦ [Oware](#) — The most widely known Mancala game: 2×6 pits, single-lap sowing, grand slam rule
- ♦ [Ayo](#) — Yoruba (Nigerian) form of Oware with identical rules and deep cultural tradition

EAST AFRICA

- ♦ [Bao](#) — The most complex Mancala: 4-row board, multi-lap sowing, relay captures

SOUTHEAST ASIA

- ♦ [Congkak](#) — Malaysian 2×7 board with two houses; sow into own store, skip opponent's
- ♦ [Sungka](#) — Philippine 2×7 board; simultaneous start, sow into own head only

SOUTH ASIA

- ♦ [Pallanguzhi](#) — Tamil Nadu: 2×7 pits, 12 seeds per pit, multi-lap sowing with relay capture

CENTRAL ASIA

- ♦ [Toguz Korgool](#) — Kyrgyz national game: 2×9 pits, tuzduk rule locks one opponent pit

WESTERN STANDARD

- ♦ [Kalah](#) — The 1940s Western standardisation: 2×6 pits plus two stores, accessible and fast



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MANCALA · VARIANT 1 OF 8

Kalah

2×6 pits + 2 stores

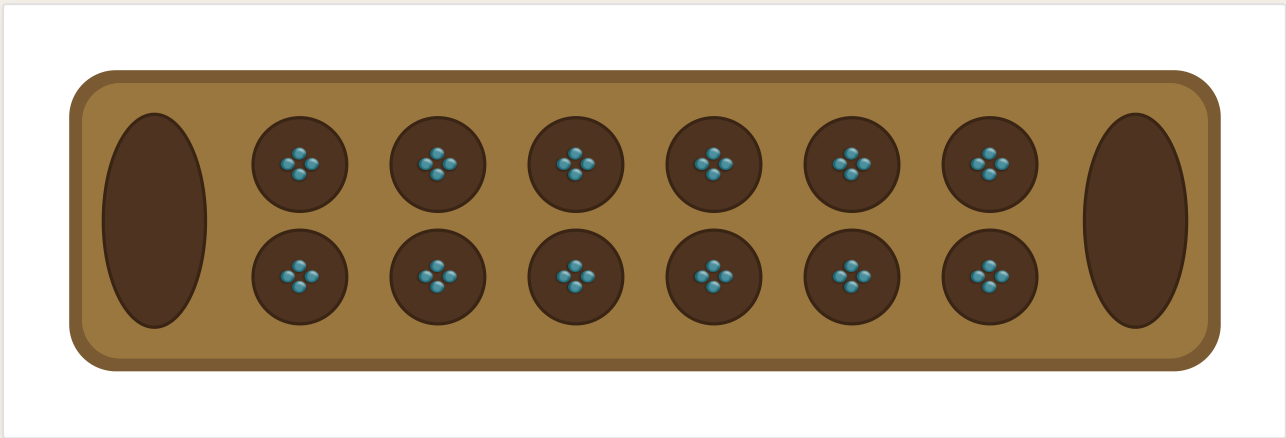
BOARD

2

PLAYERS

KALAH

The standard Western form of Mancala, designed in the United States by William Julius Champion Jr. in the 1940s and marketed as a commercial game. Widely available and the most commonly taught variant outside Africa and Asia.



Kalah — starting position

<https://engine.moddable.games/play/?game=mancala&variant=kalah>

ITEM	QTY	NOTES
Board	1	2 rows of 6 pits + 1 store at each end
Seeds	72	Stones, beads, or counters

SETUP

Each of the 12 pits begins with 6 seeds. The two stores (also called Kalahs) begin empty. Each player owns the store to their right and the 6 pits on their side of the board.

RULES

- Sowing:** On your turn, pick up all seeds from any one of your six pits. Sow them one at a time into consecutive pits, moving counter-clockwise (to the right along your row, then through your store, then along the opponent’s row).
- Your store:** When you reach your own store, deposit one seed into it. Skip the opponent’s store during sowing.
- Bonus turn:** If the last seed you sow lands in your own store, you take another turn immediately.
- Capture:** If the last seed lands in an empty pit on your side, and the opposite pit (on the opponent’s side) contains seeds, capture all seeds from the opposite pit and your sowing seed, placing them in your store.
- Empty pits:** You must choose a pit that contains at least one seed.

END OF GAME

When one player's six pits are all empty at the start of their turn, the game ends. The opposing player sweeps all remaining seeds on their side into their own store.

WINNING

The player with more seeds in their store wins. With 72 seeds total, 37 wins.

ATTRIBUTION

Kalah. Designed by William Julius Champion Jr., USA, 1940s. Public domain rules. Source: Wikipedia (CC-BY-SA).

MANCALA · VARIANT 2 OF 8

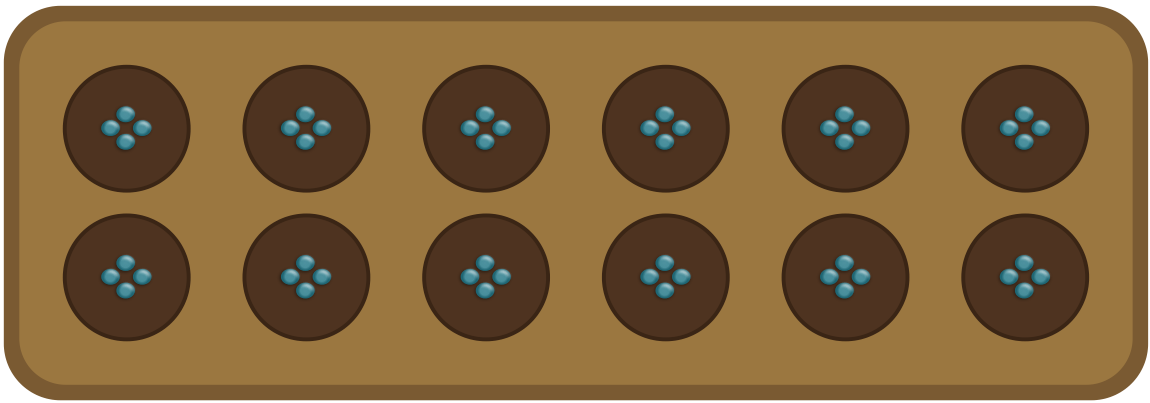
Oware

2×6 pits
BOARD

2
PLAYERS

OWARE

The most internationally recognised Mancala variant, originating in Ghana and widely played across West Africa, the Caribbean, and the Ghanaian diaspora. Known under many regional names including Awale (Côte d’Ivoire), Wari (Senegal), and Ayo (Yoruba, Nigeria). The game is a national sport in several West African countries.



Oware — starting position

<https://engine.moddable.games/play/?game=mancala&variant=oware>

ITEM	QTY	NOTES
Board	1	2 rows of 6 pits
Seeds	48	4 seeds per pit at start

SETUP

48 seeds distributed equally, 4 per pit. No stores on the board; captured seeds are held separately by each player. Each player owns the 6 pits on their side.

RULES

Sowing: Pick up all seeds from any one of your six pits. Sow counter-clockwise, one seed per pit, skipping the pit you lifted from if the circuit returns to it (only relevant with large counts).

Capture: If the last seed sown lands in an opponent’s pit and that pit now contains exactly 2 or 3 seeds, capture those seeds. If the pit before it also has 2 or 3 seeds, capture those too, and continue backwards capturing consecutive pits with 2 or 3 seeds.

Grand slam: If sowing would capture all seeds on the opponent’s side, the capture is illegal. You must choose a different pit that does not result in a grand slam. If no legal move avoids a grand slam, all opponent seeds are left in place and your turn ends.

Feeding obligation: If the opponent has no seeds, you must make a move that gives them seeds if possible. If no such move exists, the game ends.

END OF GAME

The game ends when one player captures more than 24 seeds (majority of 48), when both players agree to end with fewer than 4 seeds remaining on the board, or when the same board position repeats. Remaining seeds go to the player who owns those pits.

WINNING

The player with more captured seeds wins. 25 or more seeds wins outright.

ATTRIBUTION

Oware. Traditional game, Ghana and West Africa. Public domain. Source: Wikipedia (CC-BY-SA); Russ, Laurence — *The Complete Mancala Games Book* (1984).

MANCALA · VARIANT 3 OF 8

Bao

4×8 pits (2 rows per player)

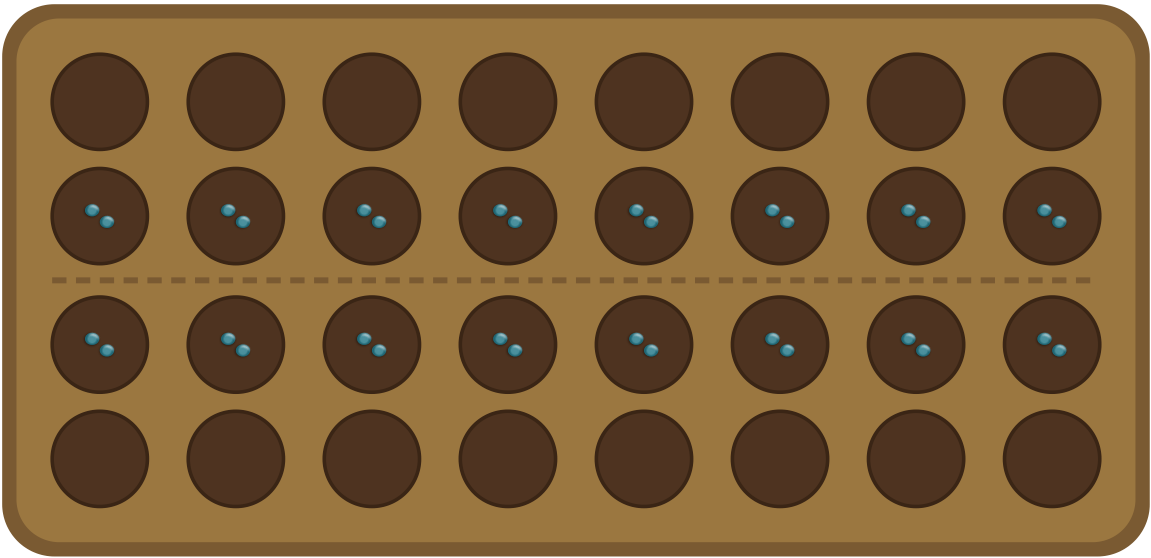
BOARD

2

PLAYERS

BAO

The most strategically complex Mancala game in the world, played in Tanzania, Kenya, and across East Africa, particularly among the Swahili-speaking peoples. Bao uses a unique four-row board and a two-phase structure that gives it a depth comparable to Chess. The game has been described by game theorists as the most complex traditional African game.



Bao — starting position

<https://engine.moddable.games/play/?game=mancala&variant=bao>

ITEM	QTY	NOTES
Board	1	4 rows of 8 pits: 2 rows per player (inner + outer)
Seeds	64	2 seeds in each of the 32 pits

SETUP

The board is oriented with both players’ inner rows facing each other. Each pit starts with 2 seeds. The four centre pits of each inner row (positions 4 and 5 from each end) are called **kimbi** — they will be significant in the opening.

Each player controls their two rows: the **inner row** (facing the centre) and the **outer row** (behind it).

PHASE 1 — NAMUA (SEEDING PHASE)

Players take turns introducing seeds from a reserve of seeds outside the board.

On each turn, a player places one seed from reserve into any pit in their inner row that already contains seeds. That pit is then sown: all seeds from that pit are lifted and distributed counter-clockwise through the inner row, then outward if they reach the end.

Relay: If the last seed lands in a non-empty pit, pick up all seeds in that pit and continue sowing. Continue until the last seed lands in an empty pit.

Capture in namua: If the final seed of a sow lands in a pit directly opposite a non-empty opponent inner-row pit, capture the opponent's seeds from that pit. Place captured seeds into your kichwa (rightmost pit of your inner row). Then sow from the kichwa if it was empty before capture, or sow the captured seeds into the kichwa pit continuing the relay chain.

Namua ends when both players have distributed all reserve seeds.

PHASE 2 — MTAJI (CAPTURE PHASE)

Players alternate turns. On each turn, you must make a capturing move if one is available.

Capture move: Pick up seeds from any inner-row pit that, when sown, will land opposite a non-empty opponent inner-row pit. After the sow (including all relay continuations), captured seeds go into the kichwa and sowing continues from there.

Non-capture move: If no capture is available, sow from any non-empty pit (inner or outer row). Relay continues as in namua.

Direction: You choose the direction of sow at the start of each turn (clockwise or counter-clockwise along your inner row, continuing into the outer row).

WINNING

You win when your opponent's inner row has no seeds, or when your opponent has no legal move.

ATTRIBUTION

Bao. Traditional game, Tanzania and East Africa. Public domain. Sources: de Voogt, Alex — *Mancala Board Games* (1997); Wikipedia (CC-BY-SA).

MANCALA · VARIANT 4 OF 8

Congkak

2×7 pits + 2 houses

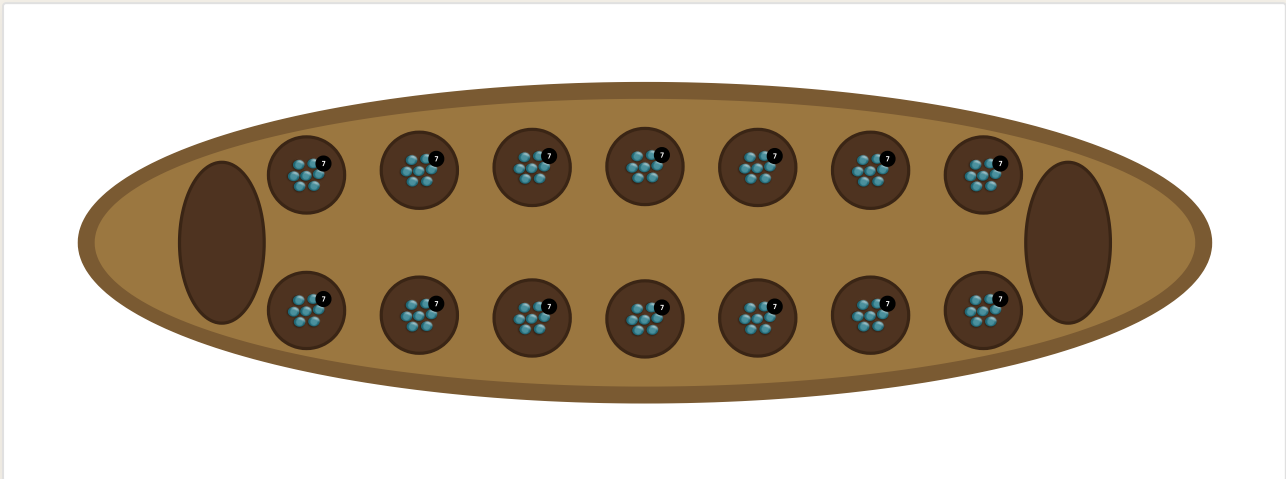
BOARD

2

PLAYERS

CONGKAK

The traditional Mancala game of the Malay Archipelago, widely played in Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Brunei. The word comes from the Malay *congkak* (to count). Congkak uses a boat-shaped wooden board with seven playing pits per side and one large *rumah* (house) at each end. The game is played by women and children during festive seasons and is recognised as a traditional Malay cultural game.



Congkak — starting position

<https://engine.moddable.games/play/?game=mancala&variant=congkak>

ITEM	QTY	NOTES
Board	1	2 rows of 7 playing pits + 1 house at each end
Seeds	98	7 seeds per pit (98 total); cowrie shells or marbles traditionally

SETUP

7 seeds in each of the 14 playing pits. Both houses start empty. Each player owns the 7 pits on their side and the house to their right.

RULES

Simultaneous start: Both players start sowing simultaneously from any pit of their choice. The first player whose hand meets the other’s hand (they collide in sowing) must stop and wait for the other player to finish their turn.

Sowing direction: Counter-clockwise. Sow one seed per pit along your own row, into your house, then continue along the opponent’s row. Skip the opponent’s house.

House: Drop one seed into your own house each pass. Do not drop seeds into the opponent’s house.

Landing in your house: If the last seed lands in your house, pick up any pit of your choosing on your side and continue sowing (effectively a bonus turn from a new pit).

Capture: If the last seed lands in an empty pit on your side, and the opposite pit on the opponent's side is non-empty, capture all seeds from the opposite pit. Your sowing seed stays in your pit. Captured seeds go to your house.

Landing in opponent's pit: If the last seed lands in an opponent's pit, your turn ends.

Landing in empty own pit with no opposite seeds: Your turn ends. That pit becomes a dead pit.

DEAD PITS

Empty pits on your side that you have triggered (last seed landed there, no capture) become dead pits. They cannot be played from on future turns. At the start of your next round, you may buy back a dead pit by paying seeds from your house equal to the number of seeds that were originally in that pit (7).

END OF GAME

The game ends when one player has no seeds on their side and cannot buy back any dead pits. Count seeds in each house.

WINNING

The player with more seeds in their house wins. With 98 seeds total, 50 or more wins.

ATTRIBUTION

Congkak. Traditional game, Malay Archipelago. Public domain. Source: Wikipedia (CC-BY-SA); Russ, Laurence — *The Complete Mancala Games Book* (1984).

MANCALA · VARIANT 5 OF 8

Toguz Korgool

2×9 pits + 2 kazans

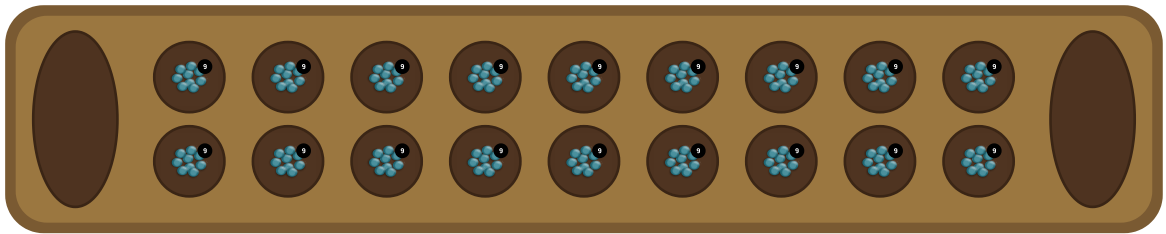
BOARD

2

PLAYERS

TOGUZ KORGOOL

The national game of Kyrgyzstan, played across Central Asia from Kyrgyzstan to Kazakhstan. The name means “nine balls” in Kyrgyz. Toguz Korgool is one of the few Mancala games to feature a permanent lock mechanic (the tuzduk), which creates long-term strategic planning entirely absent from simpler Mancala forms. The game has been played at the World Nomad Games since 2016.



Toguz Korgool — starting position

<https://engine.moddable.games/play/?game=mancala&variant=toguz-korgool>

ITEM	QTY	NOTES
Board	1	2 rows of 9 pits + 1 kazan (store) at each end
Seeds	162	9 seeds per pit at start

SETUP

9 seeds in each of the 18 pits. Both kazans start empty. Each player owns the 9 pits on their side and the kazan to their left (when facing the board).

RULES

Sowing: Pick up all seeds from any of your nine pits. Sow one seed per pit, moving right along your row, then continuing into the opponent’s row. Do not sow into either kazan.

Capture (scoring): If the last seed you sow lands in an opponent’s pit that now contains an even number of seeds, capture all seeds from that pit into your own kazan.

Tuzduk: If the last seed lands in an opponent’s pit that now contains exactly 3 seeds (i.e. you sowed the 3rd seed), and the pit is not the rightmost pit (pit 9 of their row), and neither player already has a tuzduk from that side, that pit becomes your tuzduk. Mark it. All seeds that subsequently land in your tuzduk go directly into your kazan for the rest of the game. The opponent cannot capture from their own tuzduk pit.

Tuzduk restrictions: Each player may have at most one tuzduk at a time. A tuzduk cannot be established in the rightmost pit (pit 9) of the opponent’s row.

Sowing into kasan: If a sow would include the kasan on a pass, skip it and continue on the other side.

END OF GAME

The game ends when one player cannot move (all pits empty). The opponent captures all remaining seeds on their side into their own kasan.

WINNING

The player with 82 or more seeds in their kasan wins. If both finish on exactly 81, the game is a draw.

ATTRIBUTION

Toguz Korgool. Traditional game, Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia. Public domain. Source: Wikipedia (CC-BY-SA); World Intellectual Board Games Federation rules.

MANCALA · VARIANT 6 OF 8

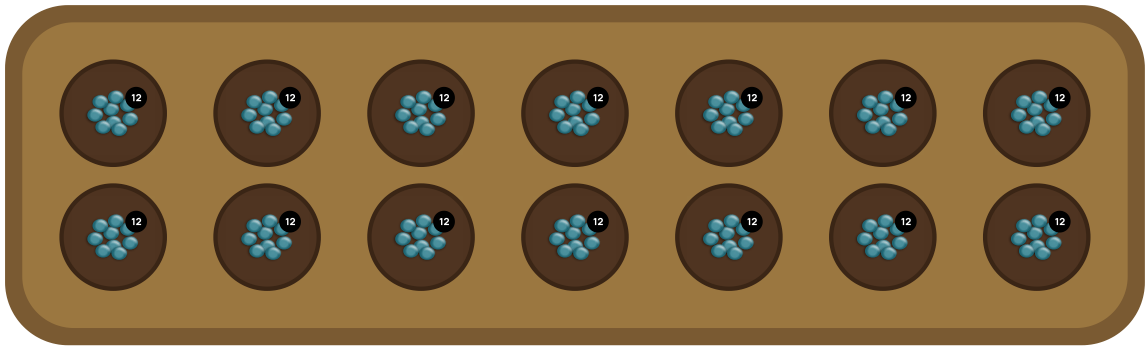
Pallanguzhi

2×7 pits
BOARD

2
PLAYERS

PALLANGUZH

A traditional South Indian Mancala game played predominantly in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, as well as among Tamil-speaking communities in Sri Lanka, Singapore, and Malaysia. The name comes from Tamil: *pallam* (pit) and *kuzhi* (hole). Pallanguzhi uses 14 seeds per pit — significantly more than other Mancala variants — and features a continuous relay mechanic that creates long, unbroken sowing chains.



Pallanguzhi — starting position

<https://engine.moddable.games/play/?game=mancala&variant=pallanguzhi>

ITEM	QTY	NOTES
Board	1	2 rows of 7 pits
Seeds	146	Traditionally cowrie shells or tamarind seeds; 14 per pit at start (not counting the initial relay)

SETUP

Place 12 seeds in each of the 14 pits (168 seeds total). No stores on the board — captured seeds are held separately.

RULES

- Sowing:** Pick up all seeds from any pit on your side. Sow one seed per pit, moving counter-clockwise (right along your row, then into the opponent’s row).
- Relay:** After sowing, pick up all seeds from the very next pit in sequence (the pit immediately after the last seed was placed) and continue sowing. This relay continues without interruption.
- Capture:** If the next pit in sequence (after the last seed) is empty, skip that empty pit and look at the one beyond it. If that pit contains seeds, capture them. If the pit beyond the empty one is also empty, no capture occurs and the turn ends.
- Consecutive captures:** After a capture, check the next pit again: if it too is followed by an empty pit and then a seeded pit, capture again. Continue until the pattern breaks.

Empty pits: If the relay lands the last seed in a pit and the next pit is empty but no capture follows, the turn ends.

END OF GAME

The game ends when a player cannot fill seven pits to begin their turn. Seeds are returned from the store at a cost of 12 seeds per pit (to fill pits from store). When a player cannot afford to fill any pit, they have lost.

WINNING

The player who captures all 168 seeds wins (the opponent cannot refill any pit to continue playing).

ATTRIBUTION

Pallanguzhi. Traditional game, Tamil Nadu, India. Public domain. Source: Wikipedia (CC-BY-SA); Russ, Laurence — *The Complete Mancala Games Book* (1984).

MANCALA · VARIANT 7 OF 8

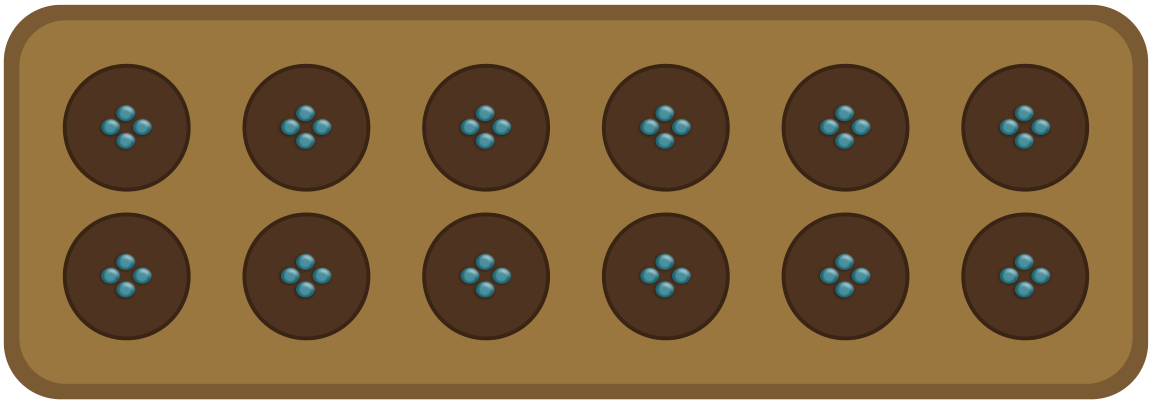
Ayo

2×6 pits
BOARD

2
PLAYERS

Ayo

The Yoruba name for the Oware family of Mancala games, played in Nigeria and among Yoruba communities worldwide. The game is culturally significant in Yoruba tradition — historically associated with philosophy, divination, and social ritual — though the rules are functionally identical to Oware. The cultural framing and terminology are distinct: seeds are called *ayo* beads, and the board (*opon ayo*) is carved with traditional motifs.



Ayo — starting position

<https://engine.moddable.games/play/?game=mancala&variant=ayo>

ITEM	QTY	NOTES
Board	1	2 rows of 6 pits
Seeds	48	4 seeds (<i>ayo</i> beads) per pit at start

SETUP

48 seeds distributed equally, 4 per pit. No stores — captured seeds are held separately. Each player owns the 6 pits on their side.

RULES

- Sowing:** Pick up all seeds from any one of your six pits. Sow counter-clockwise, one seed per pit, skipping the original pit if the circuit returns to it.
- Capture:** If the last seed lands in an opponent’s pit and that pit now contains exactly 2 or 3 seeds, capture those seeds. Continue capturing backwards through consecutive pits that also contain exactly 2 or 3 seeds.
- Grand slam:** If sowing would capture every seed on the opponent’s side, the move is illegal. You must choose a different pit. If no legal move avoids a grand slam, all opponent seeds remain and your turn ends.

Feeding obligation: If the opponent has no seeds, you must play a pit that gives them seeds. If no such move exists, the game ends and you take all remaining seeds.

END OF GAME

The game ends when one player has more than 24 seeds, when fewer than 4 seeds remain on the board and both players agree, or when a position repeats. Remaining seeds go to the player who owns those pits.

WINNING

The player with more captured seeds wins. 25 or more seeds wins outright.

ATTRIBUTION

Ayo. Traditional game, Yoruba people, Nigeria. Public domain. Source: Wikipedia (CC-BY-SA); Russ, Laurence — *The Complete Mancala Games Book* (1984).

MANCALA · VARIANT 8 OF 8

Sungka

2×7 pits + 2 heads

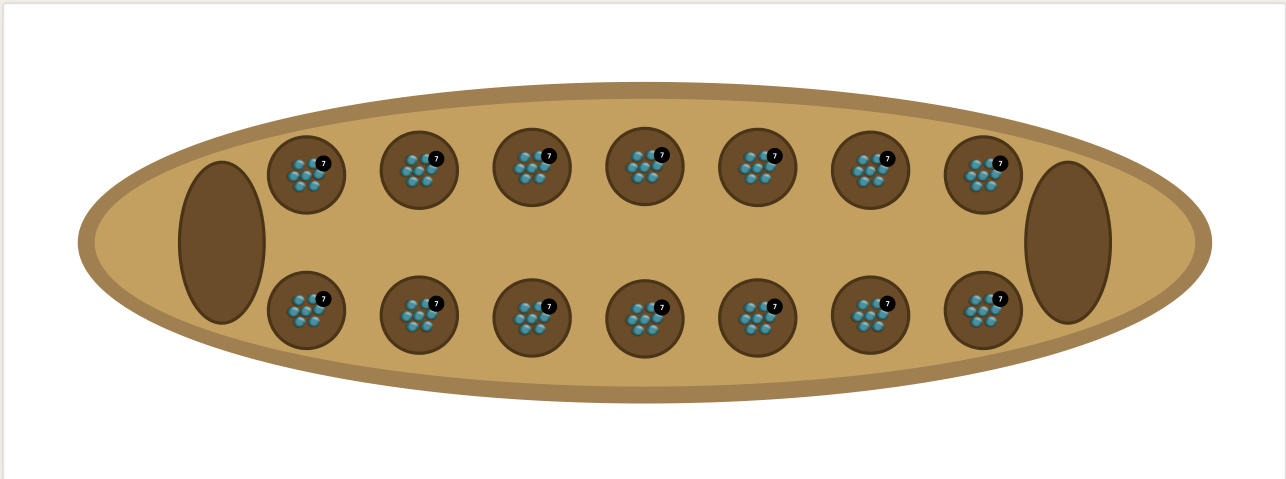
BOARD

2

PLAYERS

SUNGKA

The traditional Mancala game of the Philippines, played across the archipelago for centuries. The board (*sungkaan*) is traditionally carved from a single piece of wood in a boat shape, with seven playing pits per side and a large pit at each end called the *ulo* (head). Sungka is considered a national cultural game and is played at social gatherings, particularly among women.



Sungka — starting position

<https://engine.moddable.games/play/?game=mancala&variant=sungka>

ITEM	QTY	NOTES
Board	1	2 rows of 7 playing pits + 1 ulo (head) at each end
Seeds	98	7 shells or stones per pit at start; both heads start empty

SETUP

7 seeds in each of the 14 playing pits. Both heads start empty. Each player owns the 7 pits on their side and the head to their left.

RULES

Simultaneous start: Both players simultaneously pick up all seeds from any one of their seven pits and begin sowing. Continue until one player’s hand meets the other’s, at which point the player whose hand is met stops and waits.

Sowing direction: Counter-clockwise. Sow one seed per pit along your row, drop one seed into your head, then continue along the opponent’s row back toward their end of the board. Skip the opponent’s head entirely.

Your head: You may only deposit seeds into your own head, never the opponent’s. Sow past the opponent’s head without depositing.

Relay: If the last seed lands in a non-empty pit on either side, pick up all seeds from that pit and continue sowing. Continue relaying until the last seed lands in an empty pit.

Capture: If the last seed lands in an empty pit on your side, and the directly opposite pit on the opponent's side contains seeds, capture all seeds from the opposite pit into your head. The sowing seed remains in your now-occupied pit (no capture of the sowing seed itself).

Landing in head: If the last seed lands in your head, you may begin a new sow from any non-empty pit on your side.

END OF GAME

The game ends when one player's seven pits are all empty and they cannot continue. The opposing player sweeps all remaining seeds into their own head.

WINNING

The player with more seeds in their head wins.

ATTRIBUTION

Sungka. Traditional game, Philippines. Public domain. Source: Wikipedia (CC-BY-SA); Russ, Laurence — *The Complete Mancala Games Book* (1984).