

Double Deck Cancellation Go-Fish Hearts Cancellation Go-Fish Hearts Primer

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One of the most popular card games—any kind of game—played at RGs is Double Deck Cancellation Hearts. If you play cards at all, especially if you play Hearts (even if you don't really like it), you will probably love Double Deck. It's a fun and social game. It's nowhere near as intellectually challenging as bridge, and it's a larger social group than euchre since you have more players.

Two decks of cards, 6-11 players

If you already play Hearts, Double Deck is easy to learn. The game is played with two decks of cards (you probably figured that out from the Double Deck part of its name). The game is played with 6-11 players. If you don't play Hearts, you'll have a slightly higher learning curve. You might want to play in Yahoo! for a while before your next RG!

There are those who will say that 8 is the optimal number of players, but that doesn't mean that it isn't played with more or fewer. Some people will play with 11, although most of the time, if there are 11 people who want to play, then you search out one more so you can have two tables of 6. Sometimes, searching out the "one more" takes you to two tables of 8!

I'd like you to meet Teflon, Lovey, Boomerang, Scalpel, Pepper, Tart of Hearts, Silver...

Someone volunteers to be scorekeeper (or is volunteered), writes down the names (or Hearts nicknames) of the people around the table, and the game starts. People just seem to acquire Hearts nicknames. If you play enough, you'll meet 4Q, Black Widow, Gloater, Cobra, Long John, Hazmat, QML, Yütz, and a host of others.

The "dealer of record" is the person who shuffles the cards

“Dealer of record” messes up the cards and everyone pulls

and then spreads them all over the center of the table (and hopefully not the floor). Everybody draws the proper number of cards from the messy pile. (How many cards depends on how many people are playing. If there are 8 players, everyone gets 13 cards. If there are 7 players, a joker is added in and everyone gets 15 cards. The first dealer and/or the scorekeeper will figure it out and tell everyone else.) This is called dealing. It’s a little less formal than some other games, and unless the screw-up is extreme, misdeals are dealt with by the person who is short a card pulling one from the player who has an extra.

Passing can be a bit confusing

Passing can be a bit confusing, but the scorekeeper generally keeps track and will remind everyone at the start of the hand. Passing (when it’s done) is always 3 cards. On the first hand, everyone passes three cards to the person on their left. On the second hand, everyone passes three cards to the person on their right. (Remember that what goes around, comes around. The person you pass to is going to be passing to you!) On the third hand, it goes “two to the left”, which means “three cards to the 2nd person to your left”. Then on to “two to the right” (“three cards to the 2nd person to your right”), and so on, until eventually there’s a “hold hand” (no passing). And then it starts over again.

“Passing etiquette”? Well, maybe

There are those who practice a certain level of “passing etiquette”. For example, there are people who will not pass “doubles”, meaning two identical cards. There are other people who always pass doubles, of course. Some people try to keep their passes relatively tame, others will pass to make the best hand for themselves that they can. It’s usually a bad idea to pass low spades, just in case someone passes you the Queen and you need some other spades to play until you can get rid of her. And if you have enough

length in spades in your hands, there's no reason to pass off the Queen or other high spades.

Guts Rules means you can play (or lead) blood on the first trick

The player to the left of the "dealer of record" leads. We play Guts Rules (sometimes known as Killer Hearts), which means that any card can be led or played on the first trick. And that does mean any card. In regular Hearts, the 2 of clubs is always the opening lead, and blood (points) can't be played on the first trick. Guts rules do away with both of those restrictions. The opening lead can be any card the person chooses—including the Queen of Spades or the Ace of Hearts. The high card of the suit lead takes the trick.

Cancellation: Queen is higher than the Ace. And the Power 2 can take a trick.

Here is where the Cancellation part of the game comes in. If two identical cards are played on the same trick, they cancel each other out and cannot take the trick. For example, if someone leads the Ace of Hearts, and the next player plays the Queen of Hearts, the Ace is clearly "high" at that point, and will take the trick. But then imagine that the third player plays the other Ace of Hearts. Those Aces of Hearts cancel out, and now the Queen is high.

Strategy: pass one of a double to the left—and don't pass low spades

As a matter of strategy, many players will pass one of a double to a player to their left, and then lead the one they kept. So, in the example above, the player who led the Ace of Hearts may very well have passed that second Ace of Hearts to the player to the left—and so has a reasonable expectation of it being matched and canceling out.

There are no friends at the hearts table

Of course, there's no guarantee that the player will actually match you. It's considered polite, but as Hearts players frequently point out, "There are no friends at the Hearts table." If you are low (meaning you have a low score), chances are that the person holding the other Ace of Hearts will just let you eat the trick. And it isn't uncom-

mon for a player to ask about the scores before choosing a card to play—deciding if they're going to match, and if so, who they're going to match. There are many players who will try not to hand the same player both Queens of Spades, especially on the same trick, but if a player has low score, all bets are off.

The card-gathering etiquette is a bit different from regular Hearts too. When you play your card, instead of putting it towards the middle of the table, you turn it over right in front of you (that's known as raking your dead). When the trick is finished and decided, only point cards (hearts and the Queen of Spades) are passed to the winner. Other cards are just flipped over in front of the player to make a nice little pile. (You can't play from your discards!)

Scorekeeping is straightforward. When the last trick is over, each player picks up the pile in front of them, and counts one point for each heart and thirteen points for each Queen of Spades. Cards aren't tossed in until the scorekeeper verifies that all 52 points have been accounted for. It's not uncommon for a heart to be lost, or for someone to miss the Queen when they're counting, so don't toss your cards in early!

Now that you know the basics, it's time to play. Ask to join a game. Ask a regular player if you can look over their shoulder and learn during one game and then get into the next one. By the way, a Double Deck game goes for about 2 hours. Which means that those of us who play until 5:00 a.m. actually started our last game at 3:00.

Play your cards in front of you, and don't forget to rake your dead

Scorekeeping:
1 point per heart
13 points for the black lady

"It's 3:00 a.m. Wanna play hearts?"