

Old Maid

'Pairs with added tension' would be a fair description of this time-honoured classic, which has long been beloved by young card players.

Number of players

This is a game for two or more players.

Age and skill level

For ages six and above; level 2.

Cards

Remove one Queen from a standard deck to ensure that there will be a single 'old maid' left who cannot be paired during the game.

The cards are shuffled and all 51 are dealt individually around the table. Unless you have three players, the cards will not divide evenly, so it is likely that some players will have one card more than the others. This inequity will be redressed if the deal rotates around the table in the usual fashion with each hand.

The players pick up their hand and immediately discard any pairs of cards they hold, putting them face down into the centre of the table (see right).

With the completed pairs discarded, each player now fans his or her cards and places them face down on the table.

How to play

The dealer goes first, offering his or her cards to the player immediately to their left, who must take one card without

seeing it. The player adds the card to their hand and if it completes a pair they can discard the matched cards onto the waste pile. If it is another singleton, they must keep it.

The player now fans his or her cards and offers them to their left-hand neighbour, who must take one. The game continues in the same way moving around the table in a clockwise direction, with players either discarding pairs or adding to their hand.

When a player has successfully paired all his or her cards and has emptied their hand, they are safe. Play continues until one player is left with the odd Queen or 'old maid'. That player is the loser.

