

Current rules (2009)^[edit]

The following rules are based on Arnold (2011).^[6]

Preliminaries^[edit]

Three to six may play, but four is best. A standard pack is used. For three players, the ♣2 is removed; for five players the ♣2 and ♦2 are removed, for six players the ♣3, ♣2, ♦2 and ♠2 are left out. Players draw cards to determine the first dealer; lowest deals. Deal and play are clockwise. Dealer shuffles and youngest hand (right of dealer) cuts. Dealer then deals all the cards, individually and face down, beginning with eldest hand.

Playing^[edit]

Eldest hand leads to the first trick. Players must follow suit if able; otherwise they may play any card. The trick is won by the highest card of the suit led and the trick winner leads to the next.

Scoring^[edit]

Each heart captured incurs a penalty point, there being thirteen penalty points *in toto*. The winner is the player with the lowest score after an agreed number of deals. Alternatively a target score may be agreed (e.g. 80 for four players) and when the first player reaches the target, the game ends. The player with the lowest score wins.

If Hearts is played for stakes, the average score is worked out and those above it pay the difference into a pool, while those below it draw the difference.

Variants^[edit]

Auction Hearts^[edit]

The variant of Auction Hearts appears for the first time in the 1897 edition of *Foster's Complete Hoyle*. It is a game for four players, although five or six may "form a table". Its novel feature is that, after the deal, players may bid in sequence to declare the penalty suit. Eldest hand begins the bidding by stating the number of chips he is willing to pay for the privilege of naming the suit; the succeeding players may pass or bid higher. The dealer goes last and there is only one round of bidding. The player who wins the auction pays his bid into the pool and leads to the first trick.^{[6][7]}

Black Jack^[edit]

Not to be confused with [Blackjack](#).

Black Jack appeared at the same time as Black Lady, both as alternative names for the more general name of Discard Hearts. Discard Hearts, as the name suggests, introduced the concept of discarding (also called passing or exchanging) for the first time into Hearts. It is identical with the basic Black Lady game, but with the Jack of Spades as the penalty card, worth 10 "hearts" (i.e. points).^[8] It is last mentioned by Gibson in 1974, only this time with the same penalty as Black Lady of 13 points.^[9]

Black Lady^[edit]

Main article: [Black Lady](#)

Black Lady appeared in 1909, also called Discard Hearts, and has since become the most popular variant in the United States, overtaking Hearts itself to become a game in its own right. It is frequently, and confusingly, also called Hearts, not least in computer gaming versions. However its distinguishing feature is that the Queen of Spades, the Black Lady, is an additional penalty card worth 13 points. The first description of the game already included the feature of discarding cards to one's neighbour after the deal. Over time, the game has developed elaborations such as 'shooting the moon' and passing cards in different directions with each deal.^{[8][10]}

Black Maria^[edit]

Main article: [Black Maria \(card game\)](#)

Black Maria is the British variant of Hearts and features three additional penalty cards - the ♠ worth 10 points, the ♠K worth 7 points and the Black Maria or ♠Q worth 13 points. It was first described by Hubert Phillips in the mid-20th century.^[11] It usually includes passing to the right (not left as in other variants) which is considered more challenging because you don't know any of the next player's cards. Hitting the moon (sic) is an optional rule.^[11] Confusingly, sometimes the name Black Lady is given to this game and sometimes Black Lady is called Black Maraia.

Cancellation Hearts[\[edit\]](#)

Main article: [Cancellation Hearts](#)

Cancellation Hearts is first described in 1950 by Culbertson and is a variant designed for larger numbers of players, typically 6 to 11 players, using two decks shuffled together. If exactly the same card is played twice in one trick, the cards cancel each other out, and neither can win the trick. If two such pairs appear in the same trick, the whole trick is cancelled and the cards are rolled over to the winner of the next trick.^[12]

Domino Hearts[\[edit\]](#)

Another variant first noted by Foster in 1909, the key feature of which is that it is played with a stock. Each player receives six cards and the remainder are placed face down on the table as a stock. When a player is unable to follow suit, he has to draw cards, one at a time, from the stock until he can follow suit. The last player holding cards must pick up any remaining cards in the stock and count them with his tricks. Every heart taken scores one penalty point. As soon as any player reaches or exceeds thirty-one points, the game is over and the winner is the player with the fewest hearts scored.^[13]

Greek Hearts[\[edit\]](#)

Greek Hearts is a name given to at least three different variants. Maguire's version is essentially Spot Hearts with passing to the left.^[14] Parlett (2008) has the ♠Q valued at 50 penalty points, the ♥A at 15, courts 10 each and the remaining hearts as 1.^[15] However, in the earliest rules by Culbertson (1950), it is the game of Black Lady with 3 changes: three cards are always passed to the right, the ♦J counts as 10 plus points and a heart card may not be led to the first trick of the game.^[16]

Heartsette[\[edit\]](#)

Heartsette is another very early variant that is still played. Its distinguishing feature is a **widow**. When four play, the spade deuce is removed, twelve cards are dealt to each player and the remaining three cards are placed face down in the centre of the table to form the widow. For other numbers of players the full pack is used, the widow comprising three cards when three play, two when five play and four when six play. The player winning the first trick takes in the widow and any hearts it contains. He may look at these cards but may not show them to anyone. Otherwise the game is played as normal. The key difference from basic Hearts is that the first winner is the only one who known how many and which hearts are still to be played.^[17]

Joker Hearts[\[edit\]](#)

Joker Hearts is recorded as early as 1897.^[18] One or more Jokers are added, which can be played any time (regardless if following suit is possible).^[19] They cannot win tricks or score any penalty points.

Omnibus Hearts[\[edit\]](#)

In 1950, Culbertson reported that Omnibus Hearts was "rapidly becoming the most popular of Hearts games" and was so called because it included all the features found in different members of the Hearts family and Arnold states that it is "sufficiently different and popular" to justify being described as a separate game."^[3] In effect, Omnibus Hearts is really a variant of Black Lady to which has been added the bonus card of the ♦10 which earns 10 plus points for the player who takes it in a trick. If a player takes all fifteen counters (♦10, ♠Q and thirteen hearts), he scores 26 plus points for the deal and the rest score zero (noting that in Culbertson's Black Lady rules, what is now called shooting the moon results in no player scoring for that deal).^[16] Arnold (2011) states that Omnibus Hearts is considered the best version of Hearts by many players. He refers to the capture of all counting cards as "hitting the moon, take-all or slam". The game ends when a player reaches or exceeds 100 penalty points, whereupon the player with the lowest score wins.^[5]

Partnership Hearts[\[edit\]](#)

A recent variant to enable players to play in partnership. There are three versions of Partnership Hearts. In the first, partners sit opposite one another and combine their scores, a team that successfully shoots the moon causing the other to earn 52 penalty points. In the second, partners also face each other at the table, but keep individual scores. A player shooting the moon must do this alone. When any player reaches 100 or more, the partners combine their scores and the team with the lower score wins. The third is really a variant of Omnibus Hearts with a slam bid. After the deal, players bid to shoot the moon by taking all tricks. The player holding the ♦10 becomes the silent partner of the winning bidder and they combine their scores. If no one bids, the game is played as in Omnibus Hearts with no partnerships.^[10]

Spot Hearts^[edit]

Spot Hearts appears as a variant in the very first description of Hearts in 1887, albeit referred to as the Double Game of Hearts or the Eagle Game of Hearts,^[20] being first named as Spot Hearts by Foster in 1897. Both names continue to be used until the 1920s when Spot Hearts becomes the standard name of the game. The key difference is that the hearts are now worth values ranging from 2 to 14, rather than being worth 1 chip (or penalty point) each. The actual values are: Ace 14, King 13, Queen 12, Jack 11 and pips score their face value. Foster remarks that "this adds nothing to the interest or skill of the game; but rather tends to create confusion and delay, owing to the numerous disputes as to the correctness of the count."^[21] Nevertheless, the game has been regularly listed right up to the present day with the *Little Giant Encyclopedia* (2009) giving an alternative name of Chip Hearts.^[22] Modern rules, however, tend to score the Ace as 1 penalty point rather than the original 14.^[b]

Other variants^[edit]

- "4-5-4 Hearts": For four players, the passing rule is modified such that each player passes 4 cards to each neighbor, and 5 cards across, so hands are played exclusively with cards received from opponents.
- "500 Hearts": For four or more players, a 500 card deck is used, which adds 11s and 12s (the red 13s are not used) and increases the number of cards to 60.
- "Booster Nines": If a nine is played, the trick is extended by one round.^[23]