

The Tile Set (152 tiles)

Bams (Bamboos)	1–9 × 4	36
Craks (Characters)	1–9 × 4	36
Dots (Circles)	1–9 × 4	36
Winds	E, S, W, N × 4	16
Dragons	Red, Green, White × 4	12
Flowers	Decorative	8
Jokers	Wild tiles	8

Total 152

NMJL play uses these 152 tiles. Retail sets often include extra pieces (spare Jokers, Flowers, and blanks) — set those aside.

Setup & Game Flow

- **4 players** around a square table.
- Each builds a wall of **38 tiles** (2 rows of 19).
- Deal: each gets **13 tiles**; East gets **14**.
- **Charleston** (tile passing) happens before play.
- East plays first by discarding one tile.
- Play moves **counter-clockwise**: draw, then discard.
- Ends when a player calls **Mah Jongg** or the wall runs out (wall game).

Charleston (Tile Passing)

1. **Required first Charleston**: right, across, left (3 tiles each)
2. **Optional second Charleston**: left, across, right
3. **Blind pass**: allowed on the last pass of *each* Charleston (first-round left, second-round right)
4. **Courtesy pass**: opposite players agree on 0–3 tiles

Never pass a Joker. Ever. In any pass.

Calling Discards

GROUP	TILES	NEED IN HAND
Pung	3 of same	2 matching*
Kong	4 of same	3 matching*
Quint	5 of same	4 matching*
Pair	2 of same	Only to win

* You may complete a called group with Jokers — you don't need all natural tiles. A number/wind/dragon quint always includes at least one Joker; Flower quints can be all-natural (8 Flowers exist).

Joker Rules

- Wild for any tile in groups of **3 or more** (Pung, Kong, Quint).
- **Cannot** be used in pairs or singles.
- **Cannot** be passed during the Charleston.
- **Exchange**: on your own turn, after you draw and before you discard (holding 14 tiles), swap the natural tile for a Joker in any exposed group.
- Concealed Jokers in a rack are safe from exchange.

Scoring & Payment

- Each hand's **value is printed on the card**; it varies by hand and by year.
- **Discard win**: the discarder pays double; the other two pay the single value.
- **Self-pick win**: all three players pay double.
- **Jokerless win**: paid double by **all** players (except Singles & Pairs).

Concealed hands do **not** get an extra double — their higher value is already on the card.

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Dead Hand

Triggers:

- Wrong number of tiles in your rack
- Joker used illegally (in a pair or single)
- Calling a discard for an exposure that can't match a hand you can still complete
- Falsely declaring Mah Jongg
- Exposing a group that cannot legally exist on the card

A dead-hand player is **out for the rest of the hand**: no more draws, calls, or discards, and cannot win. Their turn is skipped; the others play on. They still pay the winner normally.

Declared only on visible exposures and discards. Jokers in valid earlier exposures stay exchangeable; Jokers in the exposure that caused the dead hand go back to the rack.

Calling Mah Jongg

- Declare clearly: **"Mah Jongg!"**
- Beats all other calls for the same discard.
- Expose your full hand for verification.
- Tiles must match a single hand on the card.
- **If wrong:** hand goes dead; play continues.

A self-picked Mah Jongg (winning tile from the wall, not a discard) pays double from all three players.

Table Etiquette

- Discard face-up in front of you and name the tile aloud.
- A discard is committed once you name or place it — not only after the next draw.
- Take a moment to think, but don't stall.
- Don't comment on tiles you see in someone's rack.
- Keep food and drinks off the playing surface.
- Help newer players quietly between hands, not during play.

Common Mistakes

1. **Passing a Joker** in the Charleston
2. **Calling for a pair** before the final tile
3. **Locking into one hand** too early
4. **Wrong tile count** after a call (14, then discard to 13)
5. **Forgetting to count flowers** as part of the 14
6. **Using a Joker for a single** in Singles & Pairs hands

Quick Glossary

Bam: Bamboo suit tile

Dot: Circle suit tile

Pung: Group of 3 identical tiles

Quint: Group of 5 identical tiles

Concealed: No exposures before Mah Jongg (winning tile may still be called)

Wall Game: No winner; the wall ran out

Crak: Character suit tile

Soap: White Dragon; a zero only when the card shows "0"

Kong: Group of 4 identical tiles

Exposure: Group placed face-up after a call

Wall: Face-down tiles players draw from

Dead Hand: Out for the hand; cannot win

Get the Official NMJL Card

The National Mah Jongg League card lists the year's winning hands and is required to play. Order it directly from the League for a small charge: **Standard \$14** or **Large Print \$15**. We recommend the Large Print card, since it's just a dollar more and much easier on the eyes.

Order at nationalmahjonggleague.org/store

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