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A Beginner's Guide to American Mah Jongg: How to Play the Game & Win

Your comprehensive manual for learning and mastering American Mah Jongg.



1. INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN MAH JONGG

This guide provides an easy-to-follow introduction to American Mah Jongg, a fascinating game that combines strategy, skill, and a bit of luck. It is specifically designed for beginners and follows the official National Mah Jongg League rules. The book aims to simplify the learning process with clear instructions and diagrams.

American Mah Jongg is a unique variant of the game, distinct from its Chinese counterparts. While Chinese Mah Jongg often involves making runs and combinations similar to Gin Rummy, American Mah Jongg focuses on specific hands outlined on an annual card. This manual will help you understand these differences and master the American version.

2. UNDERSTANDING THE TILES

Familiarity with the Mah Jongg tiles is fundamental to playing the game. The set includes various types of tiles, each with specific symbolism and use in forming hands.

Tile Categories:

- **Suits:** There are three main suits: Bams (Bamboos), Dots (Circles), and Craks (Characters). Each suit has tiles numbered 1 through 9, with four identical copies of each.

- **Winds:** Four Wind tiles represent North, South, East, and West. There are four copies of each Wind.
- **Dragons:** Three types of Dragon tiles exist: Red, Green, and White (often called 'Soap'). There are four copies of each Dragon.
- **Flowers:** These are special tiles that can often be used as wild cards or in specific combinations.
- **Jokers:** These are true wild cards that can substitute for almost any tile in a combination.



The Red Dragon is red and it is called **Red**.

The Green Dragon is green, called **Green**.

Figure 2.1: Examples of Dragon Tiles. The Red Dragon is red, the Green Dragon is green, and the White Dragon is often referred to as 'Soap'.

3. GAME SETUP: BUILDING THE WALL

Before gameplay begins, the Mah Jongg tiles are arranged to form a 'Wall'. This process is crucial for starting the game correctly.

Steps to Build the Wall:

1. **Shuffle Tiles:** All tiles are turned face down and thoroughly mixed.
2. **Form Rows:** Each player builds a wall in front of them, typically 19 tiles long and 2 tiles high. This results in a total of 38 tiles per player's wall.
3. **Connect Walls:** The four individual walls are pushed together to form a square, creating the main 'Wall' for the game.
4. **Breaking the Wall:** The player designated as 'East' rolls the dice to determine where the Wall will be broken to begin drawing tiles.

Note:

Mah Jongg racks are often designed to hold 19 tiles. If your rack is shorter, some tiles may overhang. This is normal for American Mah Jongg sets.

4. GAMEPLAY INSTRUCTIONS

American Mah Jongg involves drawing and discarding tiles to form specific combinations listed on the annual National Mah Jongg League card. The game proceeds in rounds, with players taking turns.

Key Gameplay Elements:

- **The Charleston:** This is a tile-passing ritual at the beginning of the game, allowing players to exchange unwanted tiles.
- **Drawing and Discarding:** Players draw a tile from the Wall and then discard one, aiming to complete a hand.
- **Calling Tiles:** Players can call a discarded tile to complete a Pung (3 identical tiles), Kong (4 identical tiles), Quint (5 identical tiles), or Sextet (6 identical tiles) for their hand. This action exposes part of their hand.
- **Jokers:** Jokers can be used to complete any combination, making them highly valuable.
- **Mah Jongg:** The game ends when a player successfully completes a hand from the National Mah Jongg League card and declares