

In an attempt to make the old game of Canasta more interesting, some bright person came up with the unique idea of dealing every player two hands simultaneously; the second hand being called the “foot” and brought into play once the first hand has been emptied. Other changes to Canasta made in the creation of the Hand & Foot game have proven much less successful.¹ To me, both games are too slow and too reliant on luck. For four players, I much prefer Finesse.²



But what if there are just two players? My wife and I greatly enjoy playing cards with each other. We’ve played a lot of Gin Rummy and quite a bit of Spite & Malice³ (even a little Cribbage) but when my sister introduced us to Hand and Foot, it immediately struck me that this could make a good game for two persons. Over the past few years we have played more than a hundred games of 2-player Canasta that we have named “Baskets.” We have refined it quite a bit over that time and now believe that the world deserves to enjoy it too.

[Note: If you are familiar with the rules for Canasta, you may wish to skip down to the last section: “Differences from Canasta.”]

SET UP

Three standard, 52-card, decks, preferably with the same backs, are used. Jokers are not used. Note that there is nothing special about threes; they are treated just like the other cards.

Rank	Point Value
2 (deuce)	20
3 – 7	5
8 - K	10
Ace	20

Deuces are wild and, within limits, may be substituted for ranked cards.

The object of the game is to earn the highest number of points over 5,000.

THE DEAL

After the cards are thoroughly shuffled, the dealer deals out four hands of 12 cards each. The first and third hands dealt are given to

the non-dealer; the dealer keeps the second and fourth hands. The remaining cards are placed between the players and the top card is turned face up to start the discard pile. If that card is an ace or a deuce, it is buried in the remaining deck and another card is turned-up in its place.

After looking at only the bottom card of each of their stacks, players decide which stack to play immediately (this becomes the “biscuits” hand) and which to set aside until later (the “buns” hand).

MELDS

Cards are grouped by rank; suits are irrelevant. A meld is a group of cards of the same rank, laid down by a player on the table in a neat line so that the rank index of each card in the group remains visible. A meld is “natural” if all cards within it are of the same rank, and “unnatural” if some of the cards are deuces (wild cards). At all times, the number of wild cards in a meld may not exceed the number of the other cards. A meld must contain at least three cards.

In order to begin melding cards, an opening meld is required having a minimum value that is dependent on a player's current score. Melds are valued according to the card-points contained within. For example: a meld of six 10-point cards has a value of 60 points; a meld of four 5-point cards and two deuces (20 points each) also has a value of 60 points.

Score	Opening Meld
3000 plus	90 points
1500 – 2999	70 points
0 – 1499	50 points
less than 0	15 points

A meld of seven or more cards is called a "basket" ("la canasta" is a Spanish term for a basket).

THE PLAY

The non-dealer begins by either using the discard to make the required meld, or passing the option to the dealer. If the dealer does not (or cannot) pick-up the discard, then the non-dealer draws two cards from the deck and discards one card. Turns then alternate, with each player drawing either two cards from the deck or the top card from the discard pile.

Picking up a discard requires that a player has made the required meld, or can do so with the discarded card, and has two cards of the same denomination in hand (those already melded do not count). All three of these cards must then be melded; they cannot be put into a player's hand. Once they have made the initial meld, players may make additional melds at any point during their turn. Melds cannot be made during an opponent's turn.

Only the top discard may be drawn.

Since both players have the opportunity to obtain all discards, there is no picking up of the entire pile, and wild cards (deuces) are not rotated 90-degrees (as in Canasta) if added to the discard pile. Yes, in certain rare and desperate situations, a deuce might reasonably be discarded, but it cannot be picked from the discard pile, as it cannot be melded on its own.

A player's turn is ended by discarding one card. Prior to discarding, players may take back or alter any melds made on that turn; otherwise, cards can never be moved between melds, nor can a melded card be returned to a hand.

Once a player's biscuits hand is exhausted, the buns hand is picked up and played. If a discard is made to exhaust the biscuits, players must wait until their next turn to play any cards from their buns.

When a basket (a meld of seven or more cards) is formed, its cards are stacked neatly and set aside in an area visible to both players. Baskets with no deuces are called "wicker" baskets. These are identified with a red card (hearts or diamonds) placed on top. Baskets containing wild cards, called "plastic" baskets, have black-suited cards (spades or clubs) placed on top. A plastic basket cannot have more than three deuces. Once formed, a basket may be added to with additional cards of the appropriate rank; but no cards may be removed from it.

Three baskets must be melded before a player may get rid of all cards in their buns and "go out." At least one of these baskets must be a wicker basket (*i.e.* not contain any wild cards). When one player goes out by having melded or discarded all cards in their buns, the round is over and points are tallied as follows:

For each wicker basket	500 points
For each plastic basket	300 points
For the player who goes out	250 points
For the player who does not go out	minus the total point value of the cards remaining in hand (not yet melded). If the player has not picked up the buns hand, minus another 100 points. (The cards in the buns are not totaled.)
For both players	the total value of all cards melded, including those in baskets.

When a round is completed and points tallied, the non-dealer becomes the dealer for a new round.

WINNING

The player who earns the highest number of points over 5,000 wins the game.

DIFFERENCES FROM CANASTA

If you are already familiar with the rules of Canasta, you may find it quicker to grasp the rules for Baskets by noting these differences:

- ◆ 2 players
- ◆ 3 decks
- ◆ 2 hands, 12 cards each, per player
- ◆ Choose which hand to play first after looking at bottom cards
- ◆ First hand called "biscuits," second called "buns"
- ◆ Buns not played until biscuits exhausted
- ◆ No jokers, only deuces wild
- ◆ 250 points for going out
- ◆ Threes are treated just like fours
- ◆ Levels of melding are 50, 70, and 90
- ◆ No freezing of discard pile
- ◆ Only top discard may be drawn
- ◆ 7 or more in meld = basket
- ◆ Natural baskets are wicker, unnaturals are plastic

END NOTES

¹ One is the inability to pick up an unfrozen discard pile – making it impossible for the third player to ever reach some cards. Another is a change in the meld requirements that removes the compensatory benefit given to teams with lower scores. Also, the idea that a final discard is required to go out seems an unnecessary complication.

² For rules to Finesse and many other games, see my book: *Games People Actually Play*.

³ The commercial production of Spite & Malice is called Skip-Bo.

Rules for Baskets

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