

Pickleball Paddles: Complete Overview

The International Federation of Pickleball (IFP) has strict requirements around paddle material and size. Stringed racquets, or paddles that produce a trampoline-like effect, are strictly prohibited. The paddle materials, sizes, and other features we cover are generally accepted by the IFP, but we highly recommend checking with them before purchasing a specific brand.

Pickleball Paddle Material: Bottom and Top Faces

Graphite

All graphite pickleball paddles are made of a combination of graphite and epoxy – no paddle is made of just graphite. Epoxy gives graphite the movement it needs to be shaped and molded into a paddle form. There are different grades of graphite and different types of epoxy, so graphite paddles can range hugely in terms of durability and quality.

PRO: Graphite faces typically mean a light paddle that is strong and offers longevity. They are excellent for players who want maximum ball control.

CON: Due to the light nature of graphite, these paddles lack power and require more physical exertion to drive the ball. These paddles can also be expensive, since graphite is a relatively new technology.

Wood

The first official pickleball paddles were wooden. Wood paddles generally fall in the heavyweight category, weighing around 8.5 – 9.5 ounces. These heavy paddles allow players to hit the ball farther with minimal effort, but lack the control that some of the newer technology offers. These paddles are wooden through and through – the core is wooden as well.

PRO: Wood paddles are one of the most cost-effective paddles on the market, since there isn't any expensive technology behind it. They are also durable, which means you don't have to buy a new paddle anytime soon.

CON: These paddles can be seriously heavy. If you have delicate wrists, you might want to consider another option. If you're looking for a lot of control over ball maneuverability, you'll also want to look elsewhere.

Composite/Fiberglass

Typically called composite paddles, these pickleball paddles have top and bottom faces primarily made of fiberglass. A relatively new technology, these paddles can be more expensive than wood paddles, but not as pricey as graphite paddles (normally).

Composite paddles will often have a UV vinyl laminate coating for protection.

PRO: These paddles offer a nice balance of power and control for the weight and size.

CON: These faces aren't as durable as graphite or carbon fiber.

Carbon Fiber

Carbon fiber pickleball paddles aren't as common as graphite, wood, or composite ones. They can be pricey, but they are durable and give off lots of ball control.

PRO: Very durable – even more so than graphite faces. It also offers great ball control and maneuverability.

CON: As with any light paddle that allows for ball control, the trade-off is a lack of power.

Pickleball Paddle Material: Cores

Except for wood pickleball paddles, all paddle cores are made up of a material in a honeycomb pattern. This gives off the perfect blend of strength, durability, and bounce.

Nomex

Nomex was the first type of material to be put into a composite pickleball paddle. It is a cardboard-like material dipped in resin, which is very lightweight. Nomex is the hardest core material, and therefore the loudest, but it also gives the ball a great “pop.”

PRO: Nomex core paddles are tried, tested, and true. If you are nervous about new technology, this is a great core material to go with. These paddles will last you a long time and give you excellent control.

CON: Due to the hard, dense makeup of these paddles, they can be loud. As the material is light, it packs less power than other cores (like a polymer core).

Polymer

Polymer cores are the latest technology in pickleball paddles. In fact, this core material was developed specifically for the game of pickleball. It's a soft plastic blend that is incredibly quiet. It also gives you lots of control.

PRO: If you get distracted from a noisy racquet, this is the solution for you. It's the quietest paddle on the market.

CON: Paddles with polymer cores lack power.

Aluminum Core Pickleball Paddles

Aluminum core paddles aren't as quiet as polymer paddles, but less noisy than nomex paddles. Most aluminum core paddles are in the “lightweight” category, and have fiberglass faces.

PRO: These paddles have a great amount of control and maneuverability.

CON: You need to exert lots of energy to drive the ball.

Pickleball Paddle Weight

Pickleball paddles can range from 6.5 up to 9.5 ounces, depending on the material the paddle is made of. The weight of your paddle will greatly impact your game: lighter paddles give you more control, but less power. This means you need to exert more energy when you swing. Heavier paddles require less energy to drive the ball farther, but they give you less control over ball maneuverability.

Lightweight Paddles

Pickleball paddles that are 6.5 – 7.2 ounces are considered lightweight.

Most lightweight paddles have a fiberglass, composite or lightweight aluminum core, and graphite faces. Lightweight paddles are ideal for players that want control over their hit, and don't mind using physical force.

Middleweight Paddles

Paddles that are 7.3 – 8.4 ounces are considered middleweight.

Many players like using middleweight paddles, as they combine the ability to control the ball with power. You can find middleweight paddles in almost any pickleball paddle material.

Heavyweight Paddles

Heavyweight paddles are between 8.5 – 9.5 ounces.

These paddles offer a lot of drive with minimal effort. Of course, the trade-off comes with less control over the ball. Heavyweight paddles are typically made of wood.

Pickleball Paddle Grip Size

Paddle grip is incredibly important to your game. If your paddle grip is too big or small, it can cause you to drop your paddle, or worse, cause injury.

Paddles with a Small Grip

Pickleball paddles with a small grip have a circumference of 4 inches. This size is perfect for smaller women and younger players. Generally, players 5'2" and under should use a paddle with a small grip.

Paddles with a Medium Grip

Most pickleball paddles have a medium grip: 4 1/8" – 4 1/4". This is a safe size to go with for the average player. Individuals between 5'3" and 5'8" are recommended to use this grip size.

Large Grip Paddles

The largest grip you can find for a pickleball paddle is 4 1/2". If you are a taller individual – 5'9" or over – a large grip is probably the right choice for you.

Pickleball Paddles Edge Guards

Some players love paddles with edge guards, others hate them. Here are the pros and cons for pickleball paddle edge guards:

PRO: You don't have to worry about dropping your paddle, or diving for a close shot. You can play as hard as you want, and know that your paddle is protected. Your paddle is less likely to de-laminate (or have the face detach from the core). Edge guards can add years to the life of your paddle.

CON: Edge guards decrease the total hitting surface area, so you have a smaller paddle to work with.

Most edgeless paddles have protective tape in place of an edge guard. It's barely noticeable, and doesn't impact your play. On the flip side, it also doesn't protect your paddle that well.

How to pick the Right Pickleball Paddle for YOU

To summarize, you want to look at the following criteria when selecting a pickleball paddle to purchase:

1. Paddle material (face and core)
2. Paddle weight
3. Paddle grip size
4. Paddle edge

Consider the Type of Pickleball Player You Are Playing with an Injury

Back, shoulder, or upper arm injuries: Stay away from lightweight paddles. They require more energy exertion, which can easily lead to muscle inflammation, overextension, or other injuries that can exacerbate existing conditions. Try a wood or composite paddle that weighs at least 7.3 ounces or more.

Wrist injuries: Stick with a lightweight paddle – they are the least stressful on your wrist, and are the least likely to contribute to paddle fatigue. Aluminum core paddles are an excellent lightweight option.



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