

A card game of good cheer by Dr Gordon Hamilton

# 12 Days Of Christmas





## Video Tutorial

Learn how to play the game by watching a video: visit [MathPickle.com](http://MathPickle.com) and click on the games link.

## Overview

12 Days of Christmas is played with a special deck of playing cards that contains all the gifts in the classic carol. Each round, your goal is to give away all the gifts in your hand before your fellow players. It is easiest to do so when you are the Lead Player, responsible for playing the first card of a given turn.

Becoming the Lead Player requires you to play lower cards than the other players. However, as the carol reminds us, low cards are rare - there is only one partridge in a pear tree.

## Beginning the Game

Remove the 12 wrapped gift cards from the deck. For a short game, play with 6 and set the rest aside. Play with all 12 for a longer game.



Shuffle the remaining deck of 78 cards and deal 12 to every player. The player to the left of the Dealer becomes the Lead Player and will play the opening cards of the initial round.

## Playing the Lead

The Lead Player begins the round by playing one or more cards from their hand. The cards played must be one of the following 3 combinations:

**Set:** 2 or more identical cards;



**Example:**  
4 maids  
a-milking.

**Straight:** 2 or more successive cards;



**Example:** 1 goose, 1  
golden ring,  
1 calling bird, 1  
french hen, 1 turtle  
dove (i.e. 6/5/4/3/2).

**Singleton:** any single card.



**Example:** 1 lord  
a-leaping.

The lowest card played by the Lead Player is called the Lead's Low Card.



## Following the lead

Proceeding clockwise around the table, players either respond to the Lead Player's cards or pass.

To respond, the current player must play the same type of combination (Set, Straight or Singleton) as the Lead Player. The new combination must include at least one card that is as low or lower than the Lead's Low Card. In the case of Sets and Straights, players can respond with more or fewer cards than those led by the Lead Player, but never a single card. Players may choose to pass.

### Lead Hand



Straight  
Low Card = 9

### Response



Straight  
Low Card = 8

After play has gone once around the table and all players have had the opportunity to either respond or pass, the player who played the lowest card becomes the new Lead Player. In case of a tie for lowest card, the most recent player to have played the low card becomes the new Lead Player. All played cards are now discarded.

### Alvin



Set  
Low Card = 11

### Betty



Set  
Low Card = 8

### Daniella



Pass!  
Low Card = 3

### Carl



Pass!  
Low Card = 12

**Example:** Alvin leads with a Set of four 11s. Betty plays a Set of two 8s. Carl can't play because his Set of three 12s aren't low enough to beat Alvin's Low Card. Daniella passes because she doesn't want to break her Straight to play her two 3s. As Betty's 8s were the lowest cards played, she becomes the next Lead Player.

## Winning the Hand

The hand ends when a player wins a round and has no cards left. That player earns a wrapped gift card and becomes the Lead Player for the next hand. In addition, the player(s) with the most unplayed cards remaining at the end of the hand must surrender a single previously earned wrapped gift card (if they have any) to the winning player.





If a player played their last card(s) but did not win the round, the card(s) they just played are returned to their hand rather than being discarded.

**Alvin**



Straight  
Low Card = 7

**Daniella**



Straight  
Low Card = 6

**Example:** Alvin leads with his last 5 cards, a Straight of 11/10/9/8/7, but Daniella wins the round with the Straight of 8/7/6. Because he didn't win the round, Alvin must return all 5 cards to his hand. If Alvin had kept the 7 and played a 4-card Straight of 11/10/9/8, Daniella would still have won the round but Alvin would have gotten rid of all but one of his cards.

## *Winning the Game*

Once the final wrapped gift card has been claimed, the winner is the player(s) with the most.

Giving is usually, but not always better than getting ;)

## *Credits*

The game designer is Gordon Hamilton (MMath, PhD). At Christmas you'll find him skiing & smuggling in Canada with his two children, Keefer and Julia.

