

Cucumber

2-7 players

52 cards

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: Short

Avoid losing the final trick of each round.

SETUP

- Use a standard 52-card deck with 2 to 7 players.
- Deal 7 cards to each player.
- Cards rank from 2 (low) to Ace (high).

SCORING

- Only the last trick matters for scoring.
- The loser takes penalty points equal to the highest card's rank (Ace = 14).
- Exceed the score limit (often 21) and you are eliminated.

Tip: Win a middle trick with a high card to take the lead, then play low to avoid the final trick.

ON YOUR TURN

- Play a card equal to or higher than the current highest card.
- If you cannot beat it, you must play your lowest card.
- The highest card wins the trick and leads the next one.

Cucumber is a Scandinavian card game of gradual escalation where each player must either play a card equal to or higher than the current highest card or play their lowest card. The last trick of the round carries all the risk, making timing and hand management essential.

Objective

Avoid losing the final trick of each round. The player who loses the last trick receives penalty points equal to the value of the highest card played in that trick. The first player to exceed the penalty threshold is eliminated.

Setup

1. **Players:** 2 to 7 players.
2. **Deck:** Standard 52-card deck.
3. **Deal:** Each player receives 7 cards dealt one at a time.
4. **Card ranking:** Cards rank from 2 (low) to Ace (high).

Gameplay

1. **Leading:** The player to the dealer's left leads any card to start the first trick.
2. **Playing higher or lowest:** Each subsequent player must either play a card equal to or higher than the current highest card in the trick, or play their lowest card.
3. **Winning the trick:** The player who played the highest card wins the trick and leads the next one.
4. **Final trick:** The loser of the last trick scores penalty points equal to the rank of the highest card played in that trick.

Scoring

- **Penalty points:** The highest card in the last trick determines the penalty. Number cards score face value, Jack is 11, Queen is 12, King is 13, Ace is 14.
- **Elimination:** Any player whose cumulative score exceeds the agreed limit (often 21) is knocked out.
- **Winner:** The last player remaining wins the game.

Variations

- **Danish Cucumber (Agurk):** Uses a slightly different penalty structure where only the loser of the last trick is penalized.
- **Swedish Gurka:** Allows players to pass instead of playing their lowest card under certain conditions.

Tips and Strategies

- Hold a high card in reserve to win a middle trick and gain the lead, then play low to avoid the final trick.
- Keep track of which high cards have already been played so you know when it is safe to hold back.
- Force opponents to burn their high cards early by leading strong in the opening tricks.

Tips & Strategy

The key is managing when you are forced to play your lowest card. Try to time your high cards so that you win a trick before the final one, then duck out safely.

Count the aces and kings carefully. Once all four aces have appeared, you know the maximum penalty for the final trick is capped at 13, which changes your risk calculations.