Beginner Golf Equipment Guide

Start with clubs that cover the shots you'll actually play. Then choose a bag that suits how you get around the course and pack enough for your first round.

The five clubs I would start with

Start with a hybrid, 7-iron, 9-iron, 56° sand wedge and putter. Tee off with the hybrid or 7-iron. Use the 9-iron for shorter approaches or for chips that carry farther and roll less than a 7-iron chip from the same lie. Learn the driver in the companion Driver Course.

Build an eight or eleven club set

Eight clubs. Driver, hybrid, 7-, 8- and 9-irons, pitching wedge, 56° sand wedge and putter.

Eleven clubs. Add a 5-wood or 7-wood, a 6-iron and a gap wedge to the eight-club set. The wood adds a long-shot option, the 6-iron covers a longer approach and the gap wedge bridges the pitching and sand wedges. You can carry up to 14 clubs under the Rules of Golf.

What each club is designed to do

Club	The shot it is built for
Driver	Your longest tee shot. A large head and long shaft help create distance.
Fairway wood	Long tee or fairway shots. Try a 5- or 7-wood if a 3-wood is hard to get airborne.
Hybrid	Longer shots from the tee, fairway or light rough. A useful replacement for a long iron.
Irons	Approach shots. A 7-iron is a good starting point. An 8- or 9-iron generally flies higher and shorter.
Pitching and gap wedges	Short approaches and lower chips. A gap wedge can bridge the distance between your pitching and sand wedges.
Sand and lob wedges	A 56° sand wedge covers greenside sand, pitches and chips. A lob wedge adds loft for specialty shots.
Putter	Rolls the ball on the green and can also work from a closely mown fringe.

What can wait

A 3-wood, 3- or 4-iron, extra hybrids and a lob wedge can all wait. Add a club once you can name the shot it gives you or the distance gap it fills.

How to Buy Clubs That Fit

Borrow or rent before you commit

Ask the golf shop about loaners for a lesson or rentals for a round. Confirm handedness, size, price and whether you need to reserve. If you're shopping, bring your 7-iron or a club you've already tried so you have a comparison.

Look past the package piece count

A "12-piece" set can include the bag and headcovers. Count the clubs. Look for a putter and a sand wedge. If the set stops at a pitching wedge, price a 56° sand wedge separately. Include regripping or length changes when comparing prices. Ask whether the return policy lets you hit the clubs.

Use a basic fitting to narrow your choices

What to check	What it means when you swing
Handedness and length	Try the side you can swing comfortably. Height and wrist-to-floor measurements give a fitter a starting point for length. Check it by hitting balls in a comfortable posture.
Lie angle	The angle between the shaft and the sole. A fitter can check it while you hit and see whether the setup contributes to a directional miss.
Shaft weight and flex	Weight changes how the club feels through the swing. Flex is how much the shaft bends. Compare contact, flight and comfort across options. Flex labels can vary by brand.
Grip size and condition	Try a grip you can hold securely with relaxed pressure. Replace slick or cracked grips.
Head design and loft	Try forgiving cavity-back irons, a hybrid and a driver with enough loft to get the ball airborne. Loft affects launch. Wedge bounce helps the sole move through turf or sand.
Putter length and aim	Try a blade and a mallet if both are available. Choose the length and shape that let you aim comfortably and control the roll.

Test the shots you hit most often

Try the 7-iron, hybrid, driver and putter if you can. Look at your usual contact, launch, carry and where your misses finish. If a hybrid and fairway wood carry about the same distance, keep the one you hit more reliably.

Keep Your Clubs or Buy Used

Bring what fits

Use your current set for the first few lessons if the clubs are sound and you can set up comfortably. An older or mismatched set is fine. Bring a usable iron, wedge and putter if you have them. A hybrid is handy too. Ask your coach about a loaner if you're missing something.

Fix one club or replace the set

Slick grips and missing clubs are usually individual fixes. Stop swinging any club with a loose head, a cracked, bent or splintering shaft, or a cracked head. Set it aside for a shop to inspect. Consider replacing most or all of the set if most clubs are the wrong handedness or length, feel too heavy to swing comfortably, or need enough repairs that a better-fitting set makes more sense.

Inspect the actual clubs

A golf shop or established used-club seller can be a good starting point. For an online listing, ask for clear photos of the face, sole, crown or back, shaft label and grip. Check wood heads for cracks or dents, wedge faces for heavy wear, and shafts for damage. Confirm the exact clubs, length, shaft and flex. Ask about reshafting, bending, shortening or extensions, and include regripping and return costs in your comparison.

Check who sold the clubs

A budget brand sells under its own name. A lookalike resembles a popular design. A counterfeit is presented as another brand's genuine club. Watch for a current premium model priced far below comparable listings, stock photos in place of actual photos, inconsistent markings and pressure to pay off-platform. A serial number alone can't establish authenticity. Ask where the clubs came from, check seller history and use a purchase method with buyer protection. If the story or photos leave doubts, pass.

Choose a Bag for How You Play

“Carry” describes how the bag is used. “Stand” means the bag has legs. A lightweight stand bag can be your everyday carry bag.

Bag type	Best use	What to check
Small walking or Sunday bag	A few clubs at the range, a par-3 course or a quick nine.	Very light and compact. Storage is limited. Some have short legs and some lie flat.
Lightweight carry or stand bag	Walking with a larger set and carrying it on your shoulders.	Padded adjustable straps, stable legs and a base that works with a cart if you sometimes ride.
Hybrid stand bag	Switching between carrying, pushing and riding.	Stand legs plus a cart-friendly base and strap routing. Check loaded weight before buying.
Cart bag	Mostly riding or using a push cart.	Stable base, pockets you can open when strapped in and enough room for the gear you actually use.

Try the bag loaded

Put a few clubs and a water bottle in it. Lift it by the handle and adjust the straps. Make sure the clubs slide in and out easily, the stand stays stable and your putter grip fits. Check that the ball pocket, water bottle sleeve and valuables pocket are easy to reach. A rain hood and a place to clip a towel are handy.

If you want to walk with a push cart

A manual push cart lets the wheels carry the bag while you walk. Ask whether the course rents them and where it allows them. Before buying, check the fold size in your trunk, handle height, brake, wheel stability and how the bag sits in the brackets. Strap the bag in and confirm the legs stay closed and the pockets open.

A simple three- or four-wheel model can do the job. A bottle holder is handy. An umbrella holder or powered cart can wait until you know how often you walk and what you’d use.

Pack for Your First Round

Choose a ball you can afford to lose

Try an affordable two-piece ball, or clean used balls in good condition. White or a high-visibility color is fine. Start with one model for practice and play so you can get used to how it feels and rolls. Compare a few chips and putts before buying in bulk. Save premium balls for when you know what extra feel or spin you want. Leave the range's practice balls at the range.

Pack these first

Item	A practical starting point
Golf balls	Bring 6 for an easy nine or 9–12 for your first 18. Add a few if the course has lots of water or thick rough.
Tees	Pack 10–15 total, a mix of longer driver tees and short tees for irons or hybrids. For driver, start with about half the ball above the crown. For an iron, set the ball just above the grass.
Two ball markers and a Sharpie	Put an identifying dot or initials on each ball before teeing off. On the green, use a coin or flat marker to mark the spot before lifting the ball. Replace the ball on the same spot.
Repair tool and towel	Use the tool to fix a pitch mark on the green. The towel wipes clubs, balls when cleaning is allowed, or wet hands.
Glove and shoes	A glove is optional and usually goes on your lead hand. A spare helps on sweaty or wet days. Ask about clean athletic shoes, spikeless shoes and soft spikes before buying.
Water and round basics	Refillable water bottle, snack, charged phone, ID or payment, and a pencil and scorecard from the shop.

Add a small comfort pouch

Pack adhesive bandages, a blister patch, a spare pair of socks and a zip bag for valuables. If you already use an ointment such as Neosporin or an over-the-counter pain reliever, keep it in its original labeled packaging and follow the Drug Facts label.

Bring a hat, water-resistant broad-spectrum SPF 30 or higher sunscreen, and a light pullover or rain jacket. Pack a rain hood or umbrella when useful. If you hear thunder, stop and head for a substantial building or enclosed, hard-topped vehicle.

Use the Cart and Leave the Course Ready

If you ride

Ask the shop about today's restrictions. On cart-path-only holes, keep the cart on the path and walk to your ball. If the 90-degree rule is in effect and the hole allows it, drive on the path until you're even with your ball, cross straight to it, then return to the path the same way.

Obey signs, stakes and ropes. Keep clear of tees, greens, bunker edges and wet turf. Set the brake when you park. If you're walking from the path, bring the club you think you'll hit and a backup. Park toward the next tee where allowed and write down scores after clearing the green.

If you push or carry

Follow posted routes and ask where push carts can go around greens and bunkers. Park your push cart or set your bag on the way to the next tee, clear of the green and other players. Rake your bunker footprints, repair your pitch marks and follow the course's instructions for replacing or filling divots.

Before you buy or head out

- Call the golf shop about rentals, walking and cart fees, push-cart access, and shoe and dress policies.
- Try your clubs and check that each one covers a shot you can explain.
- Put balls, tees, a marker and repair tool in the same easy-to-reach pocket.
- Check the weather, fill your water bottle and mark a few balls before leaving.

Sources for equipment and course rules

PGA of America equipment guide / PING club fitting guide

Golf Galaxy bag guide / USGA equipment rules

USGA ball marking rules / USGA cart etiquette

USGA divot repair / National Weather Service lightning guidance

Keep Golf Real counterfeit guide / 2nd Swing used-club condition guide

FDA Drug Facts label / AAD sunscreen guide