

Section Four



THE DESIGN OF A PLAYING AREA

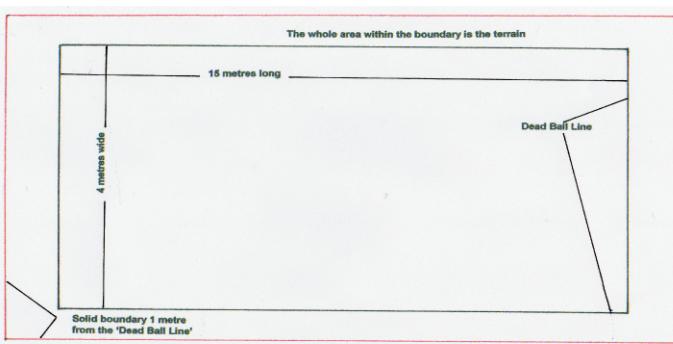


1. Designing a Pétanque terrain

Preparing a terrain for pétanque does not require a high initial outlay and maintenance is minimal once it is established. Many establishments find that they already have a suitable surface available and often it is not necessary to make any special effort to put down a pétanque terrain. Several clubs flourish on existing car parks or gravel drives.

What is required for a good terrain is a well-drained base on which has been spread a quite thin layer of small loose material. The area required for each game is called a lane. For International competition and National Championships the minimum dimensions for a single lane is 15m x 4m with a further metre outside this area before any solid barriers (see diagram below), so for one full size lane you will need an area 17m x 6m. However these dimensions are frequently altered for club and leisure situations to take account of limited space available. Many club terrains are built to have 12m x 3m lanes

2. A Playing Lane



There is no exact laid down specification for a lane, except in size (see Figure 1 for a full size International lane). As a basic rule it must not be so flat that a boule can be rolled dead straight on it, neither should the top dressing be so thick that it allows little or no forward movement of a boule once it lands. All-weather pitches can be used for pétanque but, if they are too smooth, they severely restrict the range of shots that can be used and take out the element of chance which attracts beginners. Experienced players do not like them, as a part of the real skill of the game is "reading" the surface. A good player will use the undulations of a lane when deciding the line to be taken to the jack.

Pétanque may be played on any surface but grass is not recommended, gravel or hard earth are the favoured surfaces. In the UK we try to recreate the dusty squares and areas where pétanque is played in France, however we tend to have a wetter climate so it is for this reason we construct areas similar to gravel driveways so we can play when the weather is inclement.

3. Sub-base

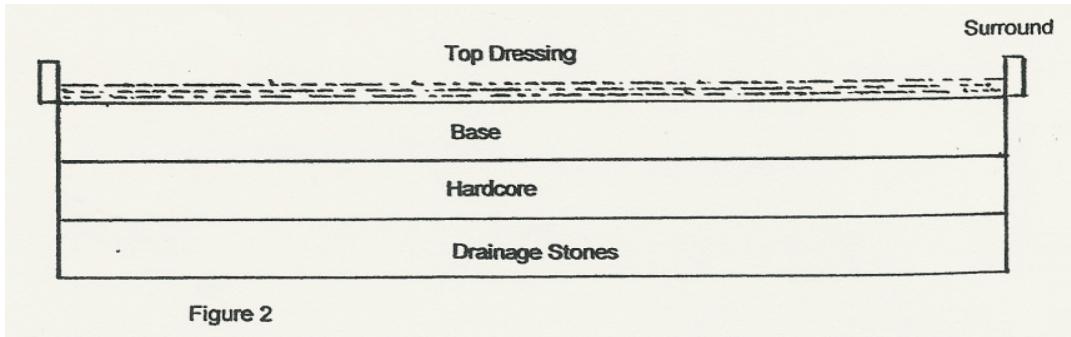


Figure 2

The worst case scenario is shown in Figure 2. This is only necessary on land where drainage is very poor. Drainage stones, in particular, are only really required if the land is likely to become waterlogged. Therefore, depending on the type of site the terrain is to be constructed upon, it may be possible, if it is sufficiently well drained, to dispense with the preparation of the lower two levels, ie. the large stones and hardcore. A local builder will be able to advise on the structure of local ground conditions. It is, however, very important if the terrain is to be well laid and long lasting, for the organic topsoil to be removed to at least a depth of 25cm. before the scalplings or hogging that are to form the base of the terrain are laid down. If the land is not well drained (eg. clay) and hardcore and drainage stones are being used it is advised to increase the depth of the whole sub-base to at least 40cm. A good base could be made of 3.5cm. crushed quarry stone, this is known by Builders' Merchants as No.1 sub base or scalplings. A heavy roller or vibrating compactor over this provide a hard firm surface. However, if played on at this stage the larger stones may well come to the surface. The area will need subsequent rolling and watering to settle the stones down.

4. Top Dressing

Once the area has been very well compacted a thin layer of granite dust (4mm to dust) should be spread over the area and rolled. The point about top dressing is that it should be just deep enough to provide the boule with some grip on landing, but not so deep that the boule sinks into it to any extent. When the top surface is too deep it is impossible to play the game properly. The ideal top dressing depth is about 6mm.

5. Surround

When completed, a terrain will need a protective surround of some sort. This usually made of wood as this material best absorbs the impact of the boules. A good way of providing this very necessary protection for spectators is to put railway sleepers, old telegraph poles or scaffold boards around the terrain, ensuring that they are well fixed as a boule can hit them with considerable force. The terrain border should be at least 23cm. to 30cm. high. It is a good idea to leave a space for entry on to the terrain and to provide a ramp to assist disabled players to gain easy access.

6. Drainage

Water escape routes can be constructed by the following methods, if necessary:

- a. Land Drainage pipe
Dig a trench deep enough to create a fall from the terrain to the outlet. Lay in drainage pipes, cover with pea-gravel and back fill with top soil.
- b. Common Soak-away
Carry out as for land drain. At the outlet dig a hole 1.5m. deep by 1m. square. Fill with hardcore (broken bricks etc.) Cover with a plastic sheet or cap with a concrete finish about 30cm. below the surface. Back fill with top soil.
- c. French Drain
About 1m. from the outside of the terrain area that floods, dig a trench. Fill with 16mm/25mm. pebbles up to the surface. This will act as a soak-away and a walk area.

7. Size

If more than one game at a time is envisaged, the overall size of the terrain, ie. the total number of individual lanes, must be decided. Each lane will cater for up to six people, as the most common game is triples. A game of Pétanque can be played, as stated before, on lanes of 3m. x 12m. or, ideally, 4m. x 15m. plus allowance should be made before any protective surround is erected.