



A FREE GUIDE FROM GREENSIDE PICKS

The Beginner's Golf Handbook

Your first year in golf — gear, costs, and getting on the course, without the guesswork

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Welcome to golf

Golf has a reputation for being complicated to get into: expensive gear, strange rules, dress codes, unwritten etiquette. The truth is far simpler. To start, you need access to a driving range, a few clubs you can borrow or rent, and a bucket of balls. Everything else can come gradually, in the right order, once you know you enjoy it.

This handbook is the short version of everything a first-year golfer actually needs to know. It won't turn you into a low handicapper — nothing in print can. What it will do is stop you wasting money on the wrong things, help you skip the mistakes that make beginners quit, and get you onto a real course with confidence. Read it once end to end; keep it for the checklist at the back.

What's inside

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Before You Spend a Penny |
| 2 | Lessons: The Best Money in Golf |
| 3 | Your First Set: What You Actually Need |
| 4 | What Golf Really Costs |
| 5 | The Driving Range, Done Right |
| 6 | On the Course: Etiquette That Matters |
| 7 | Golf Words You'll Actually Hear |
| ✓ | Your First-Year Checklist |

Before You Spend a Penny

Start at the range, not the golf shop

The single most common beginner mistake is buying a full set of clubs before ever hitting a ball. Reverse it. Your first stop is a driving range, where clubs rent for next to nothing and your only job is to find out whether striking a golf ball makes you grin. It will — the first properly struck shot is famously addictive.

Go two or three times before you buy anything. Total investment: a few euros a session plus range balls. You'll learn more about whether golf is for you in three range visits than in any amount of shopping. Only once you're sure should equipment enter the picture.

The order that works

Range first, lessons second, modest gear third, first rounds fourth. Beginners who follow that sequence spend less, improve faster, and quit far less often than those who buy a premium set on day one and try to teach themselves.

Lessons: The Best Money in Golf

A few hours with a pro save you years

The biggest hidden cost in golf isn't gear — it's a year of grooving bad habits alone, then paying a coach to undo them. Reverse this one too. Take three to five lessons with a PGA pro right at the start. A coach sets your grip, stance and swing foundation in weeks; the same corrections take years to make on your own, if you ever do.

Group beginner courses are the cheapest way in and often the most fun — you learn alongside people at exactly your level. Expect to pay somewhere between €100 and €400 depending on country and format. It pays for itself many times over in avoided frustration.

A note for Sweden

Many countries have a formal entry point. In Sweden, most clubs require the Grönt Kort (green card) before you can play real courses — a weekend course covering swing basics, rules and etiquette, usually €150–250, typically including theory, practice and playing lessons. The UK and US have no equivalent: you can simply book a tee time, though a few lessons first will make that first round far less daunting.

Your First Set: What You Actually Need

Fewer clubs, chosen well

Walk into a golf shop as a beginner and you'll face walls of individual clubs costing hundreds each. Ignore them. Your first set has exactly one job: making a developing swing playable. That takes far less than the shop wants to sell you.

The clubs that earn their place

A forgiving driver or 3-wood (big head, big sweet spot — getting airborne and roughly straight matters more than distance). One or two hybrids, the most important beginner clubs in modern golf: they replace the 3-5 irons, the hardest clubs in the game, with easy-launching alternatives. Mid and short irons (6 or 7 through 9) — your scoring and learning clubs. A wedge for around the green. And a putter, where nearly half your shots will happen.

What you don't need yet

A full 14-club set, long irons, a specialist gap or lob wedge, or “the driver the pros use.” Premium individual clubs help a pro, not a developing swing. Buy them later, if ever.

Package set or build your own

For almost every beginner, a complete package set — driver to putter plus the bag — is the smart-money route. It's cheaper, matched, and made for exactly your stage. A good new beginner set runs €300-800; a used set in good condition often costs about half. Building your own club by club is a project for later.

What Golf Really Costs

An honest breakdown, so nothing surprises you

Nobody should discover golf's costs one shock at a time. Here's the plain breakdown of a first year: what's essential, what's optional, and where beginners overspend.

Where beginners overspend

Premium balls (you'll lose three a round in ponds until you stop — buy cheap until then), premium individual clubs before your fundamentals are in place, and gadgets of every kind. A rangefinder or GPS watch is a year-two purchase at the earliest. Spend on lessons and range time instead; that's where improvement actually comes from.

A first-year budget, at a glance

Item	Typical cost	Notes
Beginner club set (new)	€300–800	Driver to putter plus bag; used ≈ half
Glove	€15	One is plenty to start
A dozen cheap balls	€20	Buy budget until you stop losing them
Tees	€10	A bag lasts a season
Golf shoes (optional)	€90–250	Trainers are fine at first
Lessons / group course	€100–400	The best money in golf
Grönt Kort (Sweden)	€150–250	Standard entry; often includes lessons
Range balls & green fees	recurring	The ongoing cost — scales with how much you play

The honest summary

A realistic year one, doing it right: roughly €450–900 all in for a beginner who buys a modest set, takes a group course and plays regularly. Buy used and share range trips and it's far less. Almost none of it is wasted if you spend it in the order this handbook recommends.

The Driving Range, Done Right

Where most of your early golf should happen

The range is the cheapest golf there is and the fastest way to improve. Mechanically it's simple: you buy a bucket or a card of balls, take a bay, and hit. But how you practise decides whether you actually get better or just tire yourself out.

Your first session: one club, low ambitions

Don't try every club. Take a 7-iron — the club that'll be your companion for years — and focus on making contact, not on distance. Half-speed swings that strike the ball cleanly beat full-power swings that don't. Quality of contact is the whole game early on.

Practise so you actually improve

Pick a target for every shot; never rake-and-hit on autopilot. Change clubs occasionally to keep it realistic. Stop when you get tired — fatigue grooves bad habits. Forty focused balls beat a hundred lazy ones.

The etiquette (there's barely any)

Stay in your bay, keep clubs off the walkways, and don't coach the person next to you unless asked. That's essentially it.

On the Course: Etiquette That Matters

Learn the few rules that count, skip the rest

Golf etiquette has a reputation for being a minefield. In practice, only a handful of things matter, and they're all about not ruining anyone else's round. Get these right and you'll be welcome anywhere.

The essentials

Keep up with the group ahead, not just ahead of the group behind — if you're holding people up, wave them through. Stay quiet and still while others swing. Repair your marks: fix your divots and pitch marks, rake bunkers after you. And keep safety absolute — never swing or hit when anyone could be within range.

What you can happily ignore

Most of the dress-code folklore, the elaborate unwritten rituals, and the fear of looking like a beginner. Everyone was one. Play at a reasonable pace, be considerate, and no one minds a bit of rust.

Golf Words You'll Actually Hear

A plain-English glossary for your first rounds

Golf has its own vocabulary, and most guides drown you in it. Here are the terms you'll genuinely hear in your first months — enough to follow a conversation and read a scorecard.

Par	The number of strokes a good golfer is expected to need on a hole (usually 3, 4 or 5).
Birdie / Bogey	One under par (birdie) or one over par (bogey) on a hole.
Handicap	A number reflecting your skill, letting players of different levels compete fairly.
Fairway	The mown strip between tee and green — where you want your shots to land.
Green	The very short grass around the hole, where you putt.
Rough	The longer grass either side of the fairway; harder to play from.
Bunker	A sand hazard. Rake it after you play from it.
Tee (box / shot)	The starting area of a hole; also the peg you place the ball on.
Fade / Draw	A shot that curves gently right (fade) or left (draw) for a right-hander.
Slice / Hook	The exaggerated, unwanted versions of a fade / draw — every beginner's companions.
Hybrid	An easy-to-hit club that replaces hard-to-hit long irons. A beginner's best friend.
Wedge	A high-lofted iron for short, high shots near the green.
Mulligan	An informal do-over shot. Not in the rules, but common in friendly rounds.
Tee time	Your booked slot to start a round.



Your First-Year Checklist

Tick these off, roughly in order, and you'll have done first-year golf right.

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- ☐ Visit a driving range 2–3 times with rented clubs
 - ☐ Book a beginner group course or 3–5 lessons with a pro
 - ☐ (Sweden) Sign up for a Grönt Kort course
 - ☐ Choose a complete beginner package set — new or good used
 - ☐ Add a glove, a dozen cheap balls and a bag of tees
 - ☐ Practise with purpose: one club, real targets, stop when tired
 - ☐ Learn the four etiquette essentials before your first round
 - ☐ Book your first tee time on a short or quiet course
 - ☐ Play nine holes before worrying about eighteen
 - ☐ Keep buying cheap balls until you stop losing them

You're Ready to Start

That's the whole first year in one handbook: hit balls before you buy, take a few lessons early, get a modest set, know what it costs before you commit, and put in range time. Do those five things and you'll skip the mistakes that make most beginners quit — and you'll be out on a real course, grinning at your first clean strike, sooner than you think.

For ranked, independent picks on starter sets, balls, shoes and everything else in this handbook — plus deeper guides on each topic — visit greensidepicks.com. We compare independent expert tests and reviews so you can spend your time playing, not researching.

Independent, ranked picks

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