

## Out of Bounds

■ SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

# horseshoes

IF YOU BUILD A PIT,  
YOU COULD GET  
HOOKED ON THIS  
GAME THAT'S  
PERFECT TO PLAY  
ON A LAZY SUMMER  
AFTERNOON

BY MARK LUCE



**I**n my never-ending quest to perfect the art of leisure, I surveyed my backyard and came up with two options — build a basketball court or a horseshoe pit. I opted for the latter because a horseshoe pit was a better fit for my humble little acre and my increasingly achy bones. Besides, a basketball court cost about \$1,500 to build.

Roman soldiers invented horseshoes, which is popular throughout the world. The game became big in America, thanks to the British, around Revolutionary War time.

In 1909, in the tiny hamlet of Bronson, Kan., the first world horseshoe tournament was held. In 1914, the Grand League of the American Horseshoe Pitchers was formed in Kansas City, Mo. The league members standardized the rules, specifications and procedures of the game that's played by millions but perfected by few.

If you want to learn horseshoes, you can't just pound a couple of stakes into the ground and start playing. You must do a little work. However, using the following steps, you can have a horse-

shoe pit with a day's work and a few trips to the hardware store.

**What you'll need** — First, check the local hardware store for a decent set of horseshoes and stakes. This will cost between \$30 and \$40.

Look for the Diamond brand, known for its sturdy shoes and rugged stakes. Avoid plastic horseshoes because they're inferior.

You'll need Sakcrete, a \$4 to \$6 50-pound bag of just-add-water cement mixture to set the stakes. Also required is about 400 pounds of sand, which can be bought in bulk and hauled in a truck or sold in 50-pound bags for about \$3 apiece. True sportsmen may opt for synthetic or blue clay, but it takes more maintenance than sand.

If you don't have a shovel or a tape measure, you'll need those, too.

**Building the court** — The official dimensions of a horseshoe court are 50 feet by 6 feet. You can alter the length if your yard isn't big enough.

Measure the court and place a marker in each of the corners so you can see the dimensions. Then measure 3 feet in from the center of each end

and mark a spot where the stakes go.

The size of the pit is 4 feet deep and 3 feet wide. Using the position of the stake as a guide, measure off the area of both pits. That means 1.5 feet toward each side, and 2 feet to the front and back.

**Time for the elbow grease** — Start digging and try to get the pit as level as possible. In the pit's center, dig a pyramid-shaped hole that's 6 inches deep. The stakes, which are 27 inches tall, should project 21 inches.

Mix the Sakcrete in a 5-gallon container, set the stakes in the ground at a 12-degree angle and pour the cement. Let dry overnight.

**Almost home** — The next day, check to make sure the stakes are secure. Then spread a thick layer of sand over the pit area.

Technically, you're finished and ready to play. However, there are still some things you can do to make the pit more attractive, such as a brick outline or railroad ties behind the pit.

Then it's time to play. The scoring is simple — a ringer scores three points, and closest to the stake (within 6 inches) scores one. Officially, you should play to 40. But it may be better to play to 15 when first learning the game — unless you're patient.

Horseshoes is not a fast game, nor is it meant to be. It's perfect to play before and after a barbecue or on a lazy summer afternoon. Remember to take your time, enjoy the outdoors and, as in all things leisurely, a little gamesmanship can go a long way, especially in a tight game.

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