



Welcome!

This rulebook contains the rules for Ducks and Geese, for the Vines deck. For complete Vines rules, including fundamentals of the games and history of the deck, please download the “Vines Rules” document from Crab Fragment Labs: <https://www.crabfragmentlabs.com/vines>

Ducks and Geese is a popular 4-player partners game that features Ducks (Twos) and Geese (Farmers) as scoring cards. There are many interesting regional variations on the basic rules.

And if you have feedback on our games, please send it along. There’s a handy form on our “About” page, <https://www.crabfragmentlabs.com/about>

About Crab Fragment:

Crab Fragment Labs is a small tabletop design studio, dedicated to bringing good games directly to customers with a minimum of fuss. You can print and play our games completely free, or buy the decks from DriveThruCards. If you’d like to support us, consider backing us on Patreon. Every pledge helps keep James Ernest and his family from begging on the streets.

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Game 5, Ducks and Geese

Summary: Ducks and Geese is primarily a four-player partners game. There are some cutthroat variants, but they are essentially just versions of Coralon with point cards. Ducks and Geese is a beloved and storied card game with variations in every corner of the world.

The Name: This game takes its name from the point cards, the Deuces and the Farmers. As with many aspects of the Vines deck, it's unclear whether the Cerevalo deck was designed to fit the name Ducks and Geese, or whether the game was previously known by a different name, until Cerevalo drew every Farmer with a goose.

Players: 4 players in two teams

Arrangement: As in most partners games, teammates sit across from one another. The role of dealer starts with a random player, and passes to the left after each hand.

The Deal: Shuffle the deck and deal a hand of seven cards to each player. Traditionally these cards are dealt as a block of three cards, and then a block of two, and another block of two. But in a well-shuffled deck the blocking should make no difference.

The dealer sets aside the remainder of the deck, turning over the top card. This card is called the "open card."

The Bid: Starting on the dealer's left and going once around the table, players bid the number of points they think their team can score. Each player in turn must either raise the standing bid, or pass. For the bidding team, tricks are worth points. Twos and Farmers (Ducks and Geese) are worth points for everyone.

The minimum bid is 3, and if no one else bids, the dealer may bid at least 3, or they may forfeit the hand and grant 3 points to the other team.

Taking the Open: The high bidder has the option to “take the open.”

- **Taking the Open:** The winning bidder picks up the open card, and then discards one card facedown. The suit of the open card becomes trump.
- **No Trump:** The player does not take the open, turning it back down and leaving it on the deck. There is therefore *no trump*.

Play of the Hand: The winning bidder leads the first trick. There is no requirement to lead any particular suit, because trump is already established. Players must follow suit if they can, and if not, they can play any card. The winner of each trick leads the next.

Collect your tricks face down, and your point cards face up. Play seven tricks, and then score the hand.

Scoring: The team that won the bid will score one point for each trick. Both teams will score one point for each Deuce and each Farmer. However, if the bidders did not accomplish their bid, there are penalties as follows.

- **Making or Exceeding the Bid:** If the bidders achieve their bid, they can score only the amount of their bid, no more. For example, if they collect 7 points on a bid of 5, they score only 5 points.
- **Falling Short:** If the bidding team fails to make their bid, they score *nothing*. In addition, the opposing team gets a bonus (called a “bump”) equal to the bid. For example, if the bid was 5, but the team scored only 4 points, then the bidding team scores zero, and their opponents get a bump of 5.

Regardless of the success of the bidding team, the non-bidding team does not score points for their tricks, only for their Ducks and Geese.

Winning: Play to a total of 30 points. If both teams go out at the same time, and their scores are tied, then the bidding team wins.

Bidding Strategy: Note that the maximum possible score in one hand (and thus the maximum bid) is 17 points: That accounts for all seven tricks, all five Ducks, and all five Geese. However, since nearly half the deck is out of play, there is no guarantee that these points will be available. Typically, 3-5 points is considered an easy bid, 6-7 is average, and 8-10 is hard.

As with any partners game, communication about the contents of your hand is strictly forbidden, save what can be gleaned from the strength of your bids. It’s reasonable to ask players to keep to the spirit of this rule, even though it can be difficult to enforce completely.



Ducks and Geese Variants

Summary: The nine Kingdoms play dozens of variants of Ducks and Geese. The ones below are the most widely known. Tavern players typically play with blind and double-zero bids.

Dog: An older, related game is called “Dog” or “Straight Draft.” In this game, only the Tars are worth points, and the minimum bid is 2. There are no other changes. This game is probably a forerunner of Ducks and Geese, now less popular because of its fewer point cards.

Zero Bid: A player can bid “zero” if they think they can take no tricks. “Zero” is always a legal bid, and the next legal bids are zero again, or something higher than the previous normal bid. If multiple players bid zero, the last bid takes precedence.

When a player takes the lead with a bid of zero, their partner sits out of the hand. The game is played three-handed, and scored as follows:

- **Success:** If the zero-bidder takes no tricks, their team scores 5 points, and the opposing team scores nothing.
- **Failure:** If the zero-bidder takes any points, then the opposing team scores double: two points for each Duck and Goose (still nothing for their tricks).

Strategy: The zero bid can sound like a desperate option. Taking zero points is harder than it seems, especially when the opposing team is *trying to feed you at least one point*. If you break your bid, you must then struggle to take as many point cards as you can, just to steal them away from the other team!

Double-Zero: When a player bids “double zero,” they are committing that *both teammates* will play the hand, and take no points. The reward for succeeding at this bid is 12 points.

Blind Bidding: If blind bidding is allowed, players can bid *without looking at their cards*. This is risky, but the rewards can be worth it. If your team succeeds with a blind bid, the opposing team scores nothing.

To make a blind bid, *neither partner can look at their cards*. Therefore, if you intend to bid blind, it's wise to warn your partner before they touch their cards. (This warning is perfectly legal, since it can't give away any information about your hand, only your intentions!)

The blind bid follows the same rules as normal bidding. It must be a number higher than the current bid, with a minimum starting bid of three.

If the first partner makes a blind bid, the second may look at their hand and make a non-blind bid. Once the bidding has completed, the blind bidder can look at their hand before deciding whether to take the open.

If the blind bidding team makes their bid, they score normally, but the opposing team scores *no points for the round*.

Blind bidding sounds reckless, but it's actually a decent option when your opponents are close to winning. It's typically the only way to keep the non-bidding team from scoring something.

Note: You could blind-bid zero, if zero is allowed, but there's not much point. The rewards for succeeding at either gambit are the same: In both cases, the opposing team scores zero.

Cutthroat Variant:

Ducks and Geese can be played "cutthroat," which means everyone playing alone. This game is essentially Coralon, but with Ducks and Geese as point cards, with new rules as follows:

- The game supports 4 to 6 players.
- Deal 8 cards per player.
- The point cards are Twos and Farmers. Tricks count for the high bidder only.
- The minimum bid is 2.
- There is no open card. Instead, the high bidder sets trump by their first lead.
- If you play a Deuce that follows suit, or if you play one as a lead, you keep it. If you play a Deuce out of suit, even if it is trump, it follows normal rules of play.
- If the bidder fails at their bid, they score no points for the round, and they also subtract their bid from their score (this is done instead of giving a bump to everyone else).
- Zero bids are never allowed, but blind bids can be.
- The winning score is 21 points.

These rules are similar to other adaptations from partners to cutthroat rules. With each player bidding their own hand, there is no need to establish a trump suit until the first lead. Note the rule that lets players save their own Deuces, since they can't be thrown to a partner!