

-Third Shot Options & Execution



To reach the 3.5+ level in pickleball, you'll need to master the art of the third shot. This pivotal play determines whether you can level the playing field against opponents already at the kitchen line.

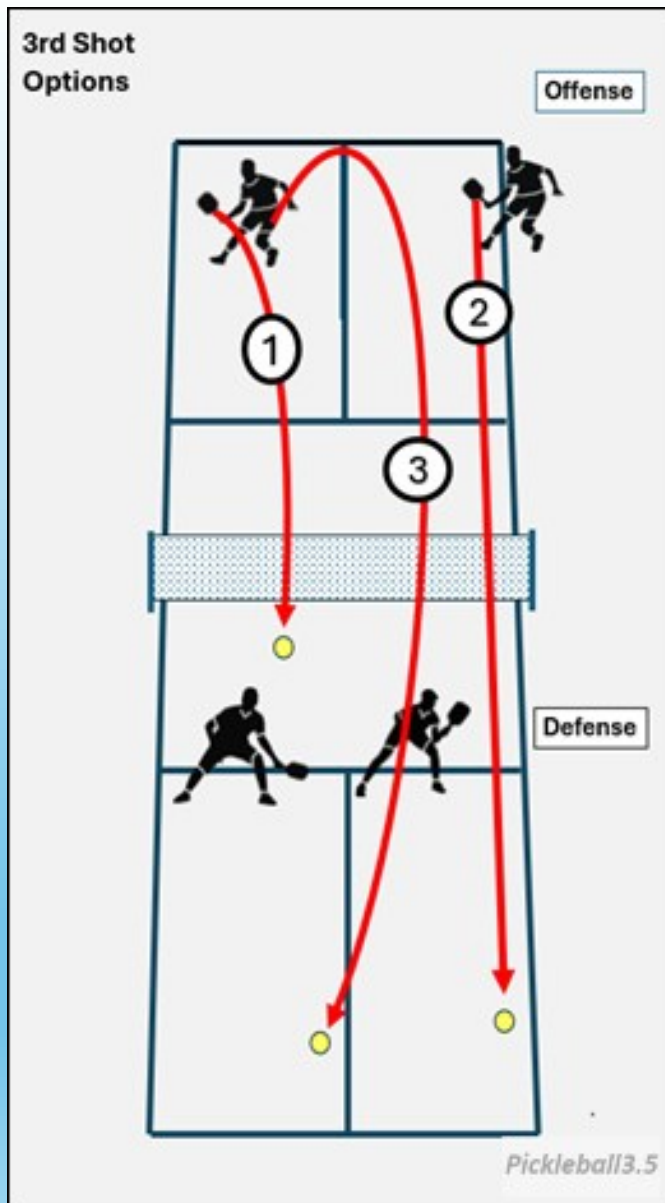
The three primary options for the third shot are:

1.Drop Shot

2.Drive or Drip

3.Lob

These choices aren't just about variety—they're about knowing the right tool for the right situation and executing it with precision.



Why the Third Shot Matters

The third shot in pickleball is the first shot that isn't constrained by placement rules. The Serve has to be hit a certain way and land in the service court.

On the return of serve, only one player can play the shot after they let it bounce. The third shot starts the action. After the ball bounces, either player can play the shot.

This shot dictates how the rest of the point will play out and it gives the offense an opportunity to attack and set the tone.

A well-executed third shot is your ticket out of the transition zone and into an advantageous position at the net.

It's your chance to even the odds against opponents who already dominate the kitchen.

Without consistent control, sharp execution, and strategic decision-making, you'll struggle to beat stronger players.

Most players evolve their third-shot game over time:

- They **start with the drive**, keeping it simple.
- Eventually, they **experiment with lobs**, adding a bit of flair.
- Finally, they **learn the drop shot**, the cornerstone of advanced play.

This progression is critical to advancing your skills—and your rating.

Third Shot Options

1 – Drop Shot

The drop shot is the surgeon's scalpel of pickleball—precise, soft, and devastating when executed correctly.

It's a gentle shot that just clears the net and lands near your opponent in their kitchen zone.

The Drop shot exists in Pickleball because of the NVZ (Non-Volley Zone or Kitchen).

The NVZ was a genius move by the inventors of Pickleball. It lets you place a shot on the court that can't be volleyed or attacked in many cases. To advance in

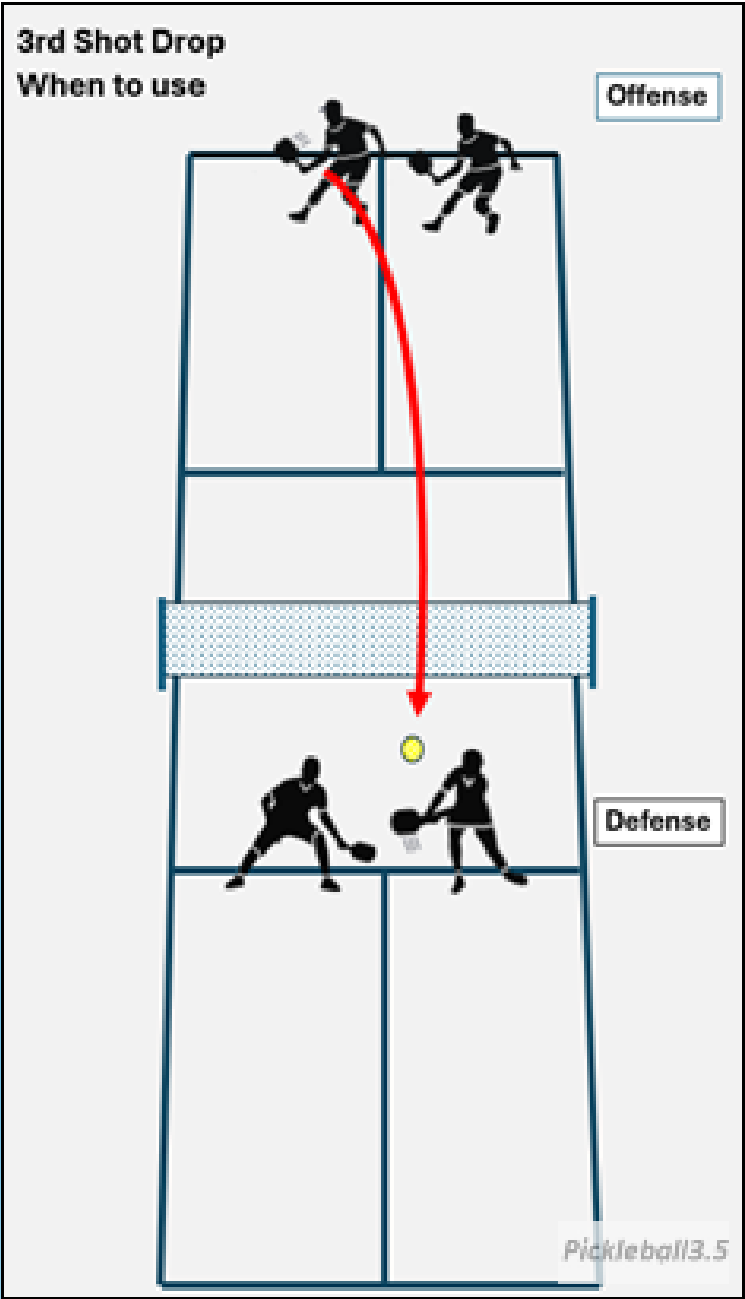
pickleball to the 3.5+ level you will need to use this shot often to beat more experienced players.

Why It Works:

- Forces opponents to hit up, limiting their ability to attack.
- Neutralizes their net advantage, giving you time to advance.
- It often causes errors like pop-ups that can be attacked or shots hit back into the net.

Pro Tip: A great drop shot is like a whispered secret—it's quiet, subtle, and leaves your opponent scrambling to figure out their next move.

The illustration shows a third shot drop hit to the middle of the court between the 2 defenders.



When to use a Drop shot and all aspects of the Drop shot including targeting, advancing and common mistakes are covered in the section on ***The Third Shot Drop.***

2 – Drive or Drip

The drive is a fast, flat shot that says, “Let’s see you handle this!” It’s a great option when you see an opening or want to pressure your opponent into a mistake.

The Drip shot is a new term for a hybrid shot combining the Drive and Drop shot. The Drip is a slower-paced drive with heavy topspin. It is designed to land at the opponent’s feet before they reach the kitchen. It is most effective against players moving towards the kitchen after the serve return. A good Drip shot can lead to pop-ups or mistakes.

Why It Works:

- Forces quick reactions and errors.

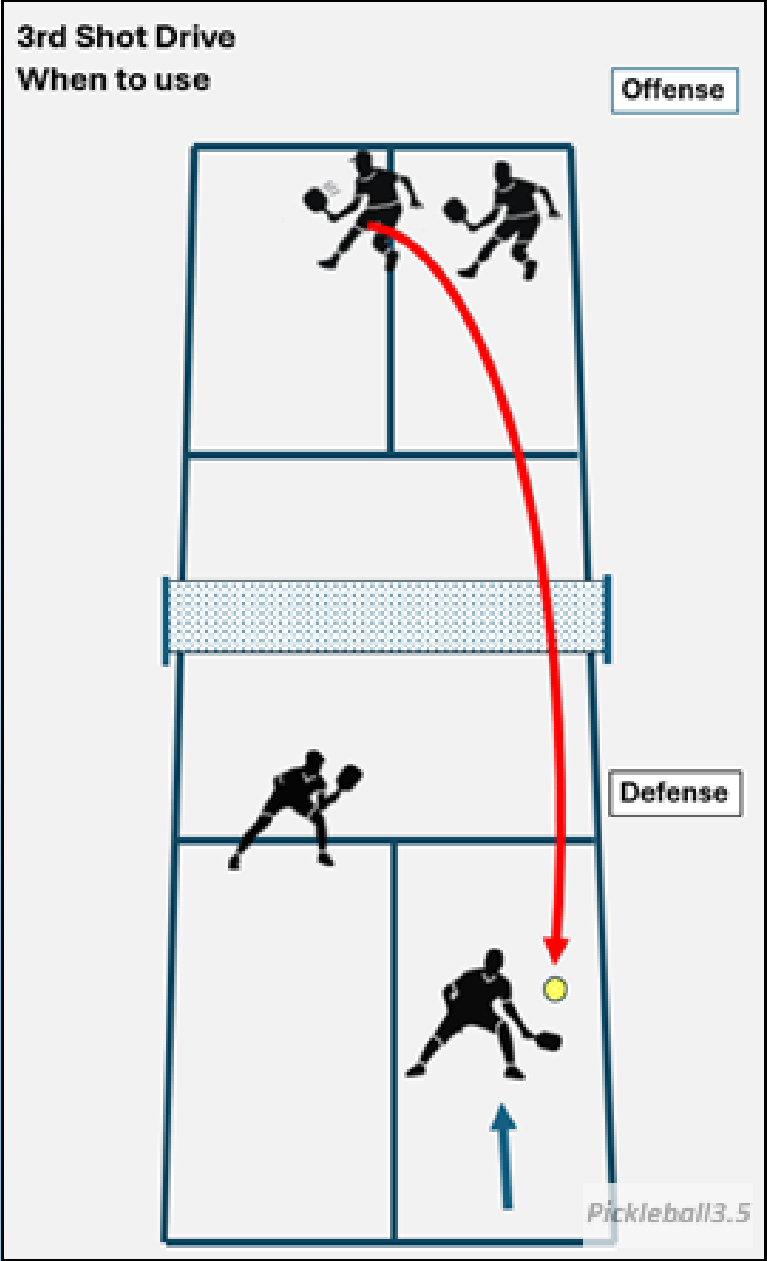
- Keeps your opponents on their toes and unable to settle at the net.

Pro Tip: Think of the drive as the fastball of pickleball—straight, powerful, and intimidating when placed well. Just don't get carried away and send it sailing out of bounds.

The Drip shot is an advanced shot being used more and more at the professional level. It is a good way to add variety to your third shot.

Focus on the standard drive and drop shot first. Once you have mastered these fundamentals, experiment with the DRIP shot.

It is critical to use a drive or drip shot on a short return of serve to keep your opponent back.



The illustration shows a third shot drive used on a short return of serve to keep the server returner back.

This is discussed along with other information on the Drive shot like targeting, poaching and Shake and Bake in the chapter on the ***Third Shot Drive***.

3 – Lob

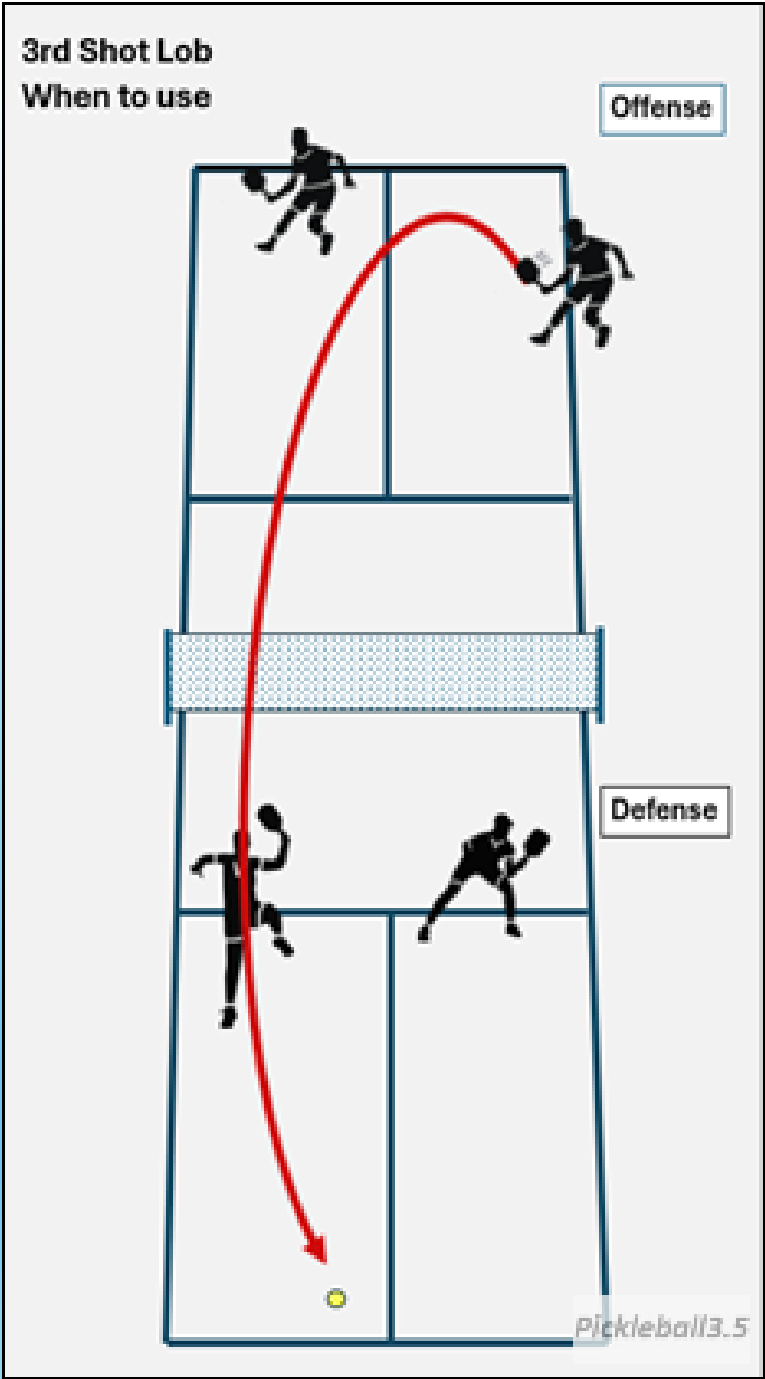
The lob shot is your surprise card, a high, arching stroke that forces your opponent to retreat from the net. It's particularly effective against players who aren't very mobile or lack good overhead skills.

Why It Works:

- Pushes your opponents back, giving you time to reposition.
- Forces them into awkward angles for an overhead smash.

Pro Tip: A good lob is like a Hail Mary in football—it's risky but spectacular when it lands. Use it wisely, and don't give your opponents too many opportunities to smash it back at you.

The illustration below shows a player hitting a lob shot over the head of their opponent.



When to use a Lob shot and all aspects of the lob including switching and defending using smash shots are covered in the section on ***The Lob Shot***.

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Summary: Progress Through Practice

The third shot is a skill that grows with time and experience. Most players naturally start with the drive, dabble in lobs, and eventually embrace the drop shot.

Mastering all three options is essential to advancing your game, especially as you move into higher skill levels where variety and consistency are non-negotiable.

Third Shot Execution

If you are just starting out, the next section gives you the basics of third shot execution and some helpful video examples.

This section references paddle grips. If you are not familiar with different paddle grips in pickleball you can find more information in this guide in the ***Pickleball Primer section.***

Continental Grip

Base of Index knuckle on Bevel 2
V of thumb and forefinger on Bevel 1
Paddle face neutral/flat



How to hit a Drop Shot



Hitting a drop shot in pickleball requires finesse and control to make the ball land just over the net and within the opponent's non-volley zone (kitchen). This is a critical shot to master in pickleball for advancement to the 3.5+ skill level.

Preferred Grip for the Drop shot

Continental Grip. Paddle is in neutral position. Easier to position for shot.

Stance and Preparation

- Get to the ball and position your feet shoulder-width apart with your knees slightly bent. Maintain a balanced stance.
- Turn your body sideways to the net, with your non-dominant shoulder facing the target.
- Stabilize yourself, it is better to not be moving your feet when you start your swing on this delicate shot.
- Your paddle should be in front of you, ready to make contact with the ball.

Swing Technique for the Drop shot

- Take a short backswing, keeping your paddle face slightly open (tilted upward).
- Shift your weight slightly from your back foot to your front foot as you prepare to swing.
- Contact the ball in front of your body. Watch the ball start to drop from its highest point and as it is descending use a gentle, controlled swing to lift the ball over the net. The motion should be smooth and slow, focusing on placing the ball rather than hitting it hard.
- Follow through with a short, upward motion. If you have a good top spin or cut shot use this shot type

delicately, otherwise just hit a flat shot with no spin.

- Your paddle should finish just above the net level, ensuring the ball lands softly in the opponent's non-volley zone.

Key Points to Remember

- The drop shot requires a delicate touch. Focus on control and feel rather than power. Let the ball start to drop before hitting it. Hitting the ball at its highest point will tend to cause you to hit it too high and deep.
- Aim to place the ball just over the net, making it difficult for your opponent to reach and return.

Short Video on the Pickleball Third Shot Drop

Courtesy of Dicks Sporting Goods and Wayne Dollard

Right click the link to open in a new Tab or Window.

[Watch this video on the Pickleball Drop Shot on Youtube.](#)

How to Hit an Effective Drive



The drive shot is the most common and natural shot in pickleball and is the first stroke you will use regularly when you step on the court. A drive shot in pickleball is a powerful and fast shot. It's used to apply pressure and force a defensive return.

Drive Shot Preferred Grip

Eastern Forehand Grip. Power, control and topspin.

Stance and Preparation

- Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. Your dominant foot should be slightly back to allow for a full swing.
- Turn your body sideways to the net, with your non-dominant shoulder facing the target.
- Keep your knees slightly bent and maintain a low center of gravity for stability and power.

Swing Technique for the Drive Shot

- Take your paddle back, keeping it at waist level. Your paddle face should

be slightly closed (tilted forward) to help keep the ball low.

- If you are using the Eastern Forehand grip your paddle will already be closed slightly and positioned well, otherwise adjust by turning your wrist slightly.
- Shift your weight from your back foot to your front foot as you swing forward. This transfer helps generate power.
- Contact the ball in front of your body. The paddle should be moving in a forward and slightly upward direction.
- Follow through with your swing, extending your paddle towards the target.

- Your paddle should finish high, and your dominant shoulder should rotate through the shot.

Key Points to Remember

Keep your eyes on the ball throughout the swing to ensure clean contact.

Focus on generating power through your legs and core, not just your arm. Maintain control by keeping your swing smooth and controlled.

Keep the paddle face slightly closed to drive the ball low and fast.

Video on the Pickleball Drive Shot

Courtesy of Ben Johns and Lifetime
Pickleball

Right click the link to open in a new Tab
or Window.

[Watch this video on the Pickleball Drive
Shot on Youtube.](#)

How to Hit a Lob



Hitting a lob shot in pickleball involves lifting the ball high over your opponent's head, trying to land it near the baseline. This shot can be used both defensively, to give yourself time to recover, and offensively, to move your opponent's

back. Here's how to hit a lob shot effectively:

Preferred Grip

Continental Grip. Paddle is in neutral position. Easier to position for shot.

Stance and Preparation

- Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent, and weight balanced.
- Turn your body sideways to the net, with your non-dominant shoulder facing the target.
- Hold your paddle below the ball level, with the paddle face slightly open (tilted upward).

Swing Technique

- Take your paddle back in a smooth, controlled motion, keeping it low and open.
- Shift your weight from your back foot to your front foot as you begin the swing.
- Contact the ball below its center, using an upward brushing motion.
- Use a gentle, controlled swing to lift the ball high into the air. The paddle should move from low to high.
- Follow through with your paddle, finishing high above your shoulder. The follow-through should be smooth and relaxed.

Key Points to Remember

- Keep the paddle face open to generate lift and ensure the ball goes high over the net.
- Focus on a smooth, controlled swing rather than power. The goal is to lift the ball, not to hit it hard.
- Aim for the area near the opponent's baseline. This forces them to move back and gives you time to reposition.

Video on Lob Shot technique

Courtesy of [Deb Harrison \(PicklePongDeb\)](#)

Right click the link to open in a new Tab or Window.

[Watch this video on the Pickleball Lob Shot on Youtube.](#)

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