



Drawing the line for optimal playability

By Mary Helen Sprecher

The only thing more prevalent than pickleball these days is this question: “Should we line our tennis courts for pickleball, too, or just have separate pickleball courts?”

It’s a difficult question because there is no right answer for all parks; the answer in any given area will depend upon a variety of factors:

- **AVAILABLE SPACE.** Is there a set amount of space available and everyone has to share, or is there room to build new courts?

- **PLAYING POPULATION.** How many tennis players and how many pickleball players are vying for space? Is either population growing or shrinking? Do the players seem to get along, or is there friction between the two groups?

- **OTHER FACILITIES.** Are there additional locations nearby, such as other parks, where players can use courts free of charge in the event of people waiting to play?

- **PLAYING TIME.** Are there times when the demand for courts is particularly concentrated?

- **PROGRAMMING.** Is there programmed play (league play, lessons, camps, youth clinics, etc.) for either or both sports, are the courts unscheduled and therefore always open for pickup games—or is there a mixture of both free time and programmed time?





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IN ADDITION TO SPACE FOR COURTS, ACCOMMODATIONS MUST BE MADE FOR OVERRUN AREAS AND SETBACKS FOR FENCING.

- **DEMAND.** Are there requests for separate facilities from either group?
- **BUDGET.** How much funding can you afford to dedicate to courts? What will that allow you to do?
- **THE LEVEL OF PLAY ON COURTS:** If courts are used for sanctioned competitive play, choices may be limited. In some cases, sanctioning organizations may recommend that courts not be marked with lines for any other sport. Check with the United States Tennis Association, or with a local section, or with USA Pickleball (USAP) for definitive guidelines.

Start With The Space Needed

Let's start with the higher-ticket (but probably more desirable) option. For those who have the funding and the space to create new courts for pickleball play, the options are more open. However, building a court means considering not only the playing space but the area outside the lines, as well as a safe overrun area, and any setbacks for fencing and other structures.

According to the publication, *Pickleball Courts: Construction & Maintenance Manual*, published by the American Sports Builders Association (ASBA) and

USAP, the following dimensions are recommended:

- Minimum total playing area for recreational/drop-in play: 30 feet (9.14m) x 60 feet (18.28 m).
- Recommended total playing area for competitive/tournament play and new construction: 34 feet (10.36 m) x 64 feet (19.51 m).
- Recommended total playing area for wheelchair play: 44 feet (13.41 m) x 74 feet (22.55 m).
- Recommended total playing area for a stadium court: 50 feet (15.24 m) x 80 feet (24.384 m).

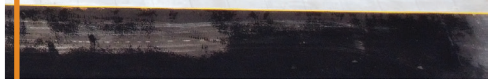
Work with a design professional and/or a contractor with court-specific experience for the best guidance. (ASBA has an online directory of members, available at www.sportsbuilders.org, and those interested can use it free of charge). A skilled professional will be able to evaluate the site and discuss the best options.

Resurfacing And Relining

If space is limited, and new construction is not possible, there are two options. The first is to designate some of the existing tennis courts to host pickleball play only. This is done by resurfacing and



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PHOTO COURTESY OF ZAINO TENNIS COURTS, INC.(INSET)
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SEPARATING PICKLEBALL COURTS FROM TENNIS COURTS IS RECOMMENDED TO PREVENT PLAYERS FROM CLASHING OVER THEIR PREFERRED SPORTS.

The lowest-cost option is to line courts for both tennis and pickleball play. If this is your choice, remember that playing lines should be in different colors so as to avoid confusion (and complaints) among players. For example, if a playing surface is dark-green and tennis court lines are white, consider putting pickleball lines in a different color that will still contrast with the surface, such as red, blue, etc. Avoid using playing lines that are too close to the same color.

relining the affected courts. Remember that pickleball courts are smaller than tennis courts, and the nets are lower, so, depending on the configuration of courts (we'll get to that in a minute), you may want to lower the existing net or purchase new nets.

When choosing to resurface and reline courts for pickleball, consider adding fencing or moveable netting between the tennis courts and the newly designated pickleball courts. In pickleball, balls are lightweight, and gusts of wind can send them onto adjacent courts. Pickleball players, when using outdoor recreational facilities, generally accept this as one of the hazards of play, but tennis players may not be as understanding if their game is interrupted on a continuing basis.

The advantage of lining courts for both sports is that it's the cheapest option. The disadvantage is it can bring pickleball players and tennis players into conflict over who has the rights to use the courts, and when.

Note: Lines always should be professionally painted. Using chalk lines will look messy, and lines will need to be reapplied. Using tape is not recommended since, in addition to creating a hazard to players if it comes loose, it can stick to the surface and destroy the coating when pulled up.

Converting Courts

When converting existing tennis courts to pickleball, the following layouts may be considered. (Some may also apply to simply lining the courts for both pickleball and tennis play.)

1 ONE PICKLEBALL COURT PER TENNIS COURT. The simplest way to create this layout is to lower the tennis net to 34 inches in the center, using the center strap (this may require loosening net-tension slightly). Because of the size of the court surface, consider a temporary barrier so balls won't stray the full length of the court.

2 TWO PICKLEBALL COURTS PER TENNIS COURT. A standard tennis court pad is 60 feet by 120 feet. The minimum recommended size for a pickleball court is 30 feet by 60 feet, so it is theoretically possible to put four pickleball courts in the space of a tennis court.

However, if the tennis court has diagonal corners, four pickleball courts might be tight; two pickleball courts are the best fit. If the conversion is temporary, portable net stands (such as USA Pickleball Portable Net Stands) can be used for the pickleball courts. The tennis net can be left in place as a backstop for the two pickleball courts.

3 FOUR PICKLEBALL COURTS PER TENNIS COURT. Typical conversion projects often involve creating four pickleball courts from one full-size tennis court. Diagonal corners on the original tennis court should be squared off. If the court is a standard 60 feet by 120 feet, there will be only 5 feet between the pickleball sidelines and 8 feet between the pickleball baselines and the surrounding fences. If space and budget allow, add additional overall width, which will give players more room and also allow room for seating on the courts.

Full information on pickleball court design and construction, as well as other resources, can be found in the publication, *Pickleball Courts: Construction & Maintenance Manual*, available from ASBA at its website, www.sportsbuilders.org, under the "Resources" tab on the blue toolbar at the top of the page. **PRB**

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