

Grandma's Game

Family tradition has it that this game was invented by an ancestress, hence the name. Actually we have no idea where the game comes from or what its real name, if it has one, might be. We have never seen it described in print or met anyone outside the family who knows it. But it's an excellent game, and has the two qualities we find most important in solitaire: you can't lose too quickly, and you can win a good percentage of your games if you play with intelligence and care.

Layout Size: Can be played on a small screen with little or no scrolling, if you use small cards. Fits nicely on medium screens.

Difficulty: This game requires thought and planning. Careful play will be rewarded with frequent wins; we are currently winning about 4 games in 10, and better players might hope to win as many as 50% of their games.

Rules: Shuffle two decks together. When playing with real cards, creating the layout is an integral part of the game, so you begin with the shuffled double deck in your hand and a blank table.

Creating the Layout: When you are using Solitaire Till Dawn, the layout is created automatically. The following rules explain how to do the layout yourself when you're playing with real cards. You should read this section even if you always play on the computer, because there are parts of the game that you won't understand unless you know how to lay out the cards.

There are 13 tableaus in three rows of 5, 5, and 3. The tableaus are referred to by the ranks of cards: the first tableau is the "Ace" pile, the second is the "2" pile, and so on up to the 13th which is the "King" pile. There are also eight foundation piles.

To create the layout, start dealing cards from the hand, face up and one at a time, onto the tableau piles. Deal one card onto the Ace pile, then one onto the 2 pile, and so on in order to the King pile. Then start over on the Ace pile again and continue until all cards have been dealt. The tableaus are kept squared so that you can see only the topmost card of each pile; however, if you have a good memory, you can watch the cards as they are laid out and remember where some of them are hidden.

As you deal onto the tableaus, you will occasionally also deal a card face-down

onto a separate pile called the stock. Do this whenever a card dealt to a tableau meets one of these three conditions: (1) the card is a King; (2) the card is dealt onto a pile at the end of a row (that is, is dealt onto the 5 pile, the 10 pile, or the King pile); (3) the card's rank matches that of the pile it is dealt to, as when you deal a 4 of Spades onto the 4 pile.

Here's an example. Suppose you start with all 104 cards in your hand, and all piles empty. Turn up the first card; it is a 3. You place it face up on the Ace pile. Turn up the second card; it is a Jack. You place it face up on the 2 pile. The next card is another 3; you place it face up on the 3 pile. Its rank matches its pile's rank, so you deal the next card face down onto the stock. Turn up the next card (the fifth you have dealt); it is a 9 and you place it face up on the 4 pile. Turn up the next card; it is a 5. Place it face up on the 5 pile. Because it was placed on a pile at the end of a row, you deal the next card face down onto the stock. And because the 5's rank matches its pile's rank, you deal another card face down onto the stock. After dealing those two cards onto the stock, you turn the next card face up and place it on the 6 pile. The card is a King, so again you deal a card face down onto the stock, and so on. If you ever happen to deal a King onto the King pile, you would deal three cards face down onto the stock: one for the King, one for the end of the row, and one for the match of ranks.

When the dealing is done, the stock will have some number of cards in it that is usually between the low twenties and the low thirties. The rest of the cards will be in the tableau piles, each of which will usually contain five or six cards. Now you can begin to actually play the game.

Playing the Game: Top cards of tableaus and foundations are available for building onto the foundations. Of the eight foundations, four (one for each suit) should start with an Ace and build up in suit to the King; the other four should start with a King and build down in suit to the Ace.

When you are out of moves, deal one card from the stock face-up onto the tableau pile that matches its rank: for example, if you deal a 3 you would place it on top of the 3 pile. Immediately pick up the entire pile you dealt to, and move it to a special place called the workspace. Fan the workspace cards so that you can see them all. (Only one tableau's cards can be in the workspace at a time. Before each deal, if there are any cards already in the workspace, you should first square them up and return them to the tableau pile that they came from.)

All of the cards in the workspace are available for moving onto foundations, along

with (as usual) the top cards of tableaux. You are also allowed to change the order of the cards in the workspace. This is the critical part of the game: you must try to predict which cards you will need soon and which you won't, and move them to the top or bottom of the fan so that afterward, when they're back in their tableau pile, you can pick them off in the best order. (A variant of the game does not allow the workspace cards to be reordered. This allows less scope for thought and makes the game much harder to win, but you may wish to play this way when you don't feel like working so hard. Solitaire Till Dawn always allows you to reorder the cards in the workspace; to play the variant, just refrain from doing any reordering.)

(See picture: Grandma's Game. The King of Spades on the 3 pile, and the Ace of Clubs in the middle of the workspace, can be moved to the foundations. The workspace cards came from the Jack pile, because the Jack of Spades was dealt.)

Since there are two foundation piles for each suit, one building up and one down, there comes a time when they "meet in the middle." For example, the Hearts tableau that builds up may be showing the 7, while the one that builds down is showing the 8. When this happens, you may transfer cards back and forth between the two foundations. By moving the 8, 9, 10 from the building-down pile onto the building-up pile, you would then be able to move the Jack of Hearts from a tableau onto the building-up foundation. It's a useful technique, and you should watch for opportunities to use it.

Because the game uses two decks, sometimes you will have a choice of cards to move to a particular foundation — or example, you may have two tableaux each showing a 10 of Diamonds that could be played onto the 9 of Diamonds on the foundation. Our family rules allow you to peek under each of the 10's to see the card beneath, in case that will help you decide which to move.

The goal is to move all cards to the foundations.

On the Screen: Solitaire Till Dawn will do a lot of work for you. The entire layout is done automatically; when you start a game you will immediately see the completed layout. (This robs you of the chance to see the cards as they are dealt, but we felt that that would be too time-consuming and boring in a computer version. When playing with real cards, seeing them as they're dealt is proper compensation for the tedium of having to lay them all out, one at a time!)

Deal by clicking on the hand. The program will automatically move the current workspace contents back to the correct tableau pile, select the next tableau on the

basis of the dealt card, move its cards to the workspace, fan them, and place the dealt card on top of them.

To reorder the cards in the workspace, just click and drag a card that you want to move. It will “pop out” of the fan, leaving all the rest of the cards behind, and showing a gap in the fan where the card used to be. Drag the card along the fan; cards in the fan will highlight as you drag over them. Drop the card to have it insert in the fan on top of the currently highlighted card. To move it to the very bottom of the fan, drag it all the way to the left of the fan until no card is highlighted, and drop it there. It’s easier than it may sound; try it once or twice and you’ll soon see how it works.

In the foundations, the suits must be placed in matching pairs: Hearts beside Hearts, Spades beside Spades, and so on. That’s why the program won’t always let you put an Ace or King in just any empty foundation. Having the suits matched like that makes it easy to see when you can move cards from one foundation to another.