

# Have you Lost your Marbles?!

Some of the world records achieved by using marbles - including the dangerous, the mundane and the downright bizarre - will really make you ask, "Have you lost your marbles?"

Those small, colourful, spherical-shaped glass balls have been used for entertainment for at least 5,000 years, and possibly longer. No-one actually knows who invented marbles or when they were first used.

They've been found in the tombs of Ancient Egyptians dating from around 3000BC and in the ashes of Pompeii - the Roman city that burned to the ground in 79AD, after the eruption of Mount Vesuvius.

There's evidence that Native American tribes played marbles centuries ago, so they have been used by people from many different cultures, and that's partly what makes it impossible to pinpoint their origins.



## How are marbles made?

The earliest examples of marbles weren't made of glass. Many were natural stones, polished smooth in a river, while others were hand-made by artisans from clay, stone, marble and later glass.

Launched in 1884 by Sam Dyke of Ohio, USA, the first mass production utilised a wooden block with six channels cut out. A piece of clay was placed in each groove and an operative rolled a wooden paddle back and forth over all of the clay balls simultaneously, to create six spherical marbles.

The 350 staff at Dyke's Akron-based factory were able to work at great speed, producing an amazing one million marbles per day. Thanks to mass production, they were cheaper. Prior to 1884, one marble had cost one penny, but as a result of factory production, the price fell to one penny for a bag of 30 marbles.

Mass production of glass marbles began in 1915 by Martin Christensen's Akron-based business, MF Christensen and Son Co. Early marbles were manufactured by hand-feeding molten glass into the machinery. The resulting marbles were either single-colour opaque, or two-coloured swirls.

The early production process was fairly basic and the glass for a batch would be mixed in one furnace pot, rather than in the separate streams used later - hence the colour limitations. Over the years, marbles have become increasingly colourful, thanks to improved manufacturing processes.

Today's fancy marbles are made using the same technique - melting glass, cutting it into pieces and running it through automated rollers to create spherical shapes - but with the addition of diligent crafting, plenty of different-coloured glass strips and a lot of heat.

### **Which are the most valuable marbles?**

There are thousands of marble collectors across the world and some individual examples are valued very highly in the right circles. In the United States, there's even a National Marble Day, when collectors take part in various fun activities to celebrate their hobby.

St Louis man Benjamin Cornwell supported the day by organising a scavenger hunt for other enthusiasts, hiding some of his most valuable marbles across town, including one said to be worth \$1,000. Others were valued at several hundred dollars each. Marble hunts were held across America and around 10,000 marbles were hidden in total. In Marlborough, Massachusetts, enthusiast Bert Cohen, 83, joked, "I lose my marbles every day!" as he chatted about his lifelong passion, admitting he wasn't surprised that some of the rarest marbles in the world were selling for as much as \$40,000 each at trade shows.

### **Marble slang**

To the average person, a marble is simply a marble, but to enthusiasts (who are known as mibsters) there is a special terminology for the various types of marble, based on their appearance, how they're used, or the material from which they are made.

Marbles made from agate are known as "aggies" and those made from alabaster are called "alleys." The large marble used to knock the smaller ones is called the "taw" or "shooter", while the small marbles are "ducks" or "mibs." Yellow and black striped marbles are "bumblebees", blue china marbles are "Jaspers" and glass marbles containing swirls of different colours are "onionskins." There are also some very unusual, intricate marbles known as "sulphides", which are made from semi-opaque glass and contain a small figurine in the centre. The figures can represent animals, fictional characters or real people.



### **Marble world records**

The rather odd world records relating to marbles include one that's extremely dangerous - Dinesh Shivnath Upadhyaya holds the world record for putting 100 glass marbles in his mouth at once. Reports of the record even carry a health warning not to try this at home.

The world record for the most consecutive bounces of a half-inch marble on a tennis racquet goes to Mark Evans, who managed 51 times, while Brian Pankey holds the record for most consecutive bounces of a marble (67) between two rubber mallets - begging the question, just why would anyone think of doing this?

If you're a collector of marbles, or any other items, it's important to have somewhere suitable to store your collections. Solent Plastics has a large variety of [clear plastic boxes](#) that enable you to quickly and easily identify their contents. The range includes our [Really Useful boxes](#) that are available in a huge selection of shapes and sizes, going up to 145 litres. Please [contact us](#) for further information.