

Ultimate Guide to La Belle Lucie

La Belle Lucie is a game of planning and strategy. It's been played for many centuries and bears similarities to in-depth games such as Chess or Checkers. Since its creation, it has been known as other names, too: Alexander the Great, Clover Leaf, Midnight Oil, The Fan, and Three Shuffles and a Draw are all alternative titles for this complex, engaging card game. Players have been known to stare at the cards for minutes on end as they plan their moves and ensure that they don't ruin their chances of victory.

La Belle Lucie differs from [classic solitaire](#) in that it punishes foolish or hasty moves by preventing the player from using cards that have already been moved once. This limitation, along with a three-round style that keeps games tight and exciting, means that every move must be considered carefully and thought-out in relation to the rest of the game.

Don't be intimidated, however. La Belle Lucie is a great game that's learnable by anyone, and once you've got the hang of it you can play it anywhere that has a deck of cards or a computer.

Rules/How to Play

[La Belle Lucie](#) is one of the solitaire variations which appears to be simple but is actually quite complex. Let's dig into the [rules](#).

To win, you're going to need some great forethought and lucky shuffling. Like with regular Solitaire, the objective of La Belle Lucie is to build up four complete stacks of cards from Ace through King. Each stack must, of course, be its own suite. These are called "foundations".

To start, deal out your cards in a face-up orientation into piles of threes. You'll need to be careful that each card in each trio is visible by you, the player. There should be seventeen total piles of cards once you're done and one card leftover for its own pile; the spread or fan-like orientation of each pile is what gives La Belle Lucie piles the "fan" nickname. It's not related to the similarly-named [game](#). The goal is to shift the position of cards to free up ones beneath which can go to the four suit stacks. You don't start with any stacks until you find aces.

All of the stacks of fanned cards are spread out on the gaming surface, called the "tableau". You're going to attempt to move cards around the tableau until you can expose the right sequence of numbers to shift them up to the foundations at the top of the game space. The only cards which may be moved at any one time are those at the top of a fan of three cards. For instance, imagine a fan with a 5, 6, and 7 of hearts. Only the 5 of hearts may be moved since it is at the "top" of the pile, but once it has been moved the 6 of hearts may then be moved, and so on and so forth. You are not permitted to move cards beneath the top of a tableau fan.

Still following? Whenever you get lucky and find an ace, you move it to the top of the pile and start the foundation for that suite. Next is any number 2 card that fits with that suite, and so on and so forth, just like with regular, classic Solitaire.

When it comes to the tableaus, the stacks build "downwards", so you can only put cards of a lower number atop cards with a higher value. 2s can go atop 3s, which can go atop 4s, and so on. 5s cannot go atop 4s, as this is an ascending order and is how the four foundations at the top are supposed to be oriented.

Here's where it gets a bit tricky. You may only attempt to move each card on the tableau once, and only one card at a time. Because of this, it's possible to "trap" certain cards or "bury" them. For instance, let's say that you place a 6 of hearts on a 7 of hearts. Because you can't move the 6 of hearts again (since you already moved it!), the 7 of hearts cannot be moved at all unless the stack of hearts goes into the heart foundation at the top of the playing space.

As previously stated, you can move each card once in total following the rules above. Once every card in the tableau has been moved as you like, you have completed one "cycle" of La Belle Lucie and must then reshuffle all the cards in the tableau – that is, all the cards that are not currently in a foundation at the top of the playing space. In a standard game of Le Belle Lucie, you only get three whole cycles to complete the game. Thus, the challenge becomes finding the most efficient orientation to shift the cards in their fans to form all four foundations before you run out of cycles!

At the end of each cycle, the shuffling should be done very well, and all cards should be reorganized into three-card fans, with their faces turned upward, just as they were at the start of the game. Empty spots where fans previously existed may not be filled with kings, as in regular solitaire.

Finally, after the second reshuffle, at which point you will be on the last "cycle" of the game, you are permitted a "Draw" right after shuffling. The Draw allows you to pick any card below the top of any fan and used either in a foundation or elsewhere in the tableau. It's essentially a free card to be played as you please, although the ascending or descending orders obeyed by the foundations and fans, respectively, must still be acknowledged.

Strategies and Tips/Tricks

The biggest key to success when it comes to La Belle Lucie is targeting the right cards for eventual movement to a foundation. You see, because of the one-move limit for all the cards in the fans, digging through fans for low-value cards, such as 2s or 3s, is foolish and will waste moves that could be better-spent targeting higher cards.

You see, whenever you move a 2 or 3 onto a pile, you bury everything in that pile unless you can move everything into the foundation at the top; this is because any other card above the 2 or 3 will necessarily also *move* that 2 or 3, which is illegal once the low-value card has been shifted.

Thus, it is imperative that you plan your card movements and strategize your card-targeting to prioritize shifting high-value cards into their own suites to prepare them for large-scale movement to their foundations.

Aces should be targeted as early as possible, of course, as these begin the foundations at the top of the playing space. However, it is not wise to spend a multitude of moves just to free once ace from the bottom of a fan. This could cause you more problems in the long run than you can recover from in one cycle.

Kings should be ignored, and any cards beneath them equally-so. After all, any card beneath a king can't be moved until the king eventually shifts to a foundation, since there's nothing higher than a king and you can't move a king onto a blank slot like with classic Solitaire.

If possible, leave kings at the bottoms of piles; after all, you can always use these kings as "anchors" and drag larger piles of cards over to them, although be wary of large-card movements in general. For

instance, moving a stack consisting of the 9-of-spades down to the 2-of-spades has just moved all those cards for the duration of the cycle. If the 9-of-spades goes atop the 10-of-spades, all 9 of those cards are now done moving until the next shuffling, when the stack will be lost again anyway.

When you're shuffling the cards, there will sometimes be one card left over. In this case, split one of the three-card fans and make two two-card fans instead.

One common advantage that is sometimes forgotten or ignored is the *merci* rule; this allows you to have one "cheat" per game at the very end if you've exhausted all other opportunities at the end of the third cycle. This *merci* allows you to move one card to try to get yourself out of gridlock. If you fail this, too, the game is lost, and you must begin again.

Glossary of Terms

There are a number of key terms you should be familiar with as you study winning strategies for La Belle Lucie.

Fan: This is a description of the three-card stacks which are spread across the "tableau". Each fan's cards need to be face-up so you can see what each represents in terms of number value and suite. The term comes from the cards' spread, fan-like shape. Fans are organized in descending order, i.e. 5, 4, 3, etc.

Tableau: This term describes the playing space in which the fans are organized. The entire collection of fans is also called the tableau.

Foundations: These are the ultimate stacks of the cards in suites which are arranged above the tableau. The object of the game is to reorganize all the cards into four foundations, one for each suite. Foundations are organized in ascending order i.e. 2, 3, 4, etc.

Suite: One of the four grouping variations in a standard deck of cards. Consists of Hearts, Spades, Clubs, and Diamonds.

Cycle: The period in a game of La Belle Lucie in which cards in the tableau may be moved once each. In a standard game of La Belle Lucie, the player is allowed three cycles to try to win the game. After each cycle is complete, any cards remaining in the tableau must be reshuffled well, then reorganized into new fans.

Merci: The term for the last-minute free move of one card that a player is granted should they be at an impasse after all three cycles have been completed. This moment is the only time the *merci* move is allowed.

Other Variations of This Game

La Belle Lucie has a few different variations that offer unique twists on the standard ruleset. They are as follows:

Trefoil – In a game of Trefoil, aces in the deck are moved to the foundations right at the beginning of the game and the other cards are shuffled and organized into fans of 3-cards. There should be sixteen fans in total. This allows for an easier start that leaps right into the action of building up foundations.

The Fan – This variant of La Belle Lucie allows for any fan slot to be replaced by a king if it's emptied, similar to the rule in standard solitaire. In addition, cards are not redealt with this ruleset. It's both

easier and quite different from the standard game. One can play with either the “king” rule or the “redeal” rule or both.

Three Shuffles and a Draw – This is the variant of the game commonly played which allows the *merci* move at the very end. This variant is recommended for beginners or those who find themselves stuck at the cusp of victory more often than not.

FAQ

Can I move cards between suites in the tableau? No, each card must belong to the suite on which you are attempting to move it.

Can I move cards from the foundations back to the tableau? No, once cards are in a foundation they must remain there.

Is the *merci* move allowed before the end of the game? No, not in the accepted ruleset.

Are Aces considered above or below Kings in this game? They are considered below Kings, the equivalent of a 1.

Final Thoughts on La Belle Lucie

If you're a fan of great card [games](#), Le Belle Lucie is a great game that has surprising depth. It's both easier and harder than standard Solitaire purely because of its harsh one-card-move rule, which forces the player to adapt and predict. The depth of planning and forethought which is required for victory set this card game above many others. Try it out for yourself! It's great fun.