



Juggle me this!

Image credit: [Peggy Anke](#)

Welcome to the wonderful world of juggling!

Whether you're a juggling pro, have just started on your juggling journey, or are an enthusiastic spectator of this sometimes mind-boggling art form, we've put together this little ditty all about juggling, just for you - from the history and origins through to some incredibly impressive juggling records and feats. So without further ado...Juggle Me This!

Juggling Basics

The words 'juggling' and 'juggler' are derived from the Middle English word 'jogelen' which means to entertain by performing tricks. From the 12th to 17th century, the term 'juggling' was used to describe acts of magic. Nowadays, juggling commonly refers to toss juggling - repeatedly throwing and catching multiple objects in a rhythmic pattern.

Author James Ernest wrote a book called [Contact Juggling](#), in which he says that most people will tell you that juggling is "throwing and catching things". However, most jugglers do more than just this, and their definition may look a little like the following:

"Juggle: To perform a visually complex or physically challenging feat using one or more objects, which most people do not know how to do, and which has no apparent purpose other than entertainment, where the methods are not mysterious" (i.e. magic).

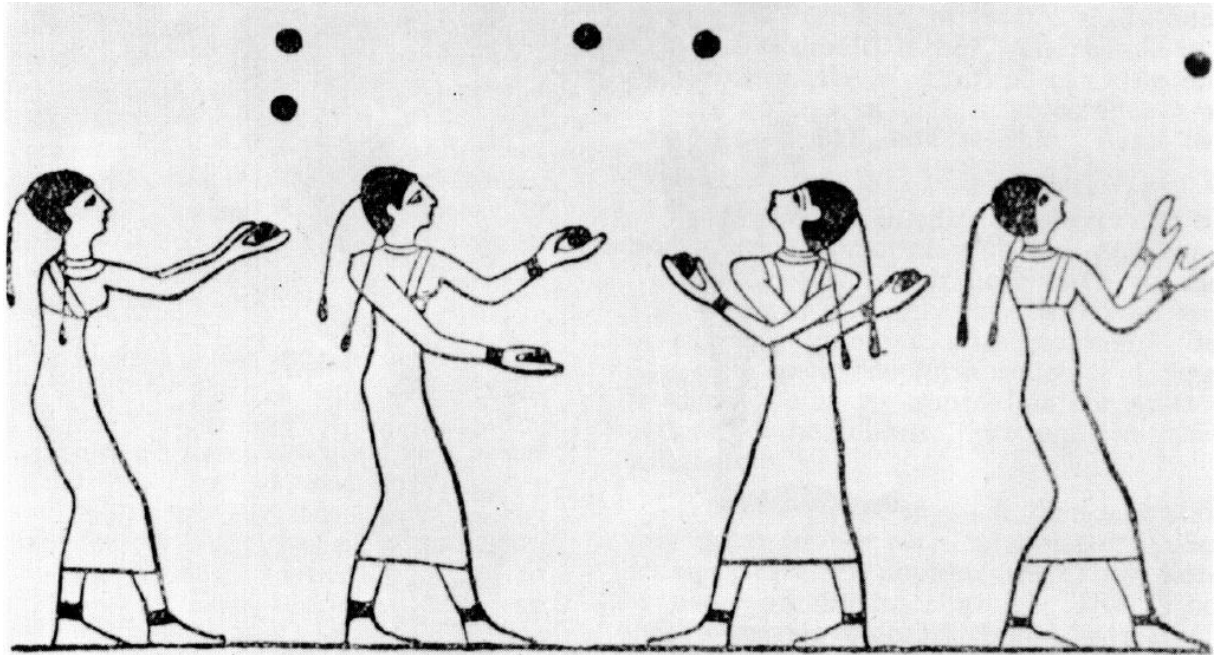


Image credit: [Oxymoron](#)

While toss juggling may be the most common form of this wondrous art, juggling is so much more than that! Juggling is the manipulation of one or many objects at the same time - a physical skill which takes patience and practice. Jugglers can use their hands, feet (think hacky sack or soccer ball), arms, legs, heads, and just about any other body part to showcase their skills.

While balls, rings, and clubs tend to be the most common objects used in juggling, you can also find jugglers using things like knives, chainsaws, fire torches, staffs, plates, cigar boxes, poi, beanbags, hoops, hats, devil sticks, chairs, tables, and even pianos. The list of potential objects that could be used for juggling is endless!

Juggling can be broken down into multiple categories (which are ever growing and changing), based either on the type of object being juggled, or by the style of manipulation being performed. Below are just a few of the many various juggling categories.

- **Toss:** throwing and catching any number of objects (generally balls, rings, or clubs).
- **Bounce:** bouncing objects, usually balls, off a hard surface.
- **Balancing:** keeping an object balanced. For example, a pool cue on the tips of your fingers.
- **Gyroscopic:** spinning objects, such as plates, basketballs, diabolo, devil sticks.
- **Contact:** manipulations of an object that stays in contact with the body, often with little gripping, spinning, or tossing (commonly seen with a 'crystal' ball - see David Bowie in the popular 1986 film 'Labyrinth').

- **Numbers:** the focus is on keeping as many objects in the air as possible.
- **Acro:** the combination of acrobatic moves with the art of juggling.
- **Pattern:** the focus is on juggling with aesthetically pleasing patterns.
- **Trick:** linking as many tricks as possible in unique sequences.
- **Technical:** the skills are very difficult, with a focus on more complex moves rather than 'artistic performance'.
- **Partner:** two or more jugglers passing objects between each other.
- **Sport:** competitive juggling with a strong focus on technical skills.



Image credit: [Desiray Green](#)

History of Juggling

2030 B.C. - 300 B.C.

The oldest known depiction of juggling was found in [Beni-Hassan tombs](#) during the [Middle Kingdom](#) era. The Middle Kingdom is the period from approx 2030-1650 B.C. in ancient

Egypt, during which time the organisation of society and religious beliefs of the Old Kingdom were reimagined. The depictions were of women jugglers found amongst acrobats and dancers in a painting on one of the 4000 year old tombs walls.

After this, there's about a 1500 year interval before more evidence appears. It's likely that although there is no evidence of juggling during this time, people were still juggling.



Image credit: [Unknown](#)

During the rule of King Zhuang of Chu (613-591 B.C.) a warrior named Xiong Yiliao was known to practise 'nongwan' - throwing multiple objects up and down without dropping them - and is frequently dubbed one of the worlds earliest known jugglers. A [tale](#) goes that during a battle between the Chu and Song armies (sometime around 603 B.C.) Xiong Yiliao stepped out between both armies and began to juggle nine balls. This act hypnotised the Song army and the Chu army launched their attack.

Depictions of juggling have also been found in Greek art (from between about 500-300 B.C.) when juggling was considered as a form of recreation by the Greeks, and many practitioners were women.

500 A.D. - 1500

The [Ancient Romans](#) (753 B.C. - 500 A.D.) were no strangers to juggling with evidence such as monuments depicting people juggling, and the mention of jugglers in several Roman writers' works.



Image credit: [Internet Archive](#)

There is a glass ball on display at the [Penn Museum](#) in Philadelphia which is thought to have been used in a juggling game, perhaps the same activity described on a Roman's grave. An inscription on the grave of Roman Togatus Ursus ('togatus' indicates that Ursus was a Roman citizen who wore a toga) reads:

"Ursus, the first Roman citizen to play properly with a glass ball with my players, to the great clamouring of the approving crowd in the baths of Trojan, Agrippa and Titus and especially in the baths of Nero; if you still believe me - that's me!"

A Roman poet from Hispania (modern Spain), Marcus Valerius Martialis (born sometime between 38 and 41 A.D. – died sometime between 102 and 104 A.D.), described a shield juggler in one of his [poems](#) saying:

"The skill of Agathinus, the master juggler, is overwhelming. With swift limbs he hurls the shield up in the air and catches it on his foot, on his back, on his head and on his fingertips, although the stage is slippery from sprinkles of perfume and the wind blows hard; it seems as though he is trying to avoid the shield, which is seeking his body of its own accord. To keep the shield in constant motion is child's play for Agathinus; to drop it would take practice."

After the fall of the Roman Empire, during the [Middle Ages](#) (400-1500 A.D.), juggling became seen as immoral and evil, with jugglers thought to be con artists and witches, blatantly trying to manipulate people. They were condemned to perform in the streets, in taverns, and at fairs, living like beggars waiting for a coin to be dropped in their hats.

As the Middle Ages came to a close (around 1520), royals began using jesters for their entertainment. These jesters routinely used juggling in their performances and consequently, juggling began to rebuild its reputation.

[Pierre Gringoire](#), born in France in 1475, was an acrobat, artist, musician, poet, and playwright, best known for his satirical plays written during 1506-1512. Gringoire was dubbed '[Roi des Jongleurs](#)' - the 'King of Jugglers' and he is considered by many to be responsible for bringing juggling back to the limelight.



Image credit: [Gustave Brion](#) (illustration of Pierre Gringoire)

1500 - 1800

In 1528, artist [Christoph Weiditz](#) travelled around Mexico and made paintings of Aztec jugglers, while [Emperor Babur](#) of Hindustan [describes](#) a group of jugglers spinning seven rings on their forehead, thighs, fingers, and toes, whirling them round “with a quick uninterrupted motion”, along with various other juggling tricks.

The town council of Nuremberg, Germany, hired a ‘[ball master](#)’ in 1680, who not only performed his juggling tricks, but also taught young people in the town how to juggle, along with other circus skills.

During the 18th century, walking a [tightrope while juggling](#) or balancing various objects was a popular act around the globe, and in 1768, equestrian [Philip Astley](#), known as ‘the father

of the modern circus' opened the first modern [circus](#) performing trick horse riding, with hired acrobats, jugglers, tightrope walkers, and a clown to fill the lulls between the equestrian demonstrations.

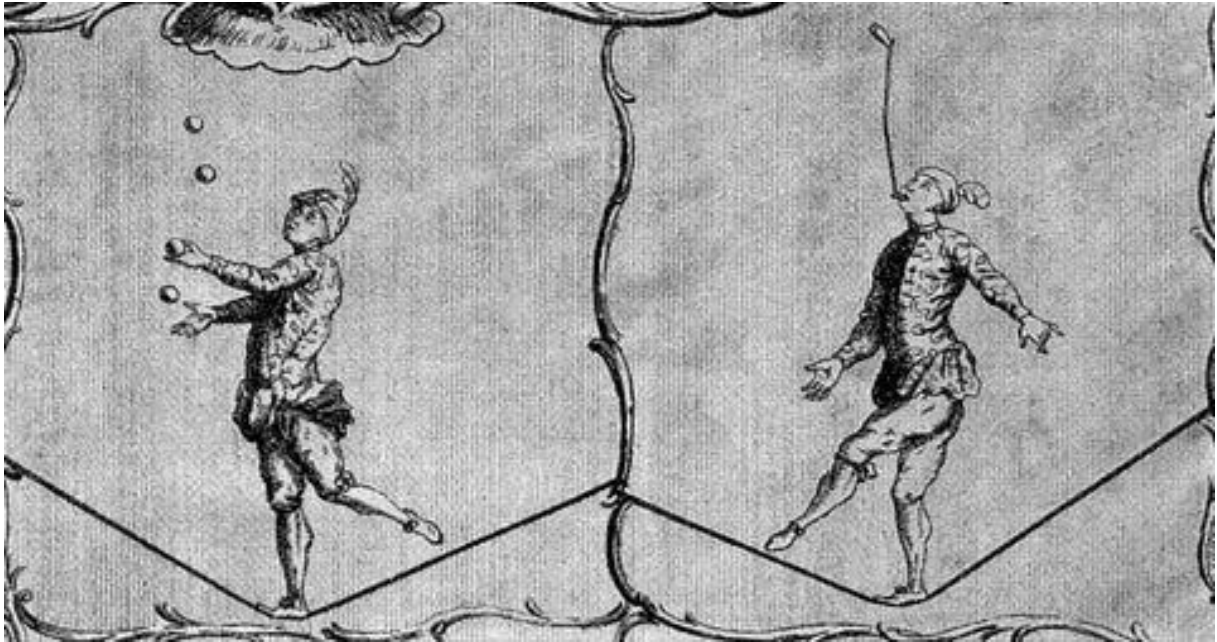


Image credit: Juggle.org

1800 - 1900

In the early 1800's, we see the appearance of brothers Mooty and Medua Samme, as mentioned in our [devil sticks article](#). The brothers were touring Europe from 1813 to 1827, performing what they called 'Chinese Stick Play' - what we know today as devil sticks.

The first duo juggling performance was recorded in 1885 when the Murdock Brothers spun and tossed four clubs between them while standing on a pedestal.

By the late 19th century, [variety](#) shows were becoming increasingly popular, and jugglers were a common part of these shows. During the same time, Charles Goodyear had developed a process that allows rubber to withstand heat and cold, known as '[vulcanisation](#)' which meant jugglers were now able to use rubber balls (which bounced, adding a whole new element to juggling) instead of balls made of twine, stuffed materials, or wooden or metal balls.

During the late 1800's [Vaudeville](#) was a popular form of entertainment. Vaudeville is essentially a theatrical and comedic version of variety entertainment, born in France and spreading to the rest of the world in the early 1900's. Many Vaudeville entertainers included juggling in their acts and it became very popular across the globe.



Image credit: [Strobridge Lithographing Co.](#)

1900 - 2000

At the beginning of the 20th century, with the invention and popularity of television, Vaudeville entertainment (along with many other forms of stage entertainment) faced a reduction in popularity. Plays and musicals that were once performed on stage shifted to television, but juggling did not benefit from the same fate, and juggling as a whole appeared to be cut off from mainstream entertainment. A few street corners and events still showcased jugglers but it had become more a hobby than a profession.

American ethnographer [Stewart Culin](#) describes ball juggling in [Games of the North American Indians](#) (originally published in 1907) as a “sport or game of throwing two or more balls into the air at the same time” as observed among various tribes of North America.

In 1912, the first light-up juggling clubs were invented by German juggler Salerno. Electric lights that changed colours while the clubs were thrown were inserted into the clubs bringing an exciting new element into the juggling world.

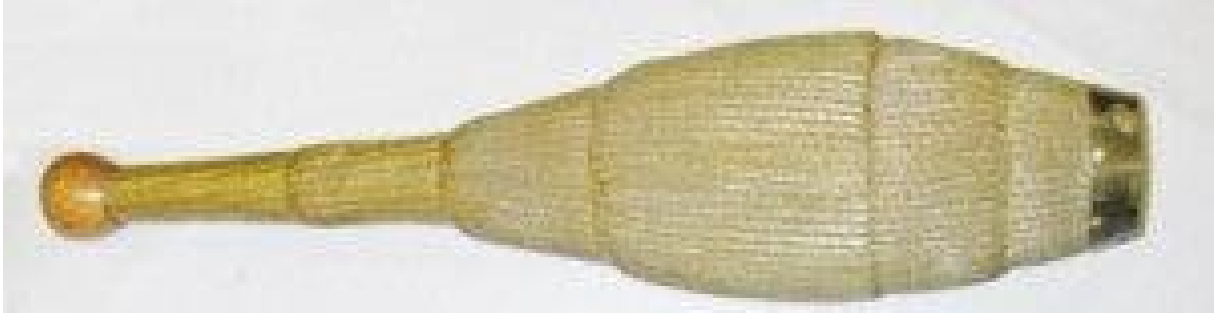


Image credit: Juggle.org (one of Salerno's light up clubs)

Around the end of WWII (1939-1945) the Japanese game known as '[otedama](#)' was incredibly popular among girls and women, although no one seems to know when this game originally developed. This was a time when toys were hard to come by, so beanbags called 'ojami' were crafted from adzuki beans and scraps of cloth. At its most basic, otedama is more similar to the game '[knucklebones](#)' than to juggling, although as the game progresses through its stages, it becomes more similar to juggling with more beanbags being thrown and caught in more complex ways.

In June, 1947, the [International Jugglers' Association](#) (IJA) was formed after a group of about 20 jugglers attended a convention of the [International Brotherhood of Magicians](#) (founded in 1922 and is the world's largest organisation of magicians with members in 88 countries around the world) and eight of these jugglers had the idea to form an organisation dedicated solely to juggling. These eight saw the need for an "organisation for jugglers that would provide meetings at regular intervals in an atmosphere of mutual friendship".

The first IJA convention was held in 1948, with gatherings from then until the early 70's remaining small and intimate, with around only 40 people. In 1975, the IJA hosted 175 attendees and was marked the first 'modern' convention. By 1982, more than 600 jugglers were attending the IJA convention.

In 1978, the IJA held a mini-convention in the UK, which became the start of the European Juggling Convention - now the world's largest gathering of jugglers.

2000 - Today

In 2000, the [World Juggling Federation](#) (WJF) was founded by Jason Garfield out of a desire to expand public awareness of juggling as a sport, and with a goal to produce juggling competition programs suitable for airing on sports TV.

In 2004, the WJF secured deals with ESPN, and in January, 2005, the world's best jugglers gathered to compete, and this competition was aired on TV.

In 2011, the world's first live juggling competition was produced by the WJF, and again in 2012.

Now, the WJF has a dedicated team with the mission of taking the sport (and art) of juggling to the Olympics!



Image credit: [Andrés Gómez](#)

Juggling Tid Bits

- On 16 December 2018, Taylor Glenn achieved the [Guinness World Record](#) of performing the most juggling tricks in one minute with three balls, with a total of 39 tricks.
- 18 year old Alex Barron broke a 16-year-held [record](#) for the most balls juggled when on 3 April 2012 he juggled 11 balls with 23 consecutive catches - a task he'd been practising for two years!
- At the Prague Juggling Marathon, Milan Roskopf juggled three bowling balls on 19 November 2011. This [record](#) was equalled by David Rush (USA) on 17 August 2018. This was then equalled again by Mike Johns (Canada) on 15 October 2022.
- David Slick juggled three balls for an insane 12hr 5min on 22 July 2009 in Texas. David Rush beat this [record](#) on 16 May 2023 with an insane 13hr 10min 5sec.
- Zane Jarvie - a Kiwi - [juggled](#) a total of five balls while suspended upside down, defying gravity with this record in Perth on 3 February 2018. This was equalled by David Rush (USA) on 1 December 2021.
- Markus Just [juggled](#) three balls underwater for 1hr 40min (using SCUBA gear) at the Freizeit Messe Nuremberg in Germany, on 03 March 2013.
- The most juggling catches while on a balance board AND blindfolded is 2,346 and was achieved by David Rush on 10 December 2023.
- David Rush also pulled off an [incredible](#) 586 juggling catches with three balls in one minute on 13 December 2019.
- The most consecutive backcross juggling catches (one of the more difficult tricks to master) with three objects was achieved by Michael Ferreri (Spain) in Balatonlelle, Hungary, on 7 August 2022, with a total of 1,309 catches.
- David Rush was [back again](#) on 17 November 2020, when he caught a juggle toss 463 times while juggling blindfolded on his unicycle in Idaho.
- Having achieved the record of most consecutive juggling catches with a chainsaw ([105 catches](#)) twice before, Ian Stewart decided to best himself on 28 December 2020 in Canada. He [achieved](#) a whopping 1,185 consecutive catches with a chainsaw and two balls.
- Josh Horton [juggled](#) four samurai swords on 3 November 2017 in New Jersey.
- On 12 August 2020 in Utah, Benjamin Snow executed a total of 937 juggling catches with an axe. David Rush came in to [beat that](#) on 30 October 2021 with a crazy 2,919 catches.
- In 1989, Anthony Gatto achieved the [juggling world record](#) of juggling seven flaming torches - no one has broken his record since.

Please note: these records were correct at the time of writing this article and may have changed since then.