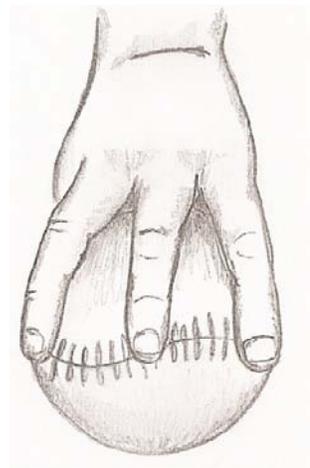


Pitching Basics:

It is very important to stretch and warm-up before pitching especially on cool days. Stretch arms, legs, neck, shoulders and back and then go for a jog. When you begin to throw, start with a few overhand tosses. Pitch underhand slowly at first from the regular pitching distance working on pitch location and spin of the ball. Step back a few feet and use your legs to get the ball to the catcher concentrating on hitting your targets. Toward the end of the warm-up move back to regular pitching distance. It will seem like the catcher is really close and boost your confidence.

Remember its only warm-up, don't waste too much energy.



Most pitchers find control and comfort with a grip that allows the ball to rotate from top to bottom. The best way to get this movement is to turn the softball so that the seam makes a "U" to the side, instead of up and down.

Pitchers should grip the ball so that their fingers rest on the seam when it is on its side. The grip should be tight and steady but not so intense that it causes strain to the forearm or wrist. The wrist should always be kept in line with the arm to avoid any potential injuries, not flexed up or down or twisted to the side.

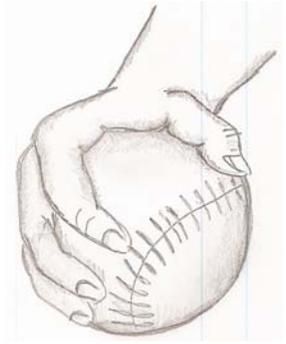
Pitchers should start by placing their hands together while standing with one foot in front of the pitching rubber and one foot behind it. It is very important to begin and end square with the plate as you move forward. This ensures the best accuracy. As you begin to throw keep your eye on the target all the way through the pitching motion. Accuracy and ball movement is more important than speed when it comes to pitching. You can work on speed as you get more comfortable with the pitching motion.

Young pitchers should work on throwing strikes, then pitching down and outside in the strike zone as they get more control. The best pitch to start throwing is the drop ball. Use the above grip if your hand is small but use two fingers when your hand is big enough. Make sure your fingers are not too far apart, about one inch will do. The grip must be comfortable to you. Make sure your thumb is directly behind the index finger on the ball and snap your wrist sufficiently at the point of release so that it gets the proper amount of backspin. The pitcher takes a shorter stride than normal and, upon releasing the ball off their front knee, pulls their fingers back and up so that the ball "peels" off their hand and gets good spin downward. Keep your arm straight through the motion.

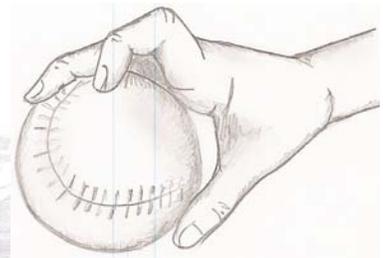
There is an old softball adage that says it takes three base hits to score a run on drop ball pitches but only one on any other pitch. Take this advice, its really true. Pitching is not about striking everyone out with overpowering speed, it's about getting three outs every inning – you have seven other players behind you that can help you out.

When the drop ball is mastered pitchers should develop an off-speed pitch otherwise known as a changeup.

The most common grip for throwing the change-up is the palm grip. Instead of holding the ball in the fingertips, the pitcher should force the ball into their palm and grip it with all four fingers and thumb. Use the regular fastball motion and delivery, eliminating wrist snap on release. Do not slow your arm down as this is easily picked up by the batter.



As pitchers get older and stronger the rise ball should be added to their pitch repertoire. Begin by learning to locate the ball up in zone inside or outside. To throw a rise ball, pitchers should grip the ball with the middle finger along the length of one of the four seams, on the raised part of the seam. Place the index finger next to the middle finger, either flat, or with the tip of the finger on the ball. The thumb rests on a seam opposite the fingers. The pitch should be released off your back foot as you follow through so that your weight is not all out on your front foot as it should be when throwing a drop ball. You should make as long a stride as you can and snap your wrist through as you release. On the final down swing, release the ball with the hand under the ball and away from the body. Rotate the wrist outward so the thumb goes up and to the rear, and the middle finger pulls up against the seam, causing the backward rotation of the ball. The follow through should be high, toward the target and out in front of the body. This should produce a sideways up spin that kind of looks like a curve ball.



How do you get better?

Three words....PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE.