

Softball – fielding and catching a ball

Basic starting infield position (before the ball is hit, as the pitcher is about to pitch):

- Be in an athletic position; feet a bit more than shoulder-width apart, knees bent, weight is mostly on the balls of your feet—you are ready to move in any direction. You are “square” to the batter—your toes are pointing to the batter.
- Hold an imaginary cup of water with your glove, at a height between knees and waist; you are ready for a ground ball, a pop fly or a hard hit in the air anywhere near you.

Fielding a ground ball – the very basics:

- Same athletic stance as the starting position, bent knees, wide feet but not so wide that it is awkward, bend to get the ball, back is flat.
- Glove is now in the dirt, glove very open
- Wrist should be bent, so that the ball is more likely to stick in the glove vs. rolling up out of the glove or having the ball hit the tip of the glove and not roll into the glove at all.
- Your throwing hand is up, a couple of feet above your glove, ready to block the ball if it takes a funny hop and ready to trap the ball, once it hits your glove; think “the hungry alligator gets the ball” – the glove and your throwing hand are the alligator mouth, eating the ball – mmmmm...
- Ideally, you are forming a triangle, where your feet are the base of the triangle and your glove is the top of the triangle about one foot in front of your feet. You don’t let the ball travel to where it is directly between your legs (harder play) and you don’t want to field it 2-3 feet in front of you, where it’s more awkward to field it and then get into your throwing motion.
- Your back is flat and you are bending down, knees bent, with your face close to the ball (vs. looking away). Your throwing hand will protect your face from any bad hop but the ball generally will not bounce much or at all.
- As you field the ball, you want your glove positioned in the middle of your legs (but about a foot out in front) or closer toward the glove side of your body (vs. your throwing arm side, which would be a more awkward attempt to stop the ball, then get in your throwing motion).
- If the grounder is hit hard and coming in fast, you won’t have time to step toward the ball and if you try, you are more likely to miss it.
- For a slow-rolling grounder, be ready to charge the ball.
- For your mid-speed grounder, you will step toward the ball but then break down into your fielding stance a second before the ball arrives; you want to get to the ball quickly but be in a position to field it properly.
- As you get more experienced fielding grounders, you can work on fielding without coming to a stop, when you are trying to field and then throw in the direction you are moving to (e.g. shortstop or 3rd base fielding and then throwing to 1st base).

Forehand/backhand; you can practice these for when you don’t have time to maneuver to field the ball in the frame of your body. One warmup drill is rolling the ball to your teammate’s forehand (glove side) or backhand (non-glove side). Reach, secure the ball, and bring it to your chest.

Catching balls in the air:

- As with fielding a grounder, your best chance to catch a ball in the air is when you can get the frame of your body in front of the ball, watching the ball come in to your glove (vs. the new player technique of sticking your arm away from your body to try to catch it while your head is

turned away with your eyes closed). So be ready to move your feet to get in proper position to have the frame of your body in front of the ball.

- Think of doing “the wave” with your glove--making a tight oval, knees to head, in front of your body:
 - For a ball in the air that is below your waist and coming toward your legs, you will go for a “basket catch”; the fingers of your glove are pointing down toward the dirt.
 - Now move your arm around the oval, clock-wise if you are right-handed (glove is in your left hand) or counter-clock wise if you are lefty (glove is in your right hand).
 - For a ball hit waist-high to one side or the other that is outside the frame of your body, you would have the fingers of the glove straight out to the side and your thumb would be either straight up or down, depending on which side the ball is going to. Your thumb will be down on a “back-hand” catch and up on a “fore-hand” catch.
 - For a ball hit above your waist but in your frame, you want to turn your glove so that the fingers of your glove are point up.
 - For a ball in the air that is below your waist but on your throwing-arm side and outside your frame, go for a back-hand catch, keeping your glove at an angle that will allow the ball to stick. Your thumb will be pointing downward, toward your feet.
 - For a ball coming down head-level in front of your frame, have your glove in front of your face but positioned where you can clearly keep sight of the ball coming in. Your wrist is bent back slightly so your glove is at enough of an angle to catch the ball and have the ball stick in your glove pocket. Remember to catch the ball with your glove, not your face.
- Keep your glove open, catch the entire ball with your glove pocket (the fingers of the glove vs. your palm), then close your glove or trap it with your throwing hand.
- If you are having trouble catching the ball, it could be due to one or more of the following:
 - Your glove is not the right size; having a glove that is too big could be a problem but typically it’s because the glove is too small and there is not enough pocket in the glove and you are trying to catch it with the palm of your hand, which stings.
 - Your glove is new and needs to be broken in; there are some cheap products you can buy to help break in a glove. There are other techniques like folding your glove in half, putting it under your mattress, and then running your mattress over with a truck.
 - Your wrist may not be bent at all and your glove is not at a slight angle where the ball will more easily stick in the pocket. For example, if you are trying to catch a ball chest-high with your glove totally straight up and down and not bent back at all, it may hit and drop out before you can close your glove.
 - Other tips; keeping the ball inside the frame of your body, keeping your eyes open and looking the ball into your glove vs. turning your head away, keeping your glove open, trying to catch the entire ball in your glove pocket, squeezing the glove right after it hits or trap it with your throwing hand.

3-minute grounder video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZLhf8Ep8t4>

3-minute pop fly video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZII1XdHdHI>