

**Q: How many chips in which colors do I need?**

**A: As with many aspects of poker, “It depends.”**

There are many factors that go into figuring out what works best:

- Are you using the chips for cash games, or tournaments, or both?
- What are the “limits” for your game?
- What is the blind structure for your tournament?
- How many players will be playing?

I’ve been hosting both home cash games and home tournaments for several years, so I’ll share a couple of different chip distribution ideas that I’ve used in the past. Note that what works for me in my games and tournaments might not work for you, so I hope you can come away with guiding principles rather than specific recipes.

There are a couple of “rules of thumb” that can help. In general, you need a lot **more** of the lower denomination chips than the higher denomination ones. One suggestion given at <http://www.homepokertourney.org/> for a tournament distribution is to have ratios of 4/3/2/1 for a set using four different chip colors. For a 1,000 chip set, this might mean 400 \$5 chips, 300 \$25 chips, 200 \$100 chips and 100 \$500 chips. Complete details, including links to a chip calculator and to chip forums can be found here:

[http://www.homepokertourney.org/chips\\_needed.htm](http://www.homepokertourney.org/chips_needed.htm)

I won a set of 500 PokerStars.com chips that are in four colors: 200 white, 150 red, 100 green, and 50 black. Note that this distribution matches the 4/3/2/1 ratios mentioned above. Since these particular chips don’t have denominations printed on them, they could represent a wide variety of chip values. If “standard” colors were used, these would be \$1 (white), \$5 (red), \$25 (green) and \$100 chips. For a “kitchen table” game, these could be Nickels (white), Dimes (red), Quarters (green) and Dollars (black).

It is a personal preference to include or exclude printed denominations on a chip set. If each chip color also includes the printed chip value, that is much clearer to the players (especially those new to the game) but it is less flexible, since you can’t easily reassign a different chip value without adding some confusion.

If you want to support both cash games and tournaments with one chip set, you might want to consider more than four chip colors, especially if you plan to have the cash games running concurrent with the tournament. You should try to avoid having the same chip colors in play at the same time, so your tournament players don’t have the temptation to hang on to some of their tournament chips with the intent of using them in the cash game.

For my typical cash games, I run \$0.50/\$1 limit dealer's choice games as well as "baby" pot-limit or no-limit games with \$0.25/\$0.50 blinds. I am currently using custom CHIPCO chips from HomePokerChips.com for this game, although I started out using inexpensive "diamond" chips. I use preset stacks of 25 chips containing twelve \$0.25 chips, twelve \$1 chips, and one \$5 chip. This adds up to \$20 per stack. This stack size works well in my set of lidded chip boxes that have 4 columns of 25 chips each. Extra \$5 chips are available for players who want to buy in for more than \$20. Most players buy in for \$40 or \$60. By limiting the number of \$0.25 and \$1 chips in play, I can support more players with fewer chips.

Note that although I have \$0.50 blinds in my game, I don't have any \$0.50 denomination chips. Instead, I've just purchased more \$0.25 chips, to limit the number of different denominations needed. For similar reasons, you probably don't need \$10, \$50, or \$200 denomination chips since you can make up those bet or blind sizes using multiple chips in a lower denomination.

Throughout the course of a typical game, the "winning" players end up making change for the "losing" players, effectively coloring up their wins to the higher denomination chips. To support deeper stacks for the baby "big bet" pot limit and no limit play, I also have a limited number of \$20 chips. That's a non-standard chip denomination, but it works well with the twenty-dollar bills provided by ATM withdrawals. Most card rooms and casinos use a \$25 chip instead.

My home game set consists of

- 20 stacks of the "preset" \$20 mix (500 chips)
- 150 extra \$5 chips
- 50 extra \$20 chips

With these 700 chips, I can support up to 20 cash game players at the limits that I spread. If I were to increase those limits, I would probably want more \$1, \$5, and \$20 chips, and I'd probably add a \$100 denomination chip as well.

A similar distribution using higher denomination chips would work for higher limits. For example, a \$3/\$6 limit game could use a mix of \$1 and \$5 chips with one or two higher denomination chips (either \$20 or \$25 chips).

Twice a year, I host a "big" tournament night that has cash games with higher limits. For that, my "preset" stacks have ten \$1 chips, fourteen \$5 chips, and one \$20 chip for a total of \$100 per stack. This also fits into my chip boxes that have four columns of 25 chips.

For most of my tournaments, I use green \$25 chips, black \$100 chips, purple \$500 chips and yellow \$1000 chips. A starting stack for these events has 8 green, 8 black, and 4 purple for a total of \$3000 in starting tournament chips.

This works well for the no-limit and pot-limit tournament blind structures that I use. The starting stack of 20 chips fit in a standard chip rack. Extra black and purple chips are needed for “coloring up” the lower denominations. The yellow \$1000 chips come into play when the blinds reach the \$1000/\$2000 level.

Given a specific starting stack and the number of players, you can figure out the exact number of chips in each color that will be needed for a tournament. For my tournaments, I have enough starting stacks for 25 players. The chips needed are:

<b><u>Color (value)</u></b>	<b><u>Start</u></b>	<b><u>Color Up</u></b>	<b><u>Total</u></b>
Green (\$25)	25*8=200	0	200
Black (\$100)	25*8=200	50	250
Purple (\$500)	25*4=100	50	150
Yellow (\$1000)	0	75	75

This assumes that I completely color up the lowest denomination to the next higher denomination chip. For example, with 200 green \$25 chips in play, I need 50 extra black \$100 chips to replace them. In theory, I might need more due to “rounding” during a chip race, but in practice, this estimate works fine since I usually color up the \$25 chips using a combination of \$100 and \$500 chips.

Note that I don’t actually need any yellow \$1000 chips, since we could use just the purple \$500 chips at the higher blind levels. Coloring up to the yellow chips helps to expedite play at these later levels. For many of these events, I did not have enough yellow to completely color up, so a combination of purples and yellows were in play.

An alternative starting stack that I’ve also used has ten \$5 chips, six \$25 chips, three \$100 chips and one \$500 chip. These 20 chips total \$1000. This goes with a tournament structure that has lower starting blinds of \$5/\$10. I also use a variation on this starting stack for tournaments that have Stud poker variants, which require antes.

In my examples above, I’ve figured out “starting stacks” of either 20 or 25 chips for the tournaments and cash games, using either chip boxes or standard chip racks to organize and store these stacks. Different stack sizes also work. If you plan to store your chips in a chip case, the number of chips in one of the columns of the case might determine your stack size. For example, I have a chip case that holds 600 chips in ten columns of 60 chips each. When I take my tournament set on the road, I fit three starting stacks per column. I also cut back on the number of players to 20, so that I have room for the extra “color up” chips.

For my PokerStars chip set, the chip case holds 500 chips with ten columns of 50 chips per column. This case would work well to carry my “cash game” stacks of 25 chips per stack.

I also won a chip set from Paradise Poker that has 300 chips in eight different denominations. Unlike the PokerStars set, these chips do have printed denominations, from \$0.50 up to \$5000. The distribution of chips is: 40 peach \$0.50 chips, 60 white \$1 chips, 60 red \$5 chips, 60 green \$25 chips, 60 black \$100 chips, 10 purple \$500 chips, 5 yellow \$1000 chips, and 5 orange \$5000 chips.

The Paradise chip distribution supports a wide variety of limits, but does not appear to support many players, since it has similar quantities of 5 different chip colors. I would think that a better distribution would have more of the lower denomination chips. To create a better distribution for a set of eight different denominations, I would need more information about the chips that are likely to be in play for a given game or tournament.

For orders with CHIPCO, there are some minimums that apply that can effect the chip distribution. The minimum number of chips in a given chip color is 50. For reorders, the minimum reorder size is 100 chips.

One thing that I did when I ordered my custom chip set was to purchase additional "spare" chips in each chip color. These are to handle the case of chips that get broken or lost. While the CHIPCO chips are very durable, and have a long life, it is possible to break them, and they can get lost over time, so I would recommend that at least 3 to 5 extra chips in each chip color are ordered. It's much simpler to do this with the initial chip order than to do it later, when the restrictions on the minimum order size come into play.