

RULE 12. SEARCHING FOR AND IDENTIFYING BALL

12-1. Searching for Ball; Seeing Ball

A player is not necessarily entitled to see the ball when making a stroke.

In searching anywhere on the course, a player may touch or move vegetation to the extent necessary to find and identify his ball – cannot improve lie, area of stance or swing or line of play. If the ball is moved, [Rule 18-2](#) applies except as noted below.

a. Searching for or Identifying Ball Covered by Sand

[Anywhere on the course](#), if a player's ball is believed to be covered by sand, to the extent that it cannot be found for identification, he may touch, or move the sand without penalty to find and identify the ball. If found and identified as his, the lie must be recreated. He may leave a small part of the ball visible. No penalty if the ball is moved during searching or identifying the ball **or re-creating the lie**. The ball must be replaced.

If player does not replace the ball (if moved) and re-create lie (if altered) the general penalty is applied under [Rule 12-1a](#).

b. Searching for or Identifying Ball Covered by Loose Impediments in Hazard

In a hazard, if the ball may be covered with loose impediments, player may remove loose impediments in searching – if uncovered or moved, the ball must be replaced and re-covered leaving a part of the ball visible. **If the ball is moved during search, [Rule 18-2](#) applies.**

A player is also permitted to touch the ground in the hazard while probing in the loose impediments with a club for the purpose of finding the ball. Such permission overrides any prohibitions in [Rule 13-4](#). See [Decision 12-1/4](#).

If player does not replace ball (if moved) and replace loose impediments (if moved), the general penalty is applied under [Rule 12-1b](#).

c. Searching for Ball in Water in Water Hazard

If a ball is believed to be lying in water in a water hazard, the player may probe without penalty. If the ball in the water is moved, the ball must be replaced unless the player elects to proceed under [Rule 26-1](#).

If ball is not lying in water in the hazard and is moved during search, [Rule 18-2a](#) applies.

d. Searching for Ball Within Obstruction or Abnormal Ground Condition

No penalty if ball is moved during search in obstruction, abnormal ground condition or water in a water hazard – replace ball or proceed under an applicable Rule.

If player does not replace a ball that was moved during search and plays the ball, the general penalty is applied under [Rule 12-1d](#).

12-2. Identifying Ball

Anywhere on the course, a player may lift a ball when required for identification – a specific procedure must be followed anywhere other than on the putting green. Player must announce intention, give fellow-competitor, marker or opponent the opportunity to observe the lifting and replacement. The ball must be marked before lifting and may be cleaned only as required to identify the ball.

Player incurs a penalty of one stroke if the player fails to comply with any or all parts of the procedure or lifts the ball when not required for identification.

Loss of hole or two-stroke penalty if ball is not replaced.