SOFTWARE & TECH

Types Of Tarot Cards Decks

PUBLISHED
November 25, 2026

REFERENCE
#1795584067447552

Introduction: A World Beyond the Cards

Stepping into the world of tarot can feel like entering an enchanted library where every book contains a universe of its own. The deck you choose is more than a tool for divination; it becomes a companion, a mirror, and a guide. With hundreds of stunning options lining the shelves and filling online galleries, the question is not whether to get a tarot deck, but rather which one calls to you. Understanding the different **types of tarot cards decks**is the first step toward finding a deck that resonates with your personal style, intuitive language, and spiritual or artistic preferences. This guide will walk you through the major families of tarot decks, helping you navigate the beautiful diversity that this ancient practice offers today.

The Historical Pillars: Decks That Defined the Tradition

Before diving into the vast sea of modern creations, it helps to understand the classic decks that established the structure and symbolism most tarot readers rely on. These foundational decks are still widely used and loved today, and they represent the core **types of tarot cards decks** that every enthusiast should know.

The Rider-Waite-Smith (RWS) Deck

Arguably the most famous and influential tarot deck in the world, the Rider-Waite-Smith deck was created in 1909 by Arthur Edward Waite and illustrated by Pamela Colman Smith. What makes this deck revolutionary is that every single card in the Minor Arcana—from the Two of Cups to the Six of Wands—depicts a full scene with figures, objects, and symbolic details. Before the RWS deck, pip cards (the numbered cards in the Minor Arcana) often showed only abstract arrangements of suit symbols. Smith's vibrant illustrations gave each card a story, making interpretation far more intuitive. If you are learning tarot, the Rider-Waite-Smith deck is often the recommended starting point, as countless books, apps, and online resources use its imagery as a reference. Many contemporary decks are directly inspired by or clone the RWS system, which means understanding this deck unlocks an entire library of related tools.

The Marseilles Tarot

Older than the RWS deck by centuries, the Tarot of Marseilles represents a distinct lineage of tarot art and symbolism. Originating in 17th-century France, this deck style features bold, simple lines, bright primary colors, and a medieval folk-art aesthetic. Key differences include the depiction of the pip cards: in the Marseilles tradition, the numbered cards of the Minor Arcana are not illustrated with narrative scenes but show the suit symbols arranged in decorative patterns. The Major Arcana figures, such as The Magician or The High Priestess, are depicted with a more archaic and enigmatic style compared to the RWS deck. Readers who prefer a more traditional, mathematical, or elemental approach to tarot often gravitate toward the Marseilles system. It demands a different kind of intuition—one that relies on number, suit, and positional meaning rather than narrative imagery. Exploring the Marseilles deck opens a window into the European esoteric traditions that predate modern occultism.

The Thoth Tarot

Created by the infamous occultist Aleister Crowley and painted by Lady Frieda Harris, the Thoth Tarot is a masterpiece of esoteric art and complex symbolism. Completed in the mid-20th century, this deck draws heavily on astrology, alchemy, Kabbalah, and Egyptian mythology. The imagery is rich, intricate, and often surreal, with a color palette that is deep, vibrant, and otherworldly. Unlike the RWS system, the Thoth deck renames several of the Major Arcana cards—such as Strength becoming Lust, and Justice becoming Adjustment—and reorders some of the trumps. The Minor Arcana, while illustrated, follows a different symbolic language that rewards deep study. The Thoth deck is not typically recommended for absolute beginners, but for those who feel drawn to its profound and multi-layered symbolism, it offers an inexhaustible well of wisdom. It represents one of the most intellectually and artistically demanding **types of tarot cards decks** available.

Modern and Contemporary Decks

While the historical decks remain beloved cornerstones, the past few decades have seen an explosion of creativity in the tarot world. Artists and creators have reimagined the tarot through countless cultural, artistic, and thematic lenses. These contemporary decks are often described as variations on the RWS system, meaning they follow the same general structure and card meanings but express them through a unique visual language.

Themed and Artistic Decks

One of the most exciting trends in tarot is the rise of themed decks that speak to specific interests, identities, or aesthetics. You can find tarot decks centered around cats, botanical gardens, celestial bodies, forest animals, literary classics, diverse cultural traditions, and even pop culture universes. For example, a nature-themed deck might replace traditional court cards with animals that embody specific energies, such as a bear for the King of Wands or a raven for the Queen of Swords. An LGBTQ+ inclusive deck might reimagine gender roles and relationships in the card imagery to reflect a wider spectrum of human experience. Themed decks are a wonderful way to make tarot practice more personal and engaging. When choosing among these **types of tarot cards decks**, consider what visual language speaks to your heart. If you love gardening, a botanical deck might feel like coming home. If you are a mythology enthusiast, a deck based on Greek or Norse myths might ignite your imagination.

Minimalist and Abstract Decks

At the opposite end of the spectrum from the richly illustrated classic decks, minimalist tarot decks strip away figurative detail and focus on geometric shapes, colors, or simple line art. These decks often appeal to readers who prefer a less distracting, more meditative experience. The lack of overt narrative imagery encourages the reader to rely more heavily on intuition and the inherent meanings of numbers and suits. Some minimalist decks use color coding, symbols, or even abstract patterns to convey the essence of each card. While they may seem simple at first glance, these decks can be surprisingly profound and are an excellent tool for experienced readers looking to deepen their intuitive connection without being led by familiar pictures.

Digital and App-Based Decks

In our modern world, tarot has also found a home on screens. While not a physical deck, digital tarot apps and platforms offer a unique category within the broader **types of tarot cards decks**. Many popular physical decks are now available as official digital versions, allowing users to draw cards, track readings, and even journal their interpretations. Some apps also offer exclusive digital-only decks with animated artwork or interactive features. While a digital deck cannot replace the tactile experience of shuffling physical cards, it offers unmatched convenience for daily draws, travel, or those just beginning to explore tarot. The key is to find an app that respects the tradition and provides accurate, thoughtful interpretations rather than purely gamified experiences.

Specialty and Collector Categories

Beyond the major categories of historical and modern decks, there are several subcategories worth understanding, especially if you are looking to build a collection or find a deck for a specific purpose.

Oracle Decks vs. Tarot Decks

It is common to see tarot and oracle decks grouped together, but they are fundamentally different tools. A tarot deck follows a specific, consistent structure: 78 cards divided into the Major Arcana (22 cards) and Minor Arcana (56 cards, further divided into four suits of 14 cards each). Oracle decks, on the other hand, have no fixed structure. They can contain any number of cards, with themes, messages, and artwork that vary wildly. Oracle decks are often more freeform and channeled, offering affirmations or single-word guidance. Many readers use both **types of tarot cards decks**and oracle decks together, drawing a tarot card for deep structural insight and an oracle card for a quick, uplifting message. Knowing the difference helps you set expectations for how each tool will function in your practice.

Mini, Pocket, and Oversized Decks

Physical size is another important factor when exploring the **types of tarot cards decks**. Standard tarot decks measure roughly 2.75 by 4.75 inches, but you can find decks in a variety of sizes. Mini and pocket decks are perfect for carrying in a purse or bag, making them ideal for on-the-go readings or travel. However, the small card size can make it difficult to see intricate details, especially for visually complex decks. At the other end of the spectrum, oversized decks offer large, detailed artwork that is beautiful for study and home use but impractical for shuffling. Some readers prefer a jumbo size for teaching or for group readings where everyone needs to see the card clearly. Your choice of size may depend on whether you plan to use your deck primarily for personal meditation, public readings, or study.

Limited Edition and Artisan Decks

For collectors and connoisseurs, limited edition and artisan decks represent the pinnacle of craftsmanship. These decks are often produced in small print runs by independent artists or small publishers. They may feature hand-painted edges, gilded foil, custom tuck boxes, and even signed prints. The quality of the card stock and finish is often superior to mass-produced decks. While these decks can be significantly more expensive, they are also works of art that hold their value and offer a deeply personal connection to the creator's vision. If you are drawn to the aesthetic and ritualistic aspects of tarot, an artisan deck can elevate your practice into a form of sacred art.

How to Choose the Right Deck for You

With so many **types of tarot cards decks**to consider, finding the right one can feel overwhelming. The most important advice is to trust your intuition. Look at images of the decks online or, if possible, handle them in a store. Pay attention to which deck draws your eye, makes you feel curious, or gives you a sense of calm. Factors to consider include your experience level, the artistic style that speaks to you, the size and feel of the cards, and whether you prefer a deck that follows a traditional structure or something more modern. If you are a beginner, starting with a classic Rider-Waite-Smith-based deck gives you a strong foundation. If you are an experienced reader, you might enjoy the challenge of a Marseilles or Thoth deck. Ultimately, the right deck is the one that inspires you to pick it up and begin a conversation.

Conclusion: Your Journey Begins with a Single Card

The universe of tarot is vast and welcoming. Whether you are drawn to the classic lines of the Rider-Waite-Smith, the esoteric depths of the Thoth, the ancient echoes of the Marseilles, or the boundless creativity of modern themed decks, there is a perfect deck waiting for you. Understanding the different **types of tarot cards**

decks answers you to make a choice that aligns with your personality, your spiritual path, and your artistic sensibilities. Remember that the deck is a tool, and the true magic lies in the relationship you build with it. Take your time, explore with curiosity, and allow the images to speak to you. Your journey through the archetypes, symbols, and stories of tarot is a deeply personal one—and it begins the moment you hold the right deck in your hands.

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