

Poison Explored



Finding and Creating Poison

POISON EXPLORED

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This is an expansion of [Reimagining the Bounty of the Land](#), originally published in August 2022. This system relies on some of the mechanics introduced in that supplement; however, game masters who choose to forgo those mechanics in favor of their own can still effectively use this to enhance poisons and poisons within their game.

Poisons, venoms, and other poisons have a prominent place in many game worlds. They are often regaled as the weapon of choice by legendary assassins and monsters, only to be snuffed out of importance the moment they encounter any of the myriad things that are just immune to every poison in the world. There are sample poisons available in the basic rules, but these are dreadfully dull; almost all of them work the same: make a saving throw against taking some damage, or half as much on a success. There is even an entire race of elves – the drow – who are said to specialize in using poison in their evil deeds... only to have it be a dull and unimaginative implementation for those few drow lucky enough to have it on their stat block at all. Even those few characters who dedicate themselves to the dark arts of a poisoner find themselves falling far short of their less imaginative comrades. In short, poison in fifth edition is bland.

AN INTRODUCTION TO POISON

At their simplest, poisons are compounds that have adverse effects when they enter a creature's body. They vary quite a bit in the ways they can get into a creature's body, but broadly speaking, they take four typical routes:

- **Ingested.** These poisons must be eaten or drunk to be effective. Getting them on the skin or even into a cut is insufficient to be affected; these poisons need to absorb through the digestive tract into the bloodstream over several hours, or they will be harmless.
- **Contact.** These poisons are absorbed through the skin and soft membranes of the eyes and nose. This typically takes just a few minutes before the affected creature feels the adverse effects. Poisons that are absorbed through open wounds also fall into this category.
- **Inhaled.** These are among the most feared poisons, as they are often invisible or just barely visible as a faint cloud. They are absorbed through the creature's lungs and rapidly become debilitating. These poisons typically take less than half a minute to take effect.
- **Injected.** This is the route of choice of most venomous creatures; their fangs, stingers, or tails typically inject potent venom directly into their victim's bloodstream. This route is also the choice of many a would-be assassin, as they coat their dagger or arrow in their poison. Poisons that are injected typically take effect almost instantly.

Most poisons are created with only a single potential route of administration. Creating a toxin that can enter a target's body in different ways is an advanced skill only available to master poisoners. However, once completed, most poisons can be effectively used by anyone – even a novice – though a master poisoner will almost always use them more effectively.

As a note regarding running a game that features poison, it is advised not to overuse them. When overused, every aspect of the game slows down as players check for poison on every surface, before every meal, and after taking every breath. Reserving them for assassins and other nefarious people that wish to target the characters in difficult-to-detect ways keeps them a fresh and unexpected challenge, rather than having every NPC carry around vials of potent poison.

GM Note. The basic rules offer slightly different categories and explanations of these routes of administration. While not wholly inaccurate, they forgo any nuance of how the poison affects a victim and treat all options equally. The optional variant rule: Administering Poisons later in this supplement offers more effective (and more interesting) options based on the four categories listed above.

POTENCY

Whether it is the result of a poisoner toiling over their alembic or a natural creation by a fearsome creature, all poisons have a measure of potency which determines whom the toxin can affect and how strongly it will affect them. The primary effect of potency is its ability to affect more powerful creatures; however, a more potent poison will, on average, be a more dangerous and deadly poison than a less potent one.

BASELINE POTENCY

The following chart provides baseline levels of potency for different sources of poison.

Source of Poison	Baseline Potency
Crafted Poison*	Calculated as part of the crafting process.
Spells	Spell level plus the caster's spellcasting ability modifier.
Magic Items and Plants	+5 for each tier of rarity, from Uncommon at 5 through Artifact at 25.
Natural Trait of a Creature*	Equal two times the creature's CR.

GM Note. Some creatures may have poison that straddles these two values, being partially a natural trait and partially crafted. For the most part, simply treating it as a natural trait to determine potency is sufficient. However, the game master may also choose to have such creatures simulate quickly crafting their poison or even use downtime to do so, achieving a less predictable but potentially more interesting outcome.

LOCATING POISONOUS COMPONENTS

Reimagining the Bounty of the Land provides rules to effectively adjudicate foraging and hunting for a wide variety of natural items, some of which may be poisonous and useful to create highly potent poisons. Hunting for creatures with poisons is identical to the process outlined in that supplement, with the only change being that the characters need to find a creature with a natural poison or venom.

In the case of searching for poisonous plants, however, those rules alone would only allow characters to happen incidentally upon poisonous plants. The following additional rules can be added to those rules to enable characters to intentionally locate poisonous plants. Alternatively, the GM may choose to forgo those rules entirely in favor of these rules; if they decide to do so, they will need to apply their own ruling for the time required to be spent and the amount that can be harvested.

LOCATING POISONOUS PLANTS IN THE AREA

As with foraging for any other plant, the character must first determine if there are any poisonous plants in the area. A character should first determine if there are any useful plants in the area using the rules located in *Reimagining the Bounty of the Land*. Once the character is aware of useful plants in the area, they should refine their search to find poisonous plants specifically. This involves an additional check beyond the initial check(s) and should be done before fully adjudicating the results; additionally, due to the increased danger involved in the identification and harvesting of poisonous plants, this can only be accomplished by an individual character.

The following are recommended checks to be made when searching for these plants. Any character with proficiency with a poisoner's kit has advantage on these checks.

- Intelligence (Nature) is appropriate if the character is carefully observing the plants that have been identified and is trying to find the telltale signs of the plant being poisonous.
- Intelligence (Poisoner's Kit) is appropriate if the character is either using past experience crafting poisons or using a small guidebook that is included in some kits to identify the plants.
- Wisdom (Animal Handling or Survival) may be appropriate if the character is looking for signs of animals avoiding the plant or for deceased animals nearby.

If the result of this check is the same or higher than the initial check to locate useful plants, the character can identify which plants are poisonous. These plants should only be of the same rarity as indicated on the chart in *Reimagining the Bounty of the Land*.

HARVESTING POISONOUS PLANTS

Once the poisonous plants are identified, the character can begin harvesting them. This process is the same as the process involved in *Reimagining the Bounty of the Land* but harbors some additional risks. If the GM is not using or does not have *Reimagining the Bounty of the Land*, have the character make a check to attempt to harvest the plant with a DC commensurate to the rarity of the plant they found.

When the character harvests the plant, they should make the following saving throws to ensure that the poisonous parts are not destroyed nor accidentally poison themselves. These saving throws should be made after determining whether the characters successfully harvest the plants, as outlined in the previous supplement. For all these saving throws, the DC is equal to the DC to harvest the plant, with a maximum of 25.

- Making a Dexterity saving throw is appropriate if the character uses a dexterity-based skill to harvest the plant. Failing this saving throw will result in the character becoming poisoned by the plant they are trying to gather, and the potency of any poison that is crafted is cut in half.
- Making a Wisdom saving throw is appropriate if the character uses either a Wisdom- or Intelligence-based skill to harvest the plant. Failing this saving throw will result in the poisonous part of the plant being destroyed in the harvesting process, and it loses any secondary effects it may have had.

CREATING POISONS

The vast majority of applications of poisons (at least, those characters can get their hands on) will be crafted in some capacity. Characters can choose whether they quickly craft the poison or use downtime to do so; each has benefits and drawbacks, which are described below.

DETERMINING DAMAGE AND DCs OF A CRAFTED POISON

Use the following chart to determine the amount of damage a crafted poison can inflict on a target and the DC required to resist the poison's effects.

Potency	Damage	DC to resist
0 to 5	1d6	10
6 to 10	3d6	10
11 to 15	5d6	15
16 to 20	7d6	15
21 to 25	9d6	20
26 to 30	11d6	25

QUICK POISON CRAFTING

Quickly crafting a poison requires eight hours of processing, only one hour of which must be spent actively working and may coincide with a long rest (this does prevent the character from doing any other activity if they also wish to benefit from a long rest). This yields a single dose of poison, but a character can spend an extra hour of active work to gain a second identical dose if they so desire. The character may use more than one ingredient per dose; if multiple doses of poison are being made, they must use the same ingredients in both. When two ingredients are used, the character has advantage on the checks to craft the poison; if three or more ingredients are used, the character gains an additional +1 bonus to the checks per extra ingredient.

When a character quickly crafts a poison, they should make the following checks:

- Intelligence (Poisoner's Kit) to set the process up and prepare the equipment for processing.
- Intelligence (Nature) to effectively prepare the components to be turned into a poison.
- Wisdom (Poisoner's Kit) to ensure the poison is developing in the desired way.

The crafted poison has a potency equal to the *lower* of the two intelligence checks, with a maximum of 15. If the result of the last check was at least 15, the poison takes on an additional effect beyond simply damaging the target. This additional effect is selected randomly from the secondary effects of all the components used. Finally, the route of administration of the poison (see Optional Variant Rule: Administering Poisons below) is always injected when the poison is quickly crafted.



DOWNTIME POISON CRAFTING

Using downtime to craft a poison can produce much more potent poisons with much greater control over the effects and how they can be administered. Of course, using downtime does involve a significant time investment which a character either may not want to invest... or might not be able to.

Resources. Using downtime to craft poisons requires at least one workweek of dedicated effort. Additionally, one must have poisonous components that can be developed over the week into a viable poison. Part of the process involves using reagents that aren't typically found in nature and must be purchased. These reagents cost 100 gp and can be found being sold by most general goods merchants, though they are probably typically referred to by other names, such as "varmint control supplies." The character can purchase additional or higher quality reagents; for each additional 500 gp spent, the potency of the final poison gains a +1 bonus.

Resolution. Crafting a poison requires using both a poisoner's kit and alchemist's supplies. To begin the process, the crafter must be proficient with at least one of these tools. Once the character has the tools required, they must decide how much gold they wish to invest into the process, which will not affect the checks they must make but will affect the finished product. This investment must be made before any checks are rolled and cannot be recovered if the process does not produce a particularly high-quality poison.

Using downtime to create a poison always results in some degree of success. However, creating a low potency toxin with poor rolls is still possible, which may be considered a failed crafting, particularly if the result is extremely low. The actual process involves making three checks. The first two are Intelligence (Poisoner's Kit) and Intelligence (Alchemist's Supplies) to ensure that all the equipment is being used properly. The final check is an appropriate check of the character's choice.

Typically, only one week of work is required to make poison of any rarity because the components used to make an extremely rare poison generally are already potent. However, at the game master's discretion, some poisons may require multiple weeks to create – which will involve gathering extra materials and investing additional gold.

COMPONENTS USED AND POTENCY

POSSIBLE

This chart outlines the potency that can be achieved based on the components used. The lowest rarity component should always be the one used to determine the potency.

Rarity of Component	Potency Range
Common	0 to 10
Uncommon	5 to 15
Rare	10 to 20
Very Rare	15 to 25
Legendary	20 to 30

CRAFTING RESULTS

Crafting a poison is unique in that it doesn't involve successes and failures the same way that other crafting does. Instead, the poison created may be of exceptionally low potency, rendering it virtually useless, though it was still technically created. The route of administration for the poison is the one described by the components used; if the poison was crafted with components that have multiple routes of administration, the route the poison uses is selected randomly. Likewise, the secondary effect from the poisonous components used is always applied; if multiple components were used with different secondary effects, select randomly which one was applied. When the character makes their checks as part of the downtime, compare the results of the roll to the potency range possible for the poison to determine its final potency.

All Three Rolls Exceed the Maximum of the Potency Range. In this case, the poison takes on the maximum possible potency for the rarity of the components. If extra reagents were purchased at the beginning of the process, they are not consumed and may either be resold for one-half their original value or saved for future crafting.

At Least One Roll Is at Least the Minimum of the Potency Range. In this case, the potency begins at the minimum end of the range. For each additional roll that was at least the minimum, the potency gains a +1 bonus to the potency. If at least one of the rolls was greater than the maximum, the potency gains an additional +2. Finally, any bonus for purchasing reagents is applied. The potency can never exceed the maximum potency possible for the rarity of the components used; if an excess of reagents was purchased, they are lost and cannot be refunded.

No Rolls are Greater than the Minimum of the Potency Range. In this case, the poison has the lowest possible potency for the components used and no bonus from purchasing additional or higher quality reagents can be obtained.

SAMPLE TABLES

All poisonous components should have the following elements: a rarity, which is used to determine the possible potencies of poisons crafted from it; a preferred route of administration, which determines how the finished poison may be administered (unless the crafter has taken the poison master feat described below); and a secondary effect which may be applied to the poison.

SAMPLE POISONOUS PLANTS

d6	Rarity of Component	Plant	Route of Administration	Secondary Effect
1	Uncommon	Yellow-Spore Mushroom	Inhaled	The target is poisoned for one hour.
2	Uncommon	Paralyzing Fern	Skin and Eye Contact	The target loses use of one limb for a day.
3	Rare	Purple Lilly	Injected	The target can only regain hit points through magical means for 1d4 days.
4	Rare	Frost Petal	Inhaled	The target's Dexterity score is reduced by 1d6.
5	Very Rare	Still Nettle	Swallowed	The target is paralyzed for 1d4 days.
6	Legendary	The Black Bloom	Swallowed	If the target fails its saving throw, it dies.

SAMPLE POISONOUS/VENOMOUS CREATURES

d6	Rarity of Component	Creature	Route of Administration	Secondary Effect
1	Uncommon	Ettercap	Inhaled	Creatures that fail their saving throw are stunned for 1d4 rounds.
2	Uncommon	Wyvern	Injected	Creatures that fail their saving throw have their maximum hit points reduced by half the amount of poison damage taken.
3	Rare	Medusa	Skin and Eye Contact	Creatures that fail their saving throw are restrained as their body begins to petrify. At the end of their next turn, they must repeat the saving throw, becoming petrified on a failure or ending the effect on a success.
4	Rare	Iron Golem	Inhaled	Creatures that fail their saving throw take double the poison damage that would have been dealt.
5	Very Rare	Purple Worm	Injected	Creatures that fail their saving throw have their Strength score reduced by 1d6. If this reduces their Strength score to 0, the creature dies.
6	Legendary	Ancient Green Dragon	Inhaled	Creatures that fail their saving throw are blinded for 1d4 days. If <i>greater restoration</i> is cast on the character, their blindness is only relieved for one day.

OPTIONAL POISON RULES

The basic rules regarding poison cause it to be one of the least useful options available for both players and game masters, which results in it being shunned from consideration. These optional rules are designed to make it a much more helpful option, particularly for those enterprising enough to spend the time carefully crafting their poisonous implements.

OPTIONAL VARIANT RULE: ADMINISTERING POISONS

The basic rules outline a few ways poisons may be administered but are relatively dull and lack meaningful differentiation. This optional rule replaces those rules in favor of a more dynamic approach that gives both game masters and players more options when they want to explore the depth of poison in the game. Regardless of how the poison is administered, each dose can only be used once.

Ingested. This type of poison must be consumed, for example, as a drink or as part of a meal. These poisons are typically tasteless and odorless, though a perceptive creature may still identify some telltale signs of the poison. This requires a successful Wisdom (Perception) check, with a DC equal to 12 + the poison's potency (maximum of 30); on a success, the creature can spit out the food or drink before any ill effects occur. Once ingested, the poison takes 1d6 hours to work its way into the bloodstream, at which point its effects begin.

Contact. These poisons are absorbed through the skin and other membranes, like those around the eyes. They must be applied directly to the target's skin or placed somewhere in hopes that it is touched. While it is on a surface, such as a banister or a table, it can be seen with a Wisdom (Perception) check, with a DC equal to 10 + the poison's potency (maximum of 30). Once successfully applied,

the poison takes 3d20 minutes to begin taking effect. If a creature has one-half or fewer of their hit points remaining when they touch the poison, it only takes 1d10 minutes to start taking effect, and they have disadvantage on all saving throws against that poison.

Inhaled. These poisons are spread by throwing a vial or other container that explodes into a cloud of gas. The cloud size is determined during the crafting process but can be up to 15 feet. A creature in the cloud can use its reaction to make a Wisdom (Perception) check; if the result of the check is at least equal to 8 + the poison's potency (maximum of 30), the creature may use the same reaction to hold their breath. The poison lingers in the air where it originally was for up to 15 minutes, though a strong breeze will blow it away. If a creature inhales the poison at any time (including by failing to hold their breath immediately), it takes effect in 1d20 seconds.

Injected. These poisons must be directly injected under a creature's skin to go straight into the bloodstream. The most common sources of these toxins are creatures with fangs or stingers, or individuals who are enterprising enough to adapt those creature parts into their own weapons. Weapons that deal piercing damage can be coated in this type of poison, but unless it was specially made to deliver poison, the target has advantage on saving throws against it. If a creature is successfully injected with one of these poisons, the effects begin instantly.



OPTIONAL VARIANT RULE: IMMUNITY

SCORE

When properly explored, poison stands apart from other conditions and sources of damage in myriad ways. It covers a broad spectrum of sources, from purely physical to magical; it also covers an array of ways of being applied and how it works on a creature's body. Unfortunately, the basic rules offer little to exploring this nuance in a game, preferring to make creatures of all types equally immune to this aspect of the game. The following optional rule corrects this by introducing an easy-to-use mechanism by which immunity to poison can be overcome using a sufficiently potent poison.

Immunity Score. All creatures have a new ability score, referred to as their Immunity score, which replaces their previous immunity or resistance to poison. For most creatures, this score is 0, reflecting no innate resistance or immunity to poisons. Creatures who were immune have a base Immunity score equal to their challenge rating or character level; those who were only resistant have a base Immunity score equal to half their challenge rating or character level (rounded down). This results in creatures who are immune to some, but not all, poisons. Poisons with a potency value greater than a creature's Immunity score have the potential to overcome their immunity.

Bonus to Immunity. A creature can attain a bonus to their Immunity score in several ways. Spells that grant immunity to poison now increase the Immunity score by an amount equal to their spell level. For example, a character benefiting from *Heroes' Feast* gains a +6 bonus to their Immunity score. Magic items that grant immunity to poison likewise increase the bearer's Immunity score based on their rarity, beginning with uncommon granting a +2 through legendary granting a +5.

Immunity versus Potency. When a poison is used against a creature, the game master should first compare the potency value of the poison to the creature's Immunity score. If the creature's Immunity score is greater than or equal to the potency value of the poison, it has no effect. However, if the potency value of the poison exceeds the creature's Immunity score, then the poison works as usual, regardless of the creature's previous immunity.

Poison Resilience. Certain creatures previously immune to poison may be given this additional trait to reflect their superior poison resilience. The creature may make all saving throws against poisons with advantage, even if another source gives them disadvantage. Additionally, when the creature is subject to a saving throw against a poison, it instead takes no damage if it succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if it fails. Secondary effects still work normally on a failed saving throw.

The game master is encouraged to use their discretion regarding when to apply this trait. Not all creatures immune to poison should be given this ability, as they shouldn't stand above others in terms of their immunity. Giving this trait to player characters whose class features (such as those playing a monk) provide immunity to poison is recommended, as those are often core and iconic features that one would be remiss to fully take away.

Undead and Constructs. Undead and constructs are slight outliers in the context of the various types of creatures. Because poisons are typically designed to work on living things, undead and constructs remain entirely immune to most poisons, regardless of potency. However, poisons that affect them can still be created; they just have to be specially made and can only affect the target creature type.

OPTIONAL FEAT: POISON MASTER

Prerequisite: Intelligence score of 14 or higher; proficiency with alchemist's supplies or poisoner's kit

Through careful study of poisons, you have mastered the art of crafting and using them, providing you the following benefits:

- When you are crafting a poison, you make 1d4 + your Proficiency Bonus doses rather than just one without having to expend additional resources.
- When you are crafting a poison that has multiple potential routes of administration, you may choose the route of administration that results from the crafting.
- When you craft a poison that has multiple potential secondary effects, you may select which secondary effect is applied, rather than leaving it to chance.
- You may apply one dose of your crafted poisons to your weapon once per round without using an action. You may apply one additional dose of poison using a bonus action.



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