

# VARIANT RULES FOR ALCHEMY IN D&D 5E

## INTRODUCTION

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I've seen some excellent adaptations of the alchemist class to 5E. There is also an excellent supplement out there that greatly increases the complexity of alchemy and herbalism.

However, I was looking for something a little more "rules-light," that could easily be added on top of a rogue or ranger just as easily as it could be added to a cleric or wizard.

I didn't want to make alchemy too unbalancing (full-disclosure, my game is more about flavor than it is power-gaming), but I wanted to achieve two goals: (1) To bring down the barrier (gp and time) to crafting and using alchemical items. (2) To capture the flare of some of the more "magical" effects produced by alchemy.

To achieve the first goal, I've created the Practical Alchemy variant rule and Alchemical Expert feat.

To achieve the second goal, I've created the Alchemical Admixture variant rule and Alchemical Adept feat.

I have two PCs in my game trying out these rules, a rogue and a wizard, so it will probably continue to be a bit of a work in progress. Feel free to try these rules out in your own game and give me feedback.

I do not hold any copyright for any *Dungeons & Dragons* content. This is an original homebrew supplement written to be used in conjunction with the *Player's Handbook* and *Dungeon Master's Guide* published by Wizards of the Coast.

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## VARIANT RULE: PRACTICAL ALCHEMY

Alchemy, and the related practices of herbalism and poison-making, involves a the precise measurement, mixing, and handling of minerals, metals, herbs, seeds, and toxins. A trained alchemist, working without distractions, can produce a variety of substances useful on adventures. Because of the high-level of precision, batch-to-batch variability among reagents, the constant possibility of impurities, and the borderline “magical” nature of alchemy, sometimes things go awry with undesirable results. But, in the right hands, mishaps are rare, and alchemy can be an exceptionally useful tool in any adventurer’s repertoire.

**Crafting an alchemical item.** You can spend 1 hour attempting to create one alchemical item with a market price of up to 200 gp using a set of tools with which you are proficient. This process requires concentration (as if concentrating on a spell). You expend 20% of the item’s price in costly reagents and ingredients: precious metals, unusual salts, rare herbs, dangerous toxins, exotic oils, and the like. At the end of the hour, you make an ability check using the appropriate tools against a DC 5 + the price of the item in gp divided by 10. On a success, you successfully create the item. On a failure, you neither create the item nor expend reagents and ingredients, and there is a 10% chance of an alchemical mishap (see Alchemical Mishaps sidebar).

If an alchemical mishap occurs there is a 50% chance that your tools are damaged or depleted. You cannot use your tools until you can find a suitable location to replenish reagents or replace damaged instruments (10 gp for alchemical supplies or poisoner’s kit, 5 gp for herbalism kit).

An alchemical item created in this fashion is unstable and spoils if you do not use it within 8 hours. An experienced alchemist or vendor of alchemical items will recognize the item as unstable and will refuse to purchase it from you.

Alchemical items you can create depend on the tools you use. These items include the following (though more items may be available at your DM’s discretion):

**Alchemical supplies (Intelligence check):** A vial of acid (25 gp), a flask of alchemist’s fire (50 gp), a vial of *dust of disappearance* (single creature, single use; 200 gp), a vial of *dust of dryness* (single use; 200 gp), an *eversmoking bottle* (single use, up to 5 min; 150 gp), a *gem of brightness* (5 charges; 200 gp), a flask of *oil of slipperiness* (1 hour duration; 200 gp), a *potion of fire breath* (200 gp), a *potion of hill giant strength* (200 gp), a *potion of resistance* (200 gp).

**Herbalism kit (Wisdom check):** A vial of antitoxin (50 gp), a *potion of healing* (50 gp), a vial of *Keoghtom’s ointment* (single use; 150 gp), a *potion of animal friendship* (200 gp), a *potion of greater healing* (200 gp), a *potion of growth* (1 hour duration; 200 gp), a *potion of resistance* (200 gp).

**Poisoner’s kit (Intelligence check):** A vial of antitoxin (50 gp), a vial of assassin’s blood (150 gp), a vial of basic poison (100 gp), a vial of carrion crawler mucus (200 gp), a vial of drow poison (200 gp), a vial of serpent venom (200 gp), a vial of truth serum (150 gp), a *potion of poison* (200 gp).

## VARIANT RULE:

### ALCHEMICAL ADMIXTURES

Certain spells have a special tag: alchemy (see Alchemical Formulas below). Such a spell can be cast following the normal rules for spellcasting, or a trained alchemist can create an alchemical admixture of the spell.

An **alchemical admixture** is a special version of a spell that takes the form of a vial of liquid or powder. Each alchemical admixture has an alchemical formula that you keep in a **book of alchemical formulas**. A book of alchemical formulas costs 50 gp and weighs less than one quarter of a pound.

### ALCHEMICAL MISHAPS

Alchemy involves combining, heating, shaking, and bubbling volatile, toxic, and sometimes dangerous substances. Sometimes, things go wrong.

If you suffer an alchemical mishap while using alchemical supplies, you roll a d10 and are subject to the corresponding effect below. If you suffer an alchemical mishap while using an herbalism kit, you roll a d6 and are subject to the corresponding effect. If you suffer an alchemical mishap while using a poisoner’s kit, you roll a d8 and are subject to the corresponding effect.

**1. Nausea.** You feel queasy and weak. You have disadvantage on all Strength ability checks until you complete a long rest.

**2. Dizziness.** You feel light-headed and unsteady on your feet. You have disadvantage on all Dexterity ability checks until you complete a long rest.

**3. Headache.** You develop a splitting headache. You have disadvantage on all Intelligence ability checks until you complete a long rest.

**4. Euphoria.** You feel giddy and content. You have disadvantage on all Wisdom ability checks until you complete a long rest.

**5. Skin irritation.** Your skin breaks out in an unsightly rash. You have disadvantage on all Charisma ability checks until you complete a long rest.

**6. Poison exposure.** You are exposed to toxins. You take 1d6 poison damage, and you are poisoned (see conditions) for 1 hour.

**7. Acid spill.** You are splashed with a caustic substance. You take 2d6 acid damage.

**8. Accidental fire.** You are burned as your reagents catch fire. You take 2d6 fire damage.

**9. Explosive boom.** Your reagents explode with a loud bang. You take 1d6 thunder damage, and you are deafened (see conditions) for 1 hour.

**10. Explosive flash.** Your reagents explode in a bright flash. You take 1d6 radiant damage, and you are blinded (see conditions) for 1 hour.

You must have a class feature or feat that specifically allows you to create alchemical admixtures of spells in order to do so. (See variant feature below and Alchemical Adept feat.)

**Mastering an alchemical formula.** You can translate and transcribe any spell you can cast that has the alchemy tag into your book of alchemical formulas. The process of mastering an alchemical formula and copying it into your book takes 2 hours per level of the spell, and costs 50 gp per level (half as much time and gold for a cantrip). The cost represents reagents used up while experimenting with the spell. These reagents and ingredients may include precious metals, unusual salts, rare herbs, dangerous toxins, exotic oils, and the like.

If you gain the Alchemical Admixtures variant feature at 1st level as part of your Spellcasting class feature, you also learn the alchemical formulas for one cantrip you can cast and for up to two 1st-level spells you know or can prepare, provided those spells have the alchemy tag.

**Preparation.** The alchemical admixture version of a spell takes one hour to create. You must have mastered the alchemical formula for the spell and copied into your book of alchemical formulas, and you must have your book on hand. You also must expend 20 gp in alchemical reagents per spell level (10 gp for a cantrip, 20 gp for a 1st level spell, 40 gp for a 2nd level spell, and so on). This process requires concentration (as if concentrating on a spell). At the end of the hour, you make an ability check using an appropriate set of tools against a DC 10 + level of the spell you are preparing as an alchemical admixture. On a success, you create the alchemical admixture without incident. On a failure, you suffer an alchemical mishap (see Alchemical Mishaps sidebar), but you do not expend any reagent cost.

An alchemical admixture is unstable and spoils if you do not activate it within 8 hours.

## ALCHEMICAL FORMULAS

The following spells have the alchemy tag, meaning they can be learned as alchemical formulas and can alchemical admixtures can be created of them.

### ALCHEMY SPELLS

**Cantrips:** *Acid splash, friends, mending, poison spray, produce flame, resistance, spare the dying.*

**1st Level:** *Bane, burning hands, create or destroy water, cure wounds, disguise self, expeditious retreat, feather fall, fog cloud, grease, heroism, jump, longstrider, purify food and drink, ray of sickness, sleep, speak with animals.*

**2nd Level:** *Alter self, barkskin, beast sense, blindness/deafness, crown of madness, darkvision, enhance ability, lesser restoration, magic weapon, protection from poison, silence, spider climb, spike growth, web.*

**3rd Level:** *Create food and water, fear, feign death, haste, magic circle, protection from energy, slow, speak with dead, stinking cloud, stoneskin, water breathing.*

**4th Level:** *Blight, compulsion, confusion, death ward, fabricate, freedom of movement, phantasmal killer, polymorph, stone shape.*

**5th Level:** *Animate objects, awaken, cloudkill, contagion, creation, modify memory.*

You must have a set of appropriate tools in good working order to create alchemical admixtures. Typically, you use a set of alchemical supplies to create an alchemical admixture, but other tools may suffice for specific spells with your DM's approval (such as an herbalism kit to create *cure wounds* or *lesser restoration* or a poisoner's kit to create *poison spray* or *sleep*).

**Activation.** Alchemical admixtures come in two varieties: alchemical extracts and alchemical infusions. You decide which type when you create the alchemical admixture.

To activate an **alchemical extract**, as an action, you sprinkle or splash the contents of the vial—or throw the vial itself—on the creature, object, or area you wish to affect. If the spell has a range greater than 60 feet, the range becomes 60 feet, since you cannot accurately throw the vial beyond that distance. In all other ways, an alchemical extract functions as casting the spell at the spell's lowest level.

To activate an **alchemical infusion**, as a bonus action, you or the creature you wish to affect must consume the contents of the vial. The spell targets only the creature that consumes the contents of the alchemical infusion. As an action, you can administer an infusion to an incapacitated creature. Alternatively, you can take an action to apply an infusion to a weapon (or piece of ammunition), and the next creature hit by that weapon is subject to the spell's effect as if it had consumed the infusion. In all other ways, an alchemical infusion functions as casting the spell at the spell's lowest level.

An alchemical admixture's spellcasting ability matches the spellcasting ability of the class for which you can cast the spell (Wisdom for a cleric spell, Intelligence for a wizard spell, and so on). This ability sets the spell attack modifier and spell save DC when you create the alchemical admixture.

Another creature can activate an alchemical admixture that you created if it is holding the vial in its hand. That creature becomes the point of origin for all spell effects that depend on the location of the spell's caster, but you function as the caster for all spell effects that relate to the caster's abilities.

## VARIANT FEATURE: ALCHEMICAL ADMIXTURES

When you become a 1st-level bard, cleric, druid or wizard and gain that Spellcasting feature for that class, you can choose to forgo gaining the Ritual Casting feature to gain the Alchemical Admixtures feature for your class, described below:

**Alchemical Admixtures (Bard):** You can create an alchemical admixture of any bard spell you know if that spell has the alchemy tag.

You also have a book of alchemical formulas in which you store your alchemical formulas and which you must have on hand to create an alchemical admixture.

**Alchemical Admixtures (Cleric):** You can create an alchemical admixture of any cleric spell if that spell has the alchemy tag and you have the spell prepared.

You also have a book of alchemical formulas in which you store your alchemical formulas and which you must have on hand to create an alchemical admixture.

**Alchemical Admixtures (Druid):** You can create an alchemical admixture of any druid spell if that spell has the alchemy tag and you have the spell prepared.

You also have a book of alchemical formulas in which you store your alchemical formulas and which you must have on hand to create an alchemical admixture.

**Alchemical Admixtures (Wizard):** You can create an alchemical admixture of any wizard spell if that spell has the alchemy tag and you have the spell in your spellbook. You don't need to have the spell prepared.

Your spellbook functions as your book of alchemical formulas, but the notation of an alchemical formula is different from that of your wizard spells. For example, if you have the *burning hands* spell in your spell book, you can prepare it and cast it using a spell slot. However, you must also have the alchemical formula for *burning hands* in your spellbook to also be able create an alchemical admixture of it.

## ALCHEMY FEATS

The following new feats are designed to work with the variant rules for alchemy presented above.

### ALCHEMICAL ADEPT

**Prerequisite:** *Intelligence or Wisdom 13 or higher, proficiency with alchemical supplies, herbalism kit, or poisoner's kit*

You have learned the secrets to unlocking the “magical” nature of alchemy.

You gain the following benefits:

- You can create alchemical admixtures of spells (see Alchemical Admixtures variant rule). These spells are written in a book of alchemical formulas, which you must have on hand while preparing one of them. You do not need to have a spell prepared to create the alchemical admixture version of it, but you must have mastered the alchemical formula for it.
- When you choose this feat, you acquire a book of alchemical formulas holding the formulas for one cantrip and two 1st-level spells of your choice. Choose one of the following classes: cleric or wizard. You must choose your spells from that class's spell list, and the spells you choose must have the alchemy tag. The class you choose also determines your spellcasting ability for these spells: Wisdom for cleric or Intelligence for wizard.
  - If you already have a book of alchemical formulas, you can either add one cantrip and two 1st-level spells from your existing class spell list to your book of alchemical formulas, or you can choose another class and learn the formulas for spells as specified above. You cannot cast these spells in any way except as alchemical admixtures, unless you also have access to them by way of your class's Spellcasting or some other similar feature.
- A number of times per day equal to one-half your Intelligence or Wisdom modifier rounded down (minimum 1), when you create an alchemical admixture, you can do so without expending alchemical reagents.

You must decide to use this ability before making the ability check to determine the success or failure of creating the item.

After a long rest, you regain all uses of this ability.

- If you come across a spell in written form, such as a magical spell scroll or a wizard's spellbook, you might be able to add it to your book of alchemical formulas. The spell must be on the spell list for the class you chose or a class for which you can cast spells, the spell's level can be no higher than half your level (rounded up), and it must have the alchemy tag. The process of copying the spell into your book of alchemical formulas takes 2 hours per level of the spell, and costs 50 gp per level. The cost represents reagents used up while experimenting with the spell. These reagents and ingredients may include precious metals, unusual salts, rare herbs, dangerous toxins, exotic oils, and the like.

## ALCHEMICAL EXPERT

*Prerequisite: Proficiency with alchemical supplies, herbalism kit, or poisoner's kit*

You have been trained by a skilled alchemist, herbalist, or poisonmaker and have learned how to quickly and efficiently create alchemical items.

You gain the following benefits:

- Increase your Intelligence or Wisdom score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- A number of times per day equal to one-half your Intelligence or Wisdom modifier rounded down (minimum 1), when you spend 1 hour creating an unstable version of a single alchemical item (as described in the Practical Alchemy variant rule), you do not expend any reagents.

You must decide to use this ability before making the ability check to determine the success or failure of creating the item.

After a long rest, you regain all uses of this ability.

- You can attempt to create two items during 1 hour of work. If you attempt to create only two items, you have disadvantage on the ability check.

You make a separate check for each item you attempt to create.

You do not need to make more than one of the same item in the hour's time, but all items created must use the same set of tools.