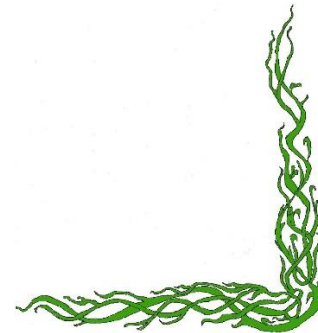
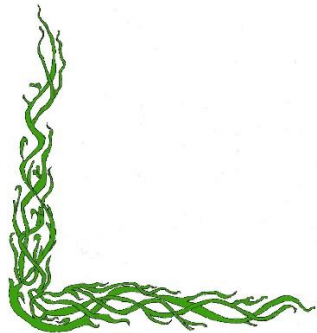


Flora for All Occasions

*A Treatise on Herbology
by Grishteblan of the Lesser Wood*



For centuries I have lived in the Lesser Wood, tending flower, tree, bush, shoot, and herb, with loving care. Over the centuries I have seen many a creature graze upon their leaves and fruit, hide in their boughs, rest in their shade, and grow a family on their toil. For lest the farmer or the forager forget, plants too toil to produce food, and it is their longsuffering nature that draws me to my trade day after day, year after year.

I seek to pass some of this knowledge on to you, of what you might expect from the flowers, trees, and foliage of every kind on our beautiful planet. We are truly blessed to live here, and I hope that by the time you close this tome you will walk away with more love and appreciation for our world because of the beautiful plants that populate it.

Grishteblan

Chapter I: Taxonomy: The Five Classes of Plants in Zurn

As everyone knows, this planet is separated into five kingdoms: the **animal kingdom** (filled with sentient and non-sentient life that move across the planet in air, land, and sea), the **plant kingdom** (filled with plants of all shapes and sizes, possessing life but lacking sentience as we understand it), the **water kingdom** (possessing motion without life or sentience in three stages: mist, liquid, and solid), the **earth kingdom** (consisting of stone, dirt, and the inanimate matter upon which all land creatures dwell), and the **nether kingdom** (the inner region of the earth that contains both the Shroud, where the dead wait for the Final Day, and the Abyss, where the demons dwell).

All of these three kingdoms comprise the physical realm, even though all of them have elements of the magical and supernatural realm in them as well. This work examines the second kingdom, and my personal favorite among them all. While animals show the complexity and logic the world, plants offer a vibrant simplicity all their own, and it is this simplicity that I seek to study here.

The Five Plant Classes

Like the world, plants also have five primary subdivisions that mimic the five realms of the world. Each shares characteristics with the others (which makes them plants), but fills a different need in the world (which determines their class).

Trees are the most commonly remembered plants, as people tend to think of the largest plants that make up the landscape (and thus are the easiest to see). Trees are all over ten feet tall (with their

height being the primary distinction between a tree and a shrub, so this rule is pretty commonly enforced in the natural world) and may be deciduous (they drop their leaves annually) or coniferous (they look more or less the same all the time).

Like the animal kingdom, tree trunks and branches have few limitations on how much they can grow, except that which can be sustained by the tree. Unlike other plants, though, there is also less diversification and variety within each species.

Shrubs are the next tallest, and offer a balance between variety and growth. Shrubs are usually between four and ten feet tall, and have many uses to a forest, garden, or mountain pass. They serve as shelters, barriers, food, and hiding places, servicing great and small alike (albeit in different ways). They are, in that sense, the most plant-like of them all.

Bushes are plants that are usually less than four feet tall, and they serve a host of needs for animal and region alike. Bushes are primarily distinguished from shrubs in that they produce fruits and have a central stem, while shrubs often have multiple stems tied to the same plant.

Bushes are truly wonderful plants: they not only enrich the land by losing their leaves and fruits in regular intervals, but also provide ample food and shade for creatures, which further enriches the soil. Bushes are, in that sense, akin to the water kingdom, in their primary function being restorative and rejuvenating for the world and its creatures.

Flowers are akin to the earth kingdom: they grow, they die, and spring back to life in a habitual cycle, revitalizing the earth with their short lifespans. They are primarily distinguished from herbs in that flowers have, well, flowers, while herbs generally lack the bright plumage of a flower (as you will see below). Flowers are used for decoration and attracting insects that will help with the growing of crops and garden plants.

And finally, **herbs** are spices that have medicinal and flavor qualities to them. Much like the nether kingdom there are many

things about the properties of herbs that we do not understand, and this is the realm of the doctor and herbalist. Herbs come in a host of sizes, and are quite common across Zurn: what makes the practice of medicine and cooking special is the proper allocation of herbs, not the presence of herbs.

Uses of Plants

If you have not noticed the utility of plants in the world around you, you have been living a sheltered life under a rock (or else you would know that you can get shelter from a plant). Plants give us food (and is the principle means of fattening up the animals that you eat, if you don't eat plants), shelter (both for wooden structures and in the thatch and other ancillary supplies used for other structures), clothing (as synthetic fabrics made from leaves, stalks, etc. is very common), and of course weapons and armor.

This also means craftsmen across different disciplines will use plants for their livelihood. The farmer and the forester use their strength to harvest crops and wood, while the seamstress uses flax when using her Finesse to sew a new shirt.

One might even go as far as to say that everything in a town or settlement owes itself at some point to plants, as they are formative for everything we do, use, and consume.

Conclusion

And this means that, at its core, you should respect plants. I am not saying that you must not cut down trees, pick berries from a bush, or erect hedges for your property. Rather, treat plants with respect: they are very selfless creatures, perhaps the most selfless beings in the world, and thus for their great sacrifices I implore you to treat them with deference, respect, and forbearance.

Chapter II: The Trees of Zurn

You will learn to love trees. Trees are the core of every forest, the backbone of most buildings, and the shelter (if not home) of the majority of creatures on our green earth.

So when I tell you that we are tackling a big project when I attempt to catalog the trees of the world, you will understand why I am taking my time in writing this chapter, as I have been given the task of building the most holistic cataloging of one of the most essential components of the world.

I consider full-grown trees in four heights: small trees (about ten feet to twenty feet tall), standard trees (from twenty to forty feet tall), large trees (forty to one hundred feet), and massive trees (anything taller than that). As a general rule most trees are standard or large trees.

We also note the trees by their relative tiers (on a scale of 1 to 4), showing how rare they are to find, as well as how resilient the wood is (ranked on a scale from 0 to 4, to show the alloy of the wood you would obtain were you to cut it down).

Fruit Trees

Fruit trees have two functions: to produce fruit (both for their own continued survival and that of the creatures in the vicinity), and eventually to produce wood when the tree cannot produce fruit any longer. These trees are numerous across Zurn, and their fruit is thus understandably varied.

The fruit of most trees can be found in the soft flesh of the pome it produces, though not all fruits are edible by every creature. In its desire to protect its fruit it is possible that a tree may add a poison to its fruit so as to keep it safe, which, in all honesty, I can't

blame the tree. So I won't. My caution to you is for you to learn which fruits are edible, which are not, and to respect both trees for the fruit that they produce.

The following is a list of fruit trees I have seen; I have heard of others in distant lands (if mariner stories are to be believed):

- ❖ **Apple Tree** (*Standard, T1 Rarity, T0 Alloy, Base Strength: 12D to resist damage, Flammable*): A tree that produces a fruit we call the "apple." It has a good yield, and while its fruit is not as large as some of the others, its meat is stronger and more resilient than others, and thus is less susceptible to blights and disease. It also has some cleansing properties in its meat, so cultures that eat apples tend to have decent public health (herbal poultices with apple seeds in it are LOR+2 to Medicine rolls with the poultice). The wood is reliable for woodworking, though it is a rudimentary wood.
- ❖ **Avocado Tree** (*Large, T1 Rarity, T2 Alloy, Base Strength: 14D to resist damage, Flammable*): The avocado tree is a strong and durable tree of massive height (sometimes upwards of sixty feet) that produces a decent yield of avocados, a small fruit with a tough exterior and protects a porous meat-filled interior surrounding a massive spherical seed. It is the only tree in Zurn that I have observed to create a spherical seed. The avocado's meat is both tasty and has medicinal qualities to it, with cultures often ingesting it to help with digestion as well as applying it to the skin as a soothing agent (may remove 1 skin-based or stomach-based poison, disease, or irritant).

- ❖ **Bael Tree** (*Massive, T4 Rarity, T4 Alloy, Base Strength: 16D to resist damage, Damage Table+15, Flammable*): A massive tree that produces a good yield of fruit which look like apples from far away. They could not be more different, though: the outside is green, wooly, and tough, and often requires a hatchet, machete, or sharp rock to open. Inside you will find a very aromatic fruit.¹ It takes almost a year for the fruit to ripen, though the tree has over 100 fruit in its yield, so it more than compensates you for the waiting time.
- ❖ **Banana Tree** (*Small, T1 Rarity, T0 Alloy, Base Strength: 12D to resist damage, Flammable*): A standard tree that produces a fair yield of fruit known as bananas. These are unique as they grow in a massive cluster that we trolls lovingly refer to as a "hand" (instead of growing on different stems like other fruits). A porous skin overlays the meat, and the seeds that are so small that even the smallest creatures in Zurn ingest them without incident.
- ❖ **Cherry Tree** (*Small, T2 Rarity, T1 Alloy, Base Strength: 13D to resist damage, Damage Table+5, Flammable*): Cherry trees are small trees, but its durable wood has made it highly lucrative for woodworking. The fruit is small, with a large seed in the center of very juicy meat. The exterior is soft yet has great tensile strength, holding back the juices of the meat until it is punctured by creature or nature.
- ❖ **Coconut Tree** (*Standard, T2 Rarity, T2 Alloy, Base Strength: 14D to resist damage, Damage Table+5, Flammable*): Far and away the largest seed in the world, the coconut tree does not believe in putting meat on its seeds. Instead the seed

¹ Some say that the bael smells like ambrosia mixed with roses; I have never had ambrosia so I cannot say if this is true, but I can confirm it smells like roses.

of the large, slender tree is wrapped over and over again in a protective wooly casing, making it a dangerous projectile when it falls (or is thrown). In the seed you will find an oily substance as well as a white fleshy coating, both of which are edible. The seed also has an oily substance in it, which is good as a topical cream (remove 1 skin-based poison, disease, or irritant) or for lighting lamps. The shell is strong and durable, and often used for lamps, bowls, or containers on journeys by islanders.

- ❖ **Dageeba Tree** (*Small, T1 Rarity, T0 Alloy, Base Strength: 12D to resist damage, Flammable*): A small tree that produces way more fruit than you would expect for a tree its size, the dageeba grows best by the shore, and is denoted by the white stripes going up the trunk (probably due to the salt it draws through its roots). It produces the dageeb, a small fruit that starts soft, tender, and bitter, but sweetens as it grows. The growth process causes the fruit to wrinkle, so generally the more contorted the fruit's appearance the sweeter it is.
- ❖ **Fig Tree** (*Standard, T2 Rarity, T1 Alloy, Base Strength: 13D to resist damage, Damage Table+5 Flammable*): Deciduous trees that sprout leaves, followed by their fruit, followed by the falling of their leaves, the fig tree grows in arid places and requires little water. Its fruit has a tough exterior, but the flesh within is exceptional. Worth all the effort of getting it open. The fig tree has tough wood that can be used for woodworking, and is above average in quality for being a fruit tree, but will not compare to a true hardwood tree.
- ❖ **Jakfruit Tree** (*Large, T2 Rarity, T0 Alloy, Base Strength: 12D to resist damage, Damage Table+5, Flammable*): The jakfruit is an anomaly among fruits, in that it is like a fig in its flesh

and texture, but is akin to the breadfruit in its exterior. The tree itself is very large, easily shading animals under its leaves. The wood of the jakfruit tree is not particularly impressive, but it is plentiful, as the tree is very large.

- ❖ **Jujube Tree** (*Large, T1 Rarity, T2 Alloy, Base Strength: 14D to resist damage, Flammable*): The jujube (as the alopens call it) goes by many names, and is found in the Eastern reaches of the continent. The fruit is small but packed with nutrients, and since the tree is enormous the yield is great. The pollen from the tree is heavy and thick, making it hard from some races to breathe near the tree when it sheds its pollen (targets with a base Strength of 5D+ must make a Stamina roll, which is a Strength roll, on a Difficulty 4X, where X = their base Strength, to avoid suffering a FIN-3D penalty to rolls and a STR-3D penalty to movement rolls due to hard breathing). The wood is quite durable, and some woodworkers prize its wood for its unique gray hue.
- ❖ **Lemon Tree** (*Standard, T1 Rarity, T0 Alloy, Base Strength: 12D to resist damage, Flammable*): A good-sized tree that produces yellow, sour fruits with a tough rind, the lemon tree is quite common, mostly for its presence as a spice and additive to improve the taste of a meal. Since the tree is low-maintenance and abundant, it is not uncommon to only find one or two lemon trees in an orchard, as its demand is less than that of the apple and jujube.
- ❖ **Lychee Tree** (*Small, T3 Rarity, T0 Alloy, Base Strength: 12D to resist damage, Damage Table+10, Flammable*): A small, frail tree that produces a decent yield of fruit, the lychee is easily distinguished from other fruits in that its soft, delicious flesh is protected by a red armored exterior. While not protected from larger animals or persons, against insects

and smaller creatures the armor is actually quite resilient, and has been used by sprites for torso pieces and helms in a pinch. Lychee trees tend to grow better in the lowlands where the temperature has less fluctuation.

- ❖ **Nectarine Tree** (*Small, T1 Rarity, T0 Alloy, Base Strength: 12D to resist damage, Flammable*): Nectarines are resilient fruits with a tough meaty center around a strong seed. Its red and yellow complexion is considered beautiful by many, though it is more neutral in sweetness than you might expect. The tree is relatively small, making it ideal for small plot farmers as it has a decent yield that will sell well at market.
- ❖ **Nutmeg Tree** (*Small, T2 Rarity, T1 Alloy, Base Strength: 13D to resist damage, Damage Table+5, Flammable*): The nutmeg tree grows to be about fourteen feet tall, and produces large fruit with a massive nut at the center. The fruit is quite spicy, and is used in dishes as a cleanser for the palate. The nut itself is quite useful, often ground into a powder (which is where the name originates from) after being pressed to release an oil that is potent for healing maladies of the stomach, sensory diseases, and headaches (adding a LOR+1D to Medicine rolls when ingested, or the bearer may remove 1 appropriate poison, infection, or irritant). The tree is commonly found in warmer portions of the world that get a lot of rain, as the tree requires a lot of watering.
- ❖ **Olive Tree** (*Standard, T3 Rarity, T1 Alloy, Base Strength: 13D to resist damage, Damage Table+10, Flammable*): Olive trees may only be of standard size, but among all trees this is perhaps the most useful tree of all. With a sturdy trunk and big leafy boughs it is a fine means of shade and wood, but

its true virtue is its fruit. The olive is good for food, good for fuel for a candle or lantern, and has medicinal properties for the body, so it is often used to anoint the body.

- ❖ **Pear Tree** (*Standard, T2 Rarity, T0 Alloy, Base Strength: 12D to resist damage, Damage Table+5, Flammable*): Pears are among the most resilient of fruits, and are almost so tough you would think their meat was not a fruit. Less commonly found than apples and nectarines, pears require a stable environment to grow for maximum yield. The tree itself is a respectable size though its leaves are small and spread out so it provides little shade from the sun.
- ❖ **Persimmon Tree** (*Massive, T2 Rarity, T2 Alloy, Base Strength: 14D to resist damage, Damage Table+5, Flammable*): A massive tree referred to by the fauns as the diospyron tree (or “the divine fruit,” as they call it), the persimmon is a reddish orange fruit that is quite resilient against the elements (and can even grow during the winter after temperatures drop). The aroma and taste is strong, and are often dried and crushed for incense and spaces. The trees are also male and female – male trees have flowers with a pink hue, while the female trees have creamy white flowers, and pollen from the male trees pollenate the flowers (which result in fruit) on the female trees.
- ❖ **Pomegranate Tree** (*Standard, T4 Rarity, T0 Alloy, Base Strength: 12D to resist damage, Damage Table+15, Flammable*): A big tree that produces relatively large fruit with hundreds of small pockets containing an odd fleshy substance (almost like small prisms) that surrounds a tiny seed. Pomegranates are labor-intensive to harvest and shell, but with enough patience you will find within a sweet and

delectable fruit. The added labor (and thus cost) of using pomegranates in food makes it more expensive, so it is most common to find it employed in the dishes of royalty.

- ❖ **Xretal Tree** (*Large, T2 Rarity, T1 Alloy, Base Strength: 13D to resist damage, Damage Table+5, Flammable*): The xretal tree is large and full of massive leaves, which are also its fruit. It is deciduous in nature, and its leaves are as thick as a human finger, carrying in them both the veins of a leaf to grasp the sunlight, but also serving as the seed of future xretal trees. As the leaves grow old and die, they shrivel, locking away the essence of the tree into the leaf, and allowing it to be carried away by the wind. Its trunk is sturdy and can easily shade a dozen trolls beneath its boughs. The sap of the tree is delicious, and can be tasted in part through the leaves as well (which are known as a delicacy across Zurn).

Some trees will produce edible seeds (nuts, seeds, etc.), but they possess no fruit accompanying the seeds. They also tend to have stronger wood, so we commonly call them “hardwood trees.” This is where we turn next, and is a critical list of trees for anyone who has an interest in woodworking.

Hardwood Trees

Hardwood trees are exceptionally tough and strong, making for excellent buildings and craftsmanship. Hardwood trees come in a host of sizes, and almost any wood can be used for crafting, though weaker wood will not stand up as well during the crafting process or over time.

- ❖ **Ash Tree** (*Standard, T1 Rarity, T0 Alloy, Base Strength: 12D to resist damage, Flammable*): The ash tree has a tough exterior

but is incredibly pliable, and thus is used in the creation of bows, crossbows, and wooden items that need to be curved or shaped. If a wooden item in Zurn does not have an alloy, it is likely made of ash. Ash trees are plentiful across Zurn and are identified by their grayish-white bark.

- ❖ **Alder Tree** (*Large, T2 Rarity, T3 Alloy, Base Strength: 15D to resist damage, Damage Table+5, Flammable*): Alder trees are among the strongest and toughest trees in all of Zurn. Their serrated leaves soak in the sun to feed the catkins that flower on their branches, which sometimes appear before the leaves return in the spring. The bark of an alder tree is useful for curing skin maladies, and thus it is common for medicine men to carry alder bark with them (adding a LOR+2D to Medicine rolls on skin, or the bearer may remove 1 skin-based poison, infection, or irritant).
- ❖ **Aspen Tree** (*Standard, T1 Rarity, T0 Alloy, Base Strength: 12D to resist damage, Flammable*): Aspens are thin trees that grow quickly in colder regions, sending out a wide root system that then breaks off and clones itself to create a new tree. The trunks are white with speckles (with the speckles varying in color based on the surrounding soil) and the wood is very soft, making it ideal for the creation of paper. Most paper in Zurn is made from aspens.
- ❖ **Bamboo Tree** (*Standard, T2 Rarity, T2 Alloy, Base Strength: 14D to resist damage, Damage Table+5, Flammable*): A thin yet resilient stalk commonly found in wet climates, bamboo requires constant water to thrive. Its stalk is elastic, though, with a lot of give in it to keep it from snapping under intense pressure. This has made it a wood of choice for staffs and other weapons that use a sweeping strike, as the wood itself helps in hitting the opponent.

Items using bamboo for its Tier 2 alloy gain the following bonuses instead of the standard Tier 2 bonuses:

Weapons: Bearer is FIN+1D to-hit with this weapon, and LOR+1D to cast magic.

Armor: Bearer is FIN+1D to parry in this armor, and LOR+1D to cast magic.

Architecture: *Unaffected*

- ❖ **Beech Tree** (*Massive, T2 Rarity, T1 Alloy, Base Strength: 13D to resist damage, Damage Table+5, Flammable*): Beech trees are very tall – usually upwards of 120 feet at full maturity – and their shade is extensive underneath the dome-like structure of the tree. The beechnuts they produce in autumn have a high fat content, so they can both be consumed or pressed for oil. The bark on a beech tree is relatively porous, making it a natural choice for carving warnings, sigils, or the names of lovers, hence why the Leafwalkers refer to the beech tree as *Melincoia*, “The Lover’s Tree.” While the bark is relatively weak it is also workable with a good smell, and is commonly used for food barrels (to allow the aroma of the wood to sink in), drums (with a timber between maple and birch), and firewood (as it cuts easily, burns for hours, and produces a controlled fire).

Items that use beech for its Tier 1 alloy gain the following bonuses instead of the standard Tier 1 bonuses:

Weapons: Bearer is STR+1 to damage rolls with the weapon, and LOR+1D+1 to cast magic.

Armor: Bearer is STR+1 to resist magical damage, and LOR+1D+1 to cast magic.

Architecture: Building is STR+1 to the defense of the structure, but does not gain the *flammable* description against elemental and magical fire damage.

- ❖ **Birch Tree** (*Large, T2 Rarity, T2 Alloy, Base Strength: 14D to resist damage, Damage Table+5, Flammable*): A tall white tree that splits its trunk, the birch is a truly magnificent tree. Its wood is stronger and more durable than the beech, and yet it is very light, making it ideal for craftsmanship (and is commonly used in crafting deep-timbered drums) and architects (as it can be easily transported to a build site without compromising the strength of the structure).

Items that use beech for its Tier 1 alloy gain the following bonuses instead of the standard Tier 1 bonuses:

Weapons: Bearer is STR+1D+1 to damage rolls with the weapon, and LOR+2 to cast magic.

Armor: Bearer is STR+2 to resist physical and magical damage, and LOR+2 to cast magic.

Architecture: Building is STR+2D to the defense of the structure, and maintains the *flammable* description against elemental and magical fire damage (STR+1D to damage).

- ❖ **Bloodwood Tree** (*Large, T2 Rarity, T3 Alloy, Base Strength: 15D to resist damage, Damage Table+5, Flammable*): A tree that grows up to sixty feet tall, with small berries springing from its blackened boughs. The sap of the tree is a thick, dark red, hence the name. The wood lets off a sweet aroma, and it is common to build chests from bloodwood to pass its scent on to clothes or other items in the chest.

Legend says that there is a curse associated with the tree; I know of no actual curse tied to the tree, though foul men

have used bloodwood to inspire a sense of awe and dread. The nobleman, Vorganstaad the Impaler, used a lance of bloodwood, and as one song says of a bandit, “whose bow of red / Would strike its mark where’ere it sped.”

Items with bloodwood for its Tier 3 alloy gain the following bonuses instead of the standard Tier 3 bonuses:

Weapons: Bearer is STR+2D to damage rolls with the weapon, and is LOR+1D+1 to cast magic. This is increased to LOR+2D to cast Fire and Arcane spells, and is reduced to LOR-2 to cast Air, Desert, and Water spells.

Armor: Bearer is STR+1D to resist physical and magical damage, and LOR+1D+1 to cast magic. This is increased to LOR+2D to cast Fire and Arcane spells, and is reduced to LOR-2 to cast Air, Desert, and Water spells.

Architecture: *Unaffected*

- ❖ **Cedar Tree** (*Massive, T2 Rarity, T4 Alloy, Base Strength: 16D to resist damage, Damage Table+5, Flammable*): One of the strongest and most resilient trees in Zurn, the cedar is a towering giant of the forest. Its wood is very rot resistant, making it a natural choice for building materials, and also releases an aroma that is pleasing to most nostrils, though moths and pests avoid it, making it ideal for storage chests. The relatively light yet resilient heartwood is commonly used for constructing boats.

Items using cedar for its Tier 4 alloy gain the following bonuses instead of the standard Tier 4 bonuses:

Weapons: *Unaffected*

Armor: Bearer is STR+1D to resist physical and magical damage, STR+1D to resist the elements, and is LOR+1D to cast spells.

Architecture: *Unaffected*

- ❖ **Elm Tree** (*Massive, T2 Rarity, T3 Alloy, Base Strength: 15D to resist damage, Damage Table+5, Flammable*): A tree that grows to be over 100 feet tall, and usually splits into two trunks to spread the weight of its vast limbs. The branches are very strong, and are thus used in silverback culture for hanging offenders against the tribe. The legend is that the tree itself is tied to death, and is often associated with death in most cultures. Its wood is very durable, and is extremely resistant to shattering, making it ideal for wagon wheels, carts, or anything else requiring nails.

Items using elm for its Tier 3 alloy gain the following bonuses instead of the standard Tier 3 bonuses:

Weapons: Bearer is STR+1D to damage rolls with the weapon, LOR+1D+1 to cast magic, and STAT+1D to all damage rolls for spells from Dark and Harrower Lore.

Armor: Bearer is STR+2 to resist physical and magical damage, LOR+1D to cast magic, and STAT+1D to all damage rolls for spells from Dark and Harrower Lore.

Architecture: *Unaffected*

- ❖ **Ironwood Tree** (*Large, T3 Rarity, T4 Alloy, Base Strength: 16D to resist damage, Damage Table+10, Flammable*): The strongest wood in Zurn, ironwood trees grow where the soil is rich in iron and other metals, which it brings into its trunk for an exceptionally resilient frame. Many axes have been dulled or broken cutting down a single ironwood tree, which often grows up to eighty feet tall and over eight feet

thick. It is not as closely tied to the magical realm as other trees are due to its increased iron deposits, but foresters value them for their added resilience and strength.

Items using ironwood for its Tier 4 alloy gain the following bonuses instead of the standard Tier 4 bonuses:

Weapons: Bearer is STR+3D to damage rolls with the weapon, and FIN+1D to parry attempts.

Armor: Bearer is STR+2D to resist physical and magical damage.

Architecture: *Unaffected*

- ❖ **Hazel Tree** (*Standard, T1 Rarity, T2 Alloy, Base Strength: 14D to resist damage, Flammable*): A tree that stands about twenty to forty feet tall, the tree produces leaves with spines which ward away predators. The tree is commonly regarded by faun and satyr mystics as being tied to wisdom and knowledge (not visions, but wisdom), and thus they hold a special place in those cultures. Hazels are quite common across Zurn, and most items made by proficient craftsmen (not artisans, who would prefer a more difficult and resilient wood) are made of hazel.
- ❖ **Mallor Tree** (*Large, T3 Rarity, T3 Alloy, Base Strength: 15D to resist damage, Damage Table+10*): A silver tree with leaves of gold, mallor trees are rare and beautiful. Their flowers are like sapphires, and they bloom every other year at the start of the winter frost. The wood is mid-range in its durability, but unparalleled in its beauty, commonly used by royalty in

their palaces. It is also rumored that the wood will not ignite, whether by elemental or magical flame.

Items using mallor for its Tier 3 alloy gain the following bonuses instead of the standard Tier 3 bonuses:

Weapons: Bearer is STR+1D+1 to damage rolls with the weapon, and LOR+2D to cast spells.

Armor: Bearer is STR+2 to resist physical and magical damage, and is LOR+2D to cast spells.

Architecture: Building is STR+2 to the defense of the structure, non-siege melee and ranged weapons are STR-1D to their damage roll. Persons associated with the building are CRM+2D to Court and Impression rolls.

- ❖ **Maple Tree** (*Large, T2 Rarity, T2 Alloy, Base Strength: 14D to resist damage, Damage Table+5, Flammable*): Maple trees are known for both their vibrant colors and their sweet sap. They produce the most incredible seeds I've ever seen: a seed is attached to a structure that looks like a sprite wing, and it twirls round and round slowing the descent of the seed to the ground.² The sprites call these seeds, "Twirly Whirlies," while the centaurs call them "Samaras." Maples have more vibrant colors if there is a lot of precipitation leading up to autumn, so generally speaking more rainfall will mean brighter, more vibrant trees. Magic can also help.
- ❖ **Oak Tree** (*Massive, T1 Rarity, T3 Alloy, Base Strength: 15D to resist damage, Flammable*): Oaks are strong and tall, easily reaching over 100 feet in height, and they have tough, sturdy trunks and branches. Their fruit comes in the form

² I quite enjoyed playing with these as a child – it took a great amount of skill, as my hands were massive compared to them, but once you get the hang of the spin, they are enormously fun! I will always look fondly on those days.

of the acorn, a resilient nut that is heavy in fat content and makes for a filling meal (with a tolerable taste). Oaks can be found in most major forests in Zurn, and due to their sturdy branches are often home to flying creatures like griffons and worbles.

- ❖ **Pine Tree** (*Large, T2 Rarity, T1 Alloy, Base Strength: 13D to resist damage, Damage Table+5, Flammable*): Tall coniferous trees with surprisingly light wood, pines are common in the highland mountains. Due to the myriad needles it sheds on the forest floor, it is very hard for other hardwoods to grow near pine trees. Its wood is porous for a hardwood, but its virtues extend far beyond wood for your fireplace. The wood just past the bark is edible, and troll shamans encourage eating it regularly because of its medicinal properties. You will often find pine pulp in poultices and teas for this reason (adding a LOR+2 to Medicine rolls).

Items using pine for its Tier 1 alloy gain the following bonuses instead of the standard Tier 1 bonuses:

Weapons: *Unaffected*

Armor: *Unaffected*

Architecture: Building is STR+1 to the defense of the structure, gains the *flammable* description against elemental and magical fire damage, and is -10 to the difficulty to build the structure (due to lighter building materials).

- ❖ **Temar Tree** (*Large, T1 Rarity, T4 Alloy, Base Strength: 16D to resist damage, Flammable*): Tall, majestic trees whose branches form “pads” conducive for nests, the temar tree is among the hardiest trees in Zurn. Usually eighty to ninety feet in height, temar trees are thick and durable, easily over six feet in thickness and weighing in as one of the heaviest

hardwoods in the world. It is relatively easy to find (and very easy to spot), and is strong enough to hold a midnight dragon family if they sought shelter in its boughs. When a forester wants quality wood for an artisan craftsman, he chooses a temar tree.

- ❖ **Willow Tree** (*Standard, T2 Rarity, T3 Alloy, Base Strength: 15D to resist damage, Damage Table+5, Flammable*): The willow is “the weeping tree,” often tied in lore to sadness and gloom. Some even say it is a portent of misfortune to brush against a willow tree, but the nymphs disagree: willows are graceful trees, littering the ground with tendrils that help flowers grow, so the presence of a willow is a good sign for a garden or forest. Willow wood is not particularly strong, but it is very closely tied to the magical realm, and thus its wood is often prized by mages for their staffs, spears, and bows. It is, in many ways, the antithesis of the oak tree: while one is tall, grand, and proud, the willow is hunched, modest in its size, and hangs its head. But its hanged head points to the earth, which is where its true love is – for the growing things around it. And that is why its connection to the magical realm is so strong.

Items using willow for its Tier 3 alloy gain the following bonuses instead of the standard Tier 3 bonuses:

Weapons: Bearer is STR+2 to damage rolls with the weapon, and LOR+2D+2 to cast magic.

Armor: Bearer is STR+2 to resist physical and magical damage, and LOR+2D to cast magic.

Architecture: *Unaffected*

- ❖ **Yew Tree** (*Standard, T1 Rarity, T1 Alloy, Base Strength: 13D to resist damage, Flammable*): A coniferous tree that grows to

between forty and sixty feet in height, the yew tree is resilient and thick, with a trunk usually wider than seven feet. Its bark is relatively thin, and tends to come off in flakes (which are bitter and toxic if swallowed). Yet yew wood is very resilient and quite common, so it is used all around the world for utility wooden items.

Dangerous Trees

As we mentioned in the last chapter, plants are distinguished from animals in that they lack the sentience of the animal kingdom. Plants lack a consciousness to direct their actions, which means when a plant has the natural ability to act – especially in dangerous ways – it is wise to be mindful of the danger you are in, because there is no reasoning with a plant.

The following plants can be quite dangerous if you are not prepared (and depending on your size), so be mindful of them.

❖ **Cholla Cactus** (*Standard, T2 Rarity, T0 Alloy, Base Strength: 12D to resist damage, Damage Table+5, Flammable*): A desert tree with small sharp spines that it can jettison when it feels endangered. The spines have a mild toxin that causes the skin to break out, causing itching (which burrows the spines deeper into the skin). The best solution to this is a good salve for the itching, followed by meticulous pulling of the spines from the skin, as spells and prayers for healing will remove the damage, but will not remove the spines (the cactus shoots the spines as a *Stomp* attack at all targets within medium range with a FIN-5D to dodge, dealing 8D of physical damage. If the target is hit and does not have metal armor on all zones of the facing that is attacked by the cactus, the target suffers a *Glancing Hit* at the start of each beat until the spines are removed, and the target gains the *Hives* and *Blistering Skin* effects. The wounds may be

removed by any means, but the spines may only be extracted with a Fine Motors Skill roll, which is a Finesse roll, on a Difficulty: 20+).

- ❖ **Ka'ax Tree** (*Standard, T3 Rarity, T2 Alloy, Base Strength: 14D to resist damage, Damage Table+10, Flammable*): A jungle tree with roots that surround the trunk and reach down into the ground, ka'ax trees provide easy handholds for climbers who want to take advantage of their height (which is usually anywhere from forty to sixty feet). But don't let my words fool you: the tree defends itself against creatures by grasping them with its tendrils (which apparently can reach up to medium range from the tree, if it really wants to grasp the target), dragging them beneath the tree to ingest them (the target is hit with a *Stomp* attack with a FIN-3D to dodge: if hit, the target is held with a Strength of 16D, and suffers 12D of elemental damage each beat from the acid).
- ❖ **Paopu Trees** (*Standard, T3 Rarity, T2 Alloy, Base Strength: 13D to resist damage, Damage Table+10, Flammable*): The paopu is shaped much like a coconut tree, only it produces a fruit that is shaped like a five-pointed star. The fruit itself is quite unique: it is rumored that the fates of the first two people who eat of the same fruit will be entwined, for good or for ill. Paopu trees are often found near the sea, often to the west (as the setting sun seems to help the fruit grow).
- ❖ **Sandbox Tree** (*Large, T3 Rarity, T1 Alloy, Base Strength: 13D to resist damage, Damage Table+10, Flammable*): A cactus with small orange flowers that explode when the cactus feels threatened, releasing a deadly toxin (the target is hit with a *Stomp* attack with a FIN-5D to dodge, dealing 16D of elemental damage from the acid). Like other cacti, it also has spines which have a mild toxin (targets that touch the

spines without metal armor suffer a *Glancing Hit* and gain the *Neural Fog* effect).

❖ **Womping Willow** (*Large, T3 Rarity, T3 Alloy, Base Strength: 15D to resist damage, Damage Table+10, Flammable*): A massive willow that swings wildly at anything that moves near its large trunk and branches. Standing about eighty feet tall, a womping willow resembles a willow tree in its tendrils and trunk, except that the tendrils extend out and up instead of hanging down. When a creature comes near the willow, the willow begins to thrash wildly until the presence of the creature departs, either in fear or in the folds of death (the target is hit with a *Stomp* attack with a FIN-5D to dodge, dealing 22D of physical stun damage to the torso).

❖ **Wulracer of Kelmar** (*Massive, T3 Rarity, T4 Alloy, Base Strength: 16D to resist damage, Damage Table+10, Flammable*): A massive tree that sways its boughs to ward away creatures that touch its trunk. It is said that the tree has connections to the nether realm, allowing people to see visions of the future if they touch the hollow of the knots in its trunk. That's easier said than done, as grown warriors have had their skulls split open by its wild branches. Apparently it does not like to be touched.

Conclusion

Trees are as varied as the races of Zurn: they each have a call and purpose under heaven, and we are still learning of their abilities and potential. Trees serve as shelter, food, and raw materials for tools, making them among the most prized of all plant life.

And yet they blend into the background. One can look out on the sunset and see oceans of trees before him if he sits in the right

place, and while he takes in the view of the forest canopy set against the hills and mountains, he loses sight of the trees even though they are legion before him. This is because the call of the tree is to be the silent watchman, the steady workman diligently caring for the earth while reaching for the heavens.

And that is a nobler call than most creatures on this earth will ever attain. So before you fell a tree with your axe or saw – for trees must be felled so that new saplings can grow – think on the beauty of the plant before you, and be thankful that it reached that height through diligent toil amidst storms and drought. Then cut it down with the honor and dignity that it deserves.

Chapter III: The Shrubs of Zurn

Shrubs are perhaps the most shafted of all plants, both literally and metaphorically. Most shrubs have more than one stalk (being distinguished from trees in both height and the number of trunks that grow from the root system), and are commonly overlooked by the herbalist and naturalist alike, for they lack the size and grandeur of the tree, and the intricate beauty of the bush, flower, and herb.

But as we examine shrubs in this chapter, you will realize that the shrub plays an integral role in the life of the forest and society, and without it we would be looking at a radically different world.

Many common shrubs can be found in a peasant or yeoman garden. But there are also dangerous shrubs that can be quite harmful to you if you get too close or handle them improperly.

Common Shrubs

Common shrubs range from four to ten feet in height, with blossoms proceeding from their branches. They will vary based on the topography of the landscape, but all shrubs produce a fruit or flower (and is usually the means of naming the shrub).

- ❖ **Aloe** (*T2 Rarity*): A shrub between four to six feet when fully mature, the aloe is found in desert places and has great healing and medicinal properties. It is said that the aloe can sooth skin, remove sores, cleanse wounds, and break fevers. I believe the fever story to be far-fetched, but all of the other uses have been verified.
- ❖ **Blueberry** (*T1 Rarity*): Blueberry shrubs are plentiful in Zurn, and are known for their distinct bluish-purple

fruit. The berry is very healthy, extending the life of creatures that eat it in ways that defy science. The shrubs are relatively small, only four feet tall, but for being small they are very productive plants, providing a good yield of fruit every eight to nine months.

- ❖ **Cactus** (*T2 Rarity, T0 Alloy*): The cactus comes in many sizes and shapes, and is the staple plant of the desert due to its ability to store water and its affinity for arid climates. Some travelers have found that opening up a cactus can be a reliable way to find water in places with little to no natural tributaries, though be careful: their spines prick easily, and often come with a mild toxin (targets that touch the spines without metal armor suffer a *Glancing Hit* and gain the *Neural Fog* effect).
- ❖ **Conifer** (*T2 Rarity, T1 Alloy*): The conifer looks like a small tree – one might think it is a pine sapling – but they are different plants. Conifers produce a strong cone to carry its seeds, and while the shrubs only grow to be about eight feet tall, they are quite resilient plants, and have been used in royal gardens and peasant farms alike to block the wind, and add some beauty to their plot. Conifer branches grow thick and close, making it hard to see through or pass through the branches.
- ❖ **Corn** (*T1 Rarity*): A thick stock that sprouts fruit in the form of kernels, each of which houses a seed encased in a soft flesh that grows on a tough center, commonly called a “cob.” The seed and flesh are edible, and are commonly used across the world as sustenance.
- ❖ **Grape Vine** (*T2 Rarity*): A long, sturdy vine that produces grapes, a small fruit with a durable skin that

keeps its juicy interior safe. Grape vines are prized by commoner and noble alike, both because of the ease of growing them (as they require some pruning, but are otherwise self-sufficient in most respects) and for the many uses its fruit provides. Grape vines require a dry climate to thrive, so they are untenable in places with heavy rain and constant precipitation. Some have taken to building indoor gardens to grow grapes because of the inclement conditions, which has more success.

- ❖ **Fennel** (*T2 Rarity*): A shrub that grows up to eight feet tall, with very straight, smooth branches. Fennel wood burns slowly, so it is commonly used to make torches and the like, and twigs are used in tinderboxes.
- ❖ **Jasmine** (*T2 Rarity*): Jasmine shrubs are gorgeous, with a wide variety of colors for its flowers. The notable trait of the jasmine shrub is its smell: for only being about five to seven feet tall, jasmine has an overpowering scent that can carry for over a mile when in full bloom. The flowers also have sweet nectar, which is said by the sprites to be exquisite in taste.
- ❖ **Laurel** (*T2 Rarity*): A shrub that grows to be about six feet tall at full maturity, the laurel is evergreen, and never loses its color until it dies. Its leaves are soft to the touch, yet have excellent tensile strength, remaining strong and green for months after being plucked from the branch. This has led to the laurel being a sign of fame, as it stays fresh much longer than a plant can typically expect. This has also led shamans to use the

laurel in their salves, hoping that some of that life will pass to the patient.

- ❖ **Mistletoe** (*T2 Rarity*): A shrub that usually grows up to seven feet tall, mistletoe is unique in that it can thrive even when not rooted in the soil (in fact, in my time observing it I'm convinced it grows faster when out of soil). It produces a white berry that is not edible, but not harmful either: it's just bitter, and causes the stomach to turn and revolt against you. It is rumored that the leaves have great medicinal properties, though I think this is superstition: I have never seen a marked change in a poultice due to adding mistletoe leaves.
- ❖ **Rowan Tree** (*T1 Rarity, T0 Alloy*): Improperly named a "tree" by those who first came across it, I can verify from both its structure and its essence that the rowan tree is in fact a shrub.³ The rowan grows to be less than ten feet tall and does not have a central trunk, preferring three or four central stalks. Rowans can be found on almost any forested mountain in Zurn, and is among the tallest of the shrubs.
- ❖ **Strawberry** (*T2 Rarity*): The strawberry is a delicacy in almost every culture, with its red flesh being both sweet to the taste and possessing of seeds that do not present a danger to any creature in Zurn, no matter how small. The shrub itself can reach as tall as six feet, and is a resilient creature, able to withstand frost and dropping temperatures. It produces a decent yield, though the fruit is very large, making up for the smaller yield.

³ I had a chance a few years back to speak to a dryad who lived in a rowan, and he confirmed for me that the rowan is, in fact, a shrub. I would refer to it here

with the dignity that it deserves as a shrub, but were I to change its name it might confuse the casual reader who does not know any better, so I have refrained.

- ❖ **Thrush Hedge** (*T1 Rarity*): A hedge of thick stalks and branches that sprout grayish-brown flowers that look like thrushes. The flowers are round at the bottom, with a dappled gray color, and then sprout into four petals, one fatter than the others drooping down, the other three standing up like a bird's wings and tail as it descends. The hedge is thick, difficult to penetrate, and can grow up to ten feet tall, so it is commonly used to create hedgerows that mark boundaries. The hedge is so thick that even rodents have trouble getting through the hedge, making it ideal for anyone who wants to keep pests and vermin from their property.
- ❖ **Wheat** (*T1 Rarity*): Growing to about four to five feet in height, wheat stalks are thin and flimsy, ending with a tassel-like top that holds the seeds. The seeds are edible, and while wheat is very plentiful and grows quickly, it is easily damaged by vermin or storms.

Dangerous Shrubs

Some shrubs can be dangerous: there are not a lot of dangerous shrubs in Zurn, but the few that we have found are worth being aware of, lest you come across one in the future.

- ❖ **Blister Plant**: A plant about five feet tall that has thick, green leaves and reddish-orange berries that are sweet to the taste. Both the berries and the leaves however have a toxin within them, causing blisters on whatever touches them, and will irritate the throat and stomach if swallowed (the target gains the *Blistering Skin* poison effect). While not usually fatal, even the most veteran soldier will find it hard to do anything other than

scratch. I recommend a salve to relieve the itch, and an herbal poultice to ease the innards if ingested.

- ❖ **Fire Coral**: A vibrant red coral with tiny spines on it, the coral defends itself by releasing the spines into any creature that brushes up against it, causing the spines to embed deep into the skin. The spines feel like there is a fire in their skin, and cause constant agony until removed (the target suffers a *Glancing Hit* each beat, gains the *Neural Fog* and *Blistering Skin* effects, and may only lose these effects when the spines are removed with a Fine Motor Skills roll, which is a Finesse roll, on a Difficulty: 20+).
- ❖ **Sser**: The sser is about six feet tall, producing a small yellow berry that has a fragrance almost as strong as jasmine. The berries are extremely toxic, however, and give temporary blindness if ingested (the target gains the *Blindness* poison effect). The sser toxin is extremely virulent, causing blindness within seconds of being consumed that can last for hours until the sser toxin passes from the body. Natural defenses are virtually useless against the sser toxin.
- ❖ **Strangleweed** (*T2 Rarity, T1 Alloy*): Strangleweeds are seaweed strands that have prehensile abilities to grasp nearby creatures. They are not particularly dangerous on their own, but they love to cling to what they catch and drag them to the ocean floor. The result is that some creatures who must move or surface to breathe tend to find them dangerous. Creatures that can breathe easily underwater still find them dangerous, as they tend to grasp the appendages of creatures, making it harder to dodge, parry, or hit an opponent. So while

you may find torn remains of creatures in strangleweed tendrils, know that it is not the strangleweeds that are killing and eating them. Something else happened upon them while they were caught in the weeds.

Conclusion

Shrubs lack the diversity of trees and the vibrancy of bushes and flowers, but they serve a critical role. While the tree shelters, the bush feeds, the flower gives life, and the herb cleanses, the shrub provides volume. As larger plants the shrub provides greater food quantity where the bush and flower fail, and gives smaller creatures shelter in ways that the tree cannot.

The shrub is truly an incredible plant, underrated by most, but critical to a balanced world. Without the intermediary of the shrub, vermin would destroy smaller plants, trees would block the sun from the smaller plants, and animals would die. But because of the shrub, they all exist in balanced harmony.

Chapter IV: The Bushes of Zurn

Bushes: bushes are exciting plants. Generally small plants have shorter lifespans than tall plants, though there are a number of bushes that can live for over a hundred years if properly tended.

Bushes generally fall into two categories: bushes that we denote by the flower they bear, and bushes that have magical properties about them. As the plant with kinship to the earthen realm, you will find that many bushes are also closely tied to death, the earth, and the beauty of the perennial cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

Flowering Bushes

Many bushes are distinguished by their flowers: flowers that possess a wide range of utility for the careful botanist. Bushes are less common in desert regions (as the scorching heat makes it hard for a mid-range plant to thrive), but mountain regions are teeming with bushes, as the crags give ample shelter and resources to a plant of its size, with minimal grazing from goats and hares.

- ❖ **Andromeda** (*T2 Rarity*): A bush that grows to be three feet tall but about seven feet wide, the Andromeda has no particular ability other than its beauty, with small, soft flowers that vary in color based on the region. Forest andromedas have whitish-pink buds, while the mountain andromedas are whitish-purple. They have a spiral leaf pattern, and the plant is known to keep its flowers through the winter, so gardeners love to plant them for year-round beauty. They are low-maintenance flowers, only requiring the occasional pruning.

- ❖ **Common Rose** (*T1 Rarity*): The common rose comes in myriad colors, including red, yellow, and white (which are the most common forms), but there are also bushes with purple, blue, and even green roses (very uncommon, but known to exist in the Dark Forest by the sea). Roses are well loved by all members of society, from the highest noble to the lowest peasant.⁴ The bush is protected by thorns, and while not typically dangerous, they have been used in the wrong hands as a cheap scourge whip, so it is worth noting that rose bushes have thorns, and that in large quantities, applied often enough, they can be dangerous to someone.
- ❖ **Desert Rose** (*T3 Rarity*): The desert rose is very similar to the common rose in structure, though its colors are more muted, almost exclusively come in orange, and the plant itself is much sturdier with tougher petals and a wooly stock, useful for keeping moisture in it amidst the scorching sun and beating wind. The rose itself also has extensive healing properties, able to remove maladies of the mind and body alike. This makes them prized by herbalists of the desert sands, though they are rare across the landscape. They do not grow well in more temperate climates, and lose much of their potency if grown outside of a desert context.
- ❖ **Hawthorn** (*T2 Rarity, T2 ally*): A bush about three to four feet tall that produces a dark red berry that is edible, though it has a bit of a bitter taste. The plant itself is resilient, lasting all winter long (including its fruit) and protected from predators by a bark that is

both tough and acidic, giving off a terrible taste if eaten. It is not poisonous or toxic to the body, but is very unpleasant in the mouth. The wood is durable, and is often used for handles for tools and axes.

- ❖ **Hydrangea** (*T2 Rarity*): Hydrangeas grow to be about three feet tall, with thick, dense leaves that make it hard to see through, so nobles will often use hydrangeas for hedges in their gardens. The presence of large, iconic flowers in red, blue, white, and purple, also make them attractive for decorative plants. The flowers themselves also have medicinal properties, with shamans claiming that they can cleanse the body of ingested poisons. I have some experience in this matter, and can confirm that the hydrangea flower does have such properties.
- ❖ **Lilac** (*T2 Rarity*): The lilac is a small, gray-bark bush that sprouts a beautiful head of flowers on each branch during the spring. The lilac buds are known to calm those near them, and have a sweet smell when burned. Lilacs are favorites of mice and other vermin, so it can be hard to find them in the wild.
- ❖ **Mandrake** (*T2 Rarity*): A small plant that grows to about fourteen inches, the plant itself is non-descript: a set of leaves reaching up toward the sun. The roots have medicinal qualities (mostly for deadening pain: the target is LOR+2D to Medicine rolls), however, all other parts of the plant are poisonous (the target gains the *Paralysis* and *Hallucinations* effects), so they must be properly prepared before applying them to a patient.

⁴ This assumes, of course, that the person loves flowers, as I don't know why a person would not like a flower. Hence the universal statement used here.

- ❖ **Rose of Sharon** (*T3 Rarity*): The Rose of Sharon does not look like other roses – in fact, no one knows why it is called a rose.⁵ The flower is actually closer to a tulip or a geranium in structure, and is usually purple. The flower is also tougher – almost leathery – than any of these flowers, and is so potent in medicinal properties that it has even helped to bring men back from the brink of death (with the help of a skilled physician). While the aloe excels in everyday remedies, for serious injuries the desert people bring the Rose of Sharon (the target is LOR+4D to Medicine rolls).
- ❖ **Seaweed** (*T1 Rarity*): Seaweed comes in many forms, so we provide one entry here even though it has many classifications. These underwater plants serve as food for many sea creatures, protection from predators, and food for land creatures. They are full of nutrients, and can be dried to prevent them from rotting.

Magical Bushes

Some bushes have magical qualities, making them medically potent, deadly, and/or vibrant and unnaturally beautiful. So while we typically highlight “dangerous” plants, here we simply highlight the magical bushes of the world: those that are dangerous, those that may save your life, and those that grow your soul.

- ❖ **Acantha** (*T3 Rarity*): A small plant, only about two feet high, with spiny twigs that produce the flowers, along with broad leaves that are green with purple veins. The

leaves are rumored to have the ability to remove blindness, deafness, leprosy, and other maladies of the senses. The rumors are true (the target may remove 1 such poison or disease).

- ❖ **Bristlehedge** (*T2 Rarity*): Bristlehedges grow up to six feet tall, and is covered with dense, serrated thorns that can flay the flesh of a giant or troll, let alone the flesh of a human or elf. Bristlehedges are often used by local shepherds as walls for their flocks, as the sheep quickly learn not to brush up against them, and keeps wolves away at night. A single branch of bristlehedge can be replanted to form a new bush, but it rarely separates without flaying the hand of the gardener (a target that touches the thorns suffers a Strength 7D hit with a STR-20D *Rend*; the target may not suffer a result higher than a *Severe Wound* on the Damage Table).
- ❖ **Butterfly Bush** (*T2 Rarity*): A bush with blue flowers that fly away when touched by someone, as if the flowers were birds taking flight as a fear reaction of the plant. This is its primary means of repopulating itself, and is majestically beautiful to witness.
- ❖ **Firethorn** (*T1 Rarity*): A bush that grows to about six feet tall, it is often used for hedges because of its thick leaf structure and tangled branches. The firethorn has yellow berries that turn orange and red as the berries mature. So far as we know the plant has no connection to fire, though the berries are known to be extremely warm, with vermin often taking shelter under its

⁵ I like to think that the flower was named by someone who longed to see a rose, as it grows in desert regions. It looks nothing like a rose, but I could imagine someone who, wanting to name it after the most beautiful flower they have

heard of, decided to name it The Rose of Sharon. We also do not know who or what Sharon is a reference to, though I like to think it is the name of the beloved of the person who named it.

boughs during the winter, and larger creatures lying beside it for warmth (the target is STR+2D to resist cold elements).

- ❖ **Flutter Bush** (*T2 Rarity*): A bush about four feet tall that rustles violently when a person or creature passes by, no matter how subtle. Despite this, it is unmoved by the wind, even in a great storm. Commonly planted in gardens where the owner wants to know if someone is coming, a flutter bush makes an intensely loud noise, often deafening to the average ear, and overpowering to those with greater hearing (targets within far range of the bush hear it, and all targets within medium range of the bush are struck with a 3D+XD hit against the Lore Stat, where X = the number of dice above 5D that the target rolls for hearing-based Detect rolls).
- ❖ **Holly** (*T1 Rarity*): A small bush with red berries, holly is said to have special significance as a protective plant. It is said that boughs of holly ward away evil sprites, but this is only half true. Boughs of holly actually ward away *all* sprites, as the scent of the holly leaves, berries, and bark is reprehensible to them (sprites must make a Willpower Test at a LOR-10D penalty to come within medium range of a structure with holly on it or in it). So while they will keep out gobskens, banshees, and imps, it will also deter brow, caitsiths, and wisps. So pick your poison.
- ❖ **Kyrt** (*T3 Rarity*): If a man comes across a kyrt bush in the mountains, he should care for it forever. A bush about two feet tall, it produces a fibrous bark that is finer than thread but as strong as steel. Kyrt bark is thus often used to build structures, tie prisoners, and

assassins who like choking a target to death, which may also result in decapitation when done swiftly (the bearer is STR+2D to damage rolls with the bark, and attacks with the bark gain STR-10D of *Rending*).

- ❖ **Witch's Fire** (*T3 Rarity*): A bush about two feet high with black bark, the plant got its name from its first recorded sighting in Zurn. Legend tells of a witch who, while being pursued by an army in the forest, cast a curse on a bush, causing it to violently erupt with flame without being consumed. The bush spread the carnage across the forest while remaining unscathed (save the blackening of its bark). Witch's Fire bushes suddenly burst into flame when a creature passes by (all targets within striking range suffer a 10D elemental fire hit). It is rare to see farmers cultivating it (as it is a very volatile plant, and as far as we know it has no loyalties to any creature, living or dead), and we are unaware of the precise means by which new ones are created. Some theorize that the fire sends small seeds out, but this is unlikely. My theory is that seeds are released from the bark, and the fire clears the nearby area, enriching the soil, and then the seeds follow amidst the ash and soot.

Conclusion

Bushes are truly wonderful: I love how, for being so small, it does so much for us. It aids the shaman, noble, carpenter, florist, shepherd, and the dog on the floor, which is incredible.

Much akin to the kingdom of earth, bushes are highly practical, grounded in function with marvelous efficiency. This stands in contrast to flowers, which, like the kingdom of water, are constantly in a state of change, sometimes to aid the world and sometimes purely as a flight of fancy. This is where we turn next.

Chapter V: The Flowers of Zurn

Flowers are known for their beautiful appearances, fragrances, and nectar. I know them for their spirit, for the spirits of flowers are truly incredible to look upon and listen to.

Now of course when I speak of the “spirit” of a flower I do not speak of an ethereal spectre or wraith, for everyone knows that plants do not have “spirits” in the way that animals and persons do. Instead I speak of their essence, their driving force – the “really real” for the plant, if you will – that causes them to persevere in growing ever upward toward the sun.

Flowers are the shortest lived of all the plants, and the result is a beautiful story of diligence, joy, and death that can be wholly seen and comprehended by the mortal mind.

The Spirit of Flowers

Flowers, as has been noted before, correspond to the water kingdom, and this is an apt description in many ways. Flowers change constantly, some living only a single day before withering and dying, only to be reborn again. Flowers revive the world, being a primary means of sustenance in the world, which brings creatures of all shapes and sizes close to other plants, allowing their seeds to be carried elsewhere.

Flowers have many uses, much like water. They are used for cooking, healing, decorating, and even home defense (in some cases). So when you look at a flower, know that it is a plant that can fill many roles.

Flowers also have great determination. Somehow they always know which direction the sun is, as they will naturally stretch toward the sun when they grow, even when buried in the earth.

They are very prompt: if a crop of flowers comes up three weeks after the winter snow melts, its offspring will likely come three weeks after the winter snow melts. This is one of my favorite traits in flowers, as their determination lacks the sturdy trunk of the oak or the protective spines of the bristlebush: it simply lies in the spirit of the flower, wanting to arrive on time and mature properly.

Flowers are also distinguished by their vibrancy of color: we do not know why flowers are as vibrant as they are, but we see their beauty and diversity at a glance. We can only assume that this is also part of the spirit of the flower: to be beautiful and bright for the sake of being beautiful and bright.

This, then, is the spirit of the flower. We will now examine the various types of flowers in Zurn, including a discussion on magical flowers, as well as those that are dangerous and ought to be avoided as a general rule.

Common Flowers

By “common” we do not mean that all of these flowers are easily found in the world. Some of them are, but some of them are quite rare. Instead we refer here to flowers that serve common purposes, often involving decoration, cooking, and healing.

- ❖ **Asphodel** (*T2 Rarity*): A flower with a spear-like stalk of white flowers, asphodel leaves are used to store cheeses and other perishables, as it wards away insects and other pests. The flowers are used in poultices for healing snake bites (the target may remove the effects from 1 snake venom), and the stalks are sturdy and thin, often used to hold thatch on rooftops. So all around the asphodel is very useful. It favors dry climates, and areas that get lots of natural sunlight.

- ❖ **Baby's Breath** (*T1 Rarity*): A small, beautiful flower that has a good taste, though most creatures do not eat it (mostly because of the sheer volume of flowers you would have to consume to get a decent mouthful). The sprites use it for interior décor in their homes, but most persons use it as an ornament for their hair or clothing. Because the thin stem and small white flower can go with almost anything, it is commonly used as an addition to floral arrangements and attire.
- ❖ **Common Lily** (*T2 Rarity*): Found in lakes and by streams, the lily has a close connection to water and all life. Known for its bright, fair, and delicate appearance, the lily is considered beautiful in almost every culture, and is often added to a floral arrangement or outfit when a person wants to make a good impression.⁶
- ❖ **Daffodil** (*T2 Rarity*): The flower called Narcissus by the fauns, it is a beautiful, radiant flower with soft white petals and a gold center. The flowers attract attention, and their smell, while faint, is very calming.
- ❖ **Daisy** (*T1 Rarity*): A small flower with bright flowers (usually white, purple, or blue), the daisy is elegant in its appearance, simple in its design, and disarming to those who smell it, as its scent is soothing. The daisy has no known medicinal properties, though I like to think that the soothing smell does aid in recovery.
- ❖ **Dwarf Iris** (*T2 Rarity*): A velvet brown flower set on a slender stem, the dwarf iris lacks the color pattern of other irises, yet it possesses a property that the others do not. While typical garden irises are simply bright faces to greet you in the morning, the dwarf iris is full of healing potential, used in remedies for the stomach, eyes, ears, and lungs (the target may remove 1 related poison, disease, or irritant). It is a truly wonderful plant, and while it may not look like much, it will surprise you.
- ❖ **Leopard Lily** (*T3 Rarity*): The leopard lily is arguably the most beautiful flower in all of Zurn. A fascinating pattern of spots and stripes of various colors array its soft, white petals, making for a stunning display. They require a relatively stable climate to grow, and are not commonly found in the wild.
- ❖ **Marigold** (*T2 Rarity*): An attractive plant with bright gold colors that can maintain its color for years after being crushed. This makes it a primary choice for occasions where a person may want to keep the flower as a token or reminder, as it is both beautiful in the moment and maintains that beauty in the future.
- ❖ **Queen Anne's Lace** (*T3 Rarity*): A slender green stem with over a dozen clusters of a hundred small, white, fair flowers, the Queen Anne's Lace (named after Queen Anne, the first queen of the human Kingdom of Arden) is one of the fairest flowers in all the land.

⁶ I conversed once with a giant who relayed to me their appreciation for the lily. For being a large and uncouth people, I had imagined that they would be reticent to admit affection for such a small and delicate flower, and yet he told me that years ago there was an illness among the giants of Morgheim that was claiming

their warriors and children, and an herbalist came to their town, telling them that she had a cure that required that small, delicate flower. And within days the city was saved. I know not whether the flower itself had the cure, or whether this is just a legend, but I was amazed at his deep admiration for the lily.

Its beauty is through simplicity rightly ordered, and it is a marvel to behold.

- ❖ **Saffron** (*T3 Rarity*): Yellow flowers that only grow in a few mountain ranges in Zurn, saffron is used both as a spice for food, and as an expensive dye for fabric and mascara. The flower is very tiny, yet its scent and taste are overwhelming, so only a trace amount of saffron is used in a dish lest it overpower the rest of the meal. For dyes and paints it is also used sparingly, as its vibrant color is hard to dilute with other pastes, keeping its color for years on end without failing.
- ❖ **Snap Dragon** (*T2 Rarity*): A beautiful flower that resembles a dragon's mouth, and can "snap" its "jaws" when laterally squeezed. Its scent is too faint to be detected by the average person (wulverns, alopen, and eaglemen claim it has an entrancing smell), the smell is very alluring to animals, making them more compliant in building trust. They are commonly kept by beast handlers and animal tamers for this purpose. They in the mountains, and it is rumored to be the best way to tame dragons of all shapes and sizes.
- ❖ **Sunflower** (*T1 Rarity*): A big, bright yellow flower that adds a splash of color to the landscape. Its seeds are edible, have some healing qualities to them (mostly in removing fatigue), and thus are well-loved among day laborers and other peasants.
- ❖ **Wild Geranium** (*T1 Rarity*): A purple flower with a beautiful smell, wild geraniums are blessed by beast tamers because of the great affection that animals have for its scent. While inferior to the snap dragon, the wild

geranium is commonly found across Zurn, and thus is always accessible.

- ❖ **Xenia** (*T3 Rarity*): A beautiful flower (able to rival the daffodil) with a dappled complexion, people from all cultures find them beautiful. So far as we know, each flower has a unique pattern of spots, so each flower, like a snowflake, has no replica. This has led people to give xenias as gifts of particular affection, which has led to their status in society as a formal flower.

Magical Flowers

There are some flowers that also possess magical properties; they tend to be harder to find, but powerful in their own way.

- ❖ **Dryad's Paintbrush** (*T3 Rarity*): A red flower with white stripes shaped like a paintbrush, with the bud forming into a point, coming off of a green stem. The flower emits a soft, entrancing scent that is beloved by animals of all shapes and sizes, magically drawing them to its location and soothing them. If a beast tamer comes across a Dryad's Paintbrush they will go out of their way to gather it and replant it, for they are rarely seen in Zurn.
- ❖ **Echo Flower** (*T1 Rarity*): A small green flower with a white center, the echo flower repeats the last sounds it hears. It is commonly used by musicians (who want to review what they play), teachers (for remedial pupils), and coroners (giving the last words of the deceased to family members). It has also been used for espionage, as a flower is less conspicuous than a person.

- ❖ **Elinor** (*T2 Rarity*): A small white flower with six petals, Elinor is a magical flower with long-term healing powers. The nymphs were the first to come across it, and legend says that it was given to a nymph mother who had recently given birth to a baby girl. She was visited by an angel who gave her the flower, saying, “lay these flowers around the head of your daughter, and she will grow in beauty with each passing day. And you shall call her Elinor, for she shall be the most beautiful nymph in the Greater Wood.”

This led to the practice of placing Elinor by the heads of babies as they slept, and some have continued the practice of keeping Elinor by their heads until they reach adulthood, and sometimes beyond. It also led to the use of Elinor on the arches at nymph weddings as a blessing to the happy couple.

- ❖ **Heart’s Desire** (*T3 Rarity*): A rare flower with peach-colored petals and an entrancing smell. The flower is shredded, simmered in water (as the leaf is bitter, but the bitterness burns off when cooked), and drunk as a tonic. The result is that the drinker will fall deeply in love with the first person they see.

This flower has led to many a manhunt, as people have run off with those they love (as hostages against their will). I once heard of a man who asked an herbalist for the tonic: she made it, he drank it, and ran off her, who screamed all the way through the mountain pass. The mountain heard her, and an avalanche buried them in

the snow. She rose from the snow and ran back to town, burning every last Heart’s Desire she owned.

- ❖ **Lava Flower** (*T3 Rarity*): A flower that pulses with a magic glow from its reddish-orange petals, which looks like a lava flow running slowly through the flower. The stem is a bright yellow, and also has a pulse of light running through it, as if feeding the “lava flow” at the petals. They are beautiful flowers, known to be particularly resilient to fire, and can burn for over an hour, though most people choose not to burn them, instead using their natural light for lighting.

- ❖ **Lily of the Glade** (*T3 Rarity*): A purple flower with nectar so sweet that it can revive unconscious men. The lily is structured differently from other lilies in that it has a very large sac where the flower and the stem intersect, which holds the nectar for the flower. The petals are also strangely sweet, which are often boiled into teas.⁷ It is very refreshing in its tea form, though some (more barbaric) people have taken to simply eating the petals raw, and discovered that it is just as sweet and refreshing. So if you are an uncultured swine and want to eat it raw, it will still heal you.

- ❖ **Raskovnik** (*T2 Rarity*): A black flower that as far as I know has no poisonous or dangerous qualities, other than the fact that the thistle that grows on a Raskovnik is very sharp and very durable, so mind your flesh when you touch it (bearer is STR+1 to damage rolls (close), and attacks with the spine gain STR-2D *Rending*). Men

⁷ My wife makes an exceptional Lily of the Glade tea, unlike anything I’ve ever tasted elsewhere. She tells me it requires one Lily of the Glade (all seven petals),

a spoonful of honey, two pinches of nutmeg, and a rabbit liver. It has the sweet taste (and scent) of the Lily of the Glade, but with that succulent iron taste.

of a foul nature have discovered that the thistle makes for an excellent lockpick, being hard to detect and sturdy enough to work the lock (bearer is FIN+2D to appropriate Mischief rolls).

- ❖ **Zurn Lily** (*T2 Rarity*): The most common lily of the forest, the Zurn Lily is not as beautiful as the common lily or the Lily of the Glade, but it is renowned for its medicinal properties. With uses ranging for cleansing wounds, treating poisons, and blood circulation, the lily is known as “the blue flower of hope” among the Leafwalkers, who use it as their primary healing flower.

Dangerous Flowers

When you think of flowers, you probably think of the beautiful magical blossoms that are so prevalent across our world. But don't let those fool you: not all flowers are bright and loving.

Some flowers are quite dangerous, with some having toxic fruit or petals, others affecting the judgment and mental faculties of nearby persons, and others having the ability to move and act on its own, often to the detriment of those in the nearby vicinity.

- ❖ **Alraune** (*T2 Rarity*): The Alraune is a small plant with a massive flower: though the stem is only a few inches long, the bud releases a massive flower when it opens. It takes about a full year for the bud to bloom, but when it opens a flower with petals over seven feet long bursts from the bud. The flower is known for grasping passersby with a vine, and then enveloping the person in the folds of the massive petals (the flower rolls 8D to hit, with successful parries resulting in the parrying item or hand being grabbed, and unsuccessful parries resulting in the target's torso being grabbed. The target

is grabbed with a Strength of 14D). The petals are not dangerous, and it is rumored that those who are taken into the flower are healed of wounds and fall asleep while within its boughs (the target recovers 2D of wounds each beat, and after four beats all diseases and poisons on the target are removed).

Getting a person out of the petals is hard, though: if the flower senses that a creature is coming near it while it holds someone in its petals it will shoot barbed spines from two tendrils that grow along the ground from the flower (the flower rolls 12D to hit, dealing 10D of damage: if the target is injured, they gain the *Bleeding* description, suffering a *Slight Injury* each beat until healed). Getting a friend back from an alraune is hard unless you know the song of the alraune, in which case it will open its petals to you willingly. Nymph and satyr children are taught the song as babies (as it has a lullaby feel to it), as the alraune is common near them.

- ❖ **Black Bromeliad** (*T2 Rarity*): The black bromeliad is a highly toxic plant whose flower is commonly used in poisons (the target gains the *Nausea* and *Loss of Balance* effects). A black flower with dark green leaves and a dark green stem, the plant gives off an odor of rotting flesh when the flower opens in the fall. If the smell doesn't encourage you to leave it alone, there is something wrong with you. Go see a shaman.
- ❖ **Fanged Poinsettia** (*T2 Rarity*): A relatively small red flower that blooms in the winter, the fanged poinsettia has small spines that retract into the plant, but come out when the poinsettia tries to grasp something near it. Larger creatures have little to fear (as the hit is very

minimal and while it may break skin, it has no poison and will not cause great discomfort), but for sprites the poinsettia is quite dangerous, tearing through flesh and light armor easily (the target is hit with a *Stomp* attack with a FIN-3D to dodge: if hit, the target is hit with a Strength 2D hit with STR-6D *Rending*).

- ❖ **Goodnight Flower** (*T2 Rarity*): A telepathic blue flower that secretes an alluring, soft odor. The odor dulls the mind, putting the target to sleep (targets within striking range are hit with a 12D Impression roll, with a LOR-2D penalty to the Willpower roll to resist: if the Charm attack is successful, the target falls asleep). The flower softly speaks to the person, encouraging them to come closer, where the effects of the sleep agent are stronger (targets at striking range that resist the Charm attack are hit with a second attack of 12D with a LOR-5D penalty to the Willpower roll). It is also addictive, affecting its victims with greater intensity in their desire to sleep with each passing use (each beat beyond the first beat inflicts an additional LOR-1D penalty to the Willpower roll). While asleep the person falls into a deep sleep, completely oblivious to the world around them unless they are violently shaken (or killed, as the case may be), so traveling alone in the forest is not encouraged.
- ❖ **Hemlock** (*T2 Rarity*): A small flower full of poison. The flower itself is poisonous, as are the leaves and stem. In fact, the roots are also poisonous (actually the most potent part of the plant), so literally every part of the plant is poisonous, and have been used by assassins in crafting deadly pastes that can be easily applied to a

dart, arrow, or blade (the target gains the *Paralysis* and *Heart Failure* effects). So be warned.

- ❖ **Spitfire** (*T3 Rarity*): A yellowish-orange flower that grows in cold climates, the spitfire shoots a gout of fire at persons who come too close (the flower makes a *Stomp* attack against all targets in one arc up to medium range away, with targets at medium range adding FIN+2D to their dodge attempt. All targets hit by the attack are struck with a 16D elemental fire hit). The gout of fire is a potent mix of elemental fire, and has been known to scald the arms of giants and wholly consume a goblin. The flower is about eight inches wide, sits about a foot off the ground at the top of the stem, and is relatively rare in Zurn, though most mountain ranges with snow-capped peaks and passages will have spitfires somewhere on their slopes.

Conclusion

Flowers are complex: even dangerous flowers can be helpful to you, and for those who take the time to learn their unique uses they will avoid a lifetime of pain and suffering. They are small, very frail, but then again so are we. I have learned so much from these small, often perennial, plants, about how to live as a creature on this earth. I hope that you will learn from them in time.

Chapter VI: The Herbs of Zurn

Herbs share many qualities with plants, in that they are rather small, often have healing and sustaining properties, are relatively short-lived, and have applications far beyond that of trees, shrubs, and bushes.

Herbs are distinguished from flowers in that the foliage above ground, if any, is simple and plain, with little in the way of flowers or blossoms, and tends to grow to less than a foot in height. The roots and stalks are commonly what is used (with the blossom usually being purely the housing for seeds and pollination), though there are a few notable exceptions to this.

Like the nether kingdom, there is much about herbs that we don't understand: why is wolfsbane so poisonous that even giants and trolls, who have incredible resiliency to poison, fear it? Because it is stronger than is physically possible if used properly. Why is the aconite lethally poisonous if boiled, but an incredible healing agent if simmered? There is much that cannot be explained about herbs, and that is to be expected, for it is part of its nature.

Herbs fall into three overarching categories: medicinal herbs that are used for healing injuries and maladies, special herbs that are used by persons of a particular trade or craft, and everyday herbs that you will find in homes for cooking and the like.

Medicinal Herbs

Stuff about the aforementioned type of herb

- ❖ **Aum** (*T1 Rarity*): Aum is a small green frond that grows close to the earth (usually not taller than six inches) that makes for an excellent antiseptic for open wounds.

Present in virtually every forest in Zurn, the Exiles use it to quickly cleanse a wound, as chewing the frond and applying it to the wound is enough to release its power (the bearer is LOR+1D to Medicine rolls).

- ❖ **Cambylictus Leaf** (*T1 Rarity*): A small plant, about ten inches tall, that looks like a miniature tree with a slender trunk and small green leaves that form a small canopy. The leaves induce sleep, and are a cheap way to put a patient to sleep so that you can perform more painful procedures, as it also deadens the body to all sensations of pain (the target is *Incapacitated* but does not suffer the STR-1D wound). The root is also useful, as it is said to aid in removing stomach aches and internal pain (the target may remove 1 stomach-based poison, disease, or irritant).
- ❖ **Chamalla** (*T2 Rarity*): An herb that is hotly debated in its use, the chamalla root is rumored to have the ability to remove plagues, but is also a hallucinogen that can result in seeing visions of the future (the target is LOR+2D to prophecy rolls). When a person is under the effects of chamalla they do not remember anything that they do, though they will recall the visions they see. Those who oppose the use of chamalla say that it makes men violent, increasing their strength as they lash out at anyone near them. Having seen chamalla used before, I can confirm that some do have a violent reaction to the drug (the target is STR+2D to melee damage rolls), but it is not a universal reaction as far as I can tell (roll a D6: on a 3 or lower, you gain the bonus to melee damage and are LOR-5D to Willpower tests not to attack people). Talk to your shaman before using chamalla.

- ❖ **Clover** (*T1 Rarity*): Clovers grow all across Zurn, and are distinguished by their three leaflet pattern. While all clovers have green stems and leaves, they are often distinguished from each other by colors, referencing the blossom that forms at the top of the clover (white, red, yellow, purple, and orange). White clovers help to alleviate heavy breathing and other breathing-related issues, while red clovers are excellent at stabilizing the stomach when irritated. Yellow clovers aid in fighting illnesses, while purple clovers have been known to fight skin diseases. But perhaps most powerful of all is the orange clover, known to fight headaches and free the mind to work at full efficiency, even to the point of alleviating some of the difficulty in concentrating on upkeep spells (the target removes 1 appropriate poison, disease, or irritant for the non-orange clovers, while orange clovers allow the target to ignore 2D of concentration penalties for 1 hour). Simply crush (or chew) the clover (stem, leaves, blossom – all of it is fine) and ingest it (or apply it to the skin, in the case of purple clovers) to release its effects.
- ❖ **Dawnshade** (*T3 Rarity*): A rare weed with small white flowers that grows close to the ground (but its tendrils reach about a foot from the stem), Dawnshade has the mystical property of breaking the power of hexes. The oldest recorded use of dawnshade is *The Tale of Faraj*, where an anubite shaman stole the Princess Beatrice from her father's castle, and after her father sent a dark magus after her, the princess was hit by a *Dark Curse* gone wrong. Faraj prayed that his love would not be consumed by the curse, and he heard a voice tell him to chew and apply the leaves of the dawnshade, which

removed the curse from her (the target removes 1 hex from the target). It is said that dawnshade can remove any magical hex, and in my experience this is a wise and true saying.

- ❖ **Ginseng** (*T2 Rarity*): A fascinating plant with a root that splits in the middle, forming two leg-like roots to feed the plant. Ginseng has limited uses, but its most common benefits include increased memory and reduced mental fatigue (the target may remove a mind-based poison, disease, or irritant). It is commonly used in schools by professors and students alike, as well as by mages and priests who want to remain sharp and acute in their work. Ginseng tends to favor dry, cold climates, and is found in mountainous regions.
- ❖ **Lavendar** (*T2 Rarity*): Lavendar is one of the most potent and versatile herbs in the world. With antiseptic and calming properties, lavender is grown for culinary and medicinal reasons. Ingested or crushed and then smelled, lavender has wide applications by cooks and shamans, and is common in forest climates. It has also been known to reduce inflammation (either ingested or smelled) of the body, and has a very distinct fragrance (the bearer is LOR+1D to Medicine rolls).
- ❖ **Thistle** (*T1 Rarity*): The thistle is an excellent healing herb all-around, healing wounds, cleansing infections, and fighting headaches (the target recovers up to 2D of wounds). It is not as strong as other herbs, but it grows in strength when it is dried, making it ideal for travel poultices that will keep for decades. The thistle has a small purple blossom at the head of a strong stem, and most of its healing properties are found in

the blossom (though teas are made from the stem and leaves).

Special Herbs

Some herbs are poisonous and/or unique in their properties, often referred to as special herbs. They are rarer than medicinal and everyday herbs, but are generally more potent in their effects.

- ❖ **Aconite** (*T2 Rarity*): A deadly poison with vast healing properties if properly prepared. The yellow blossom grows in rocky, mountainous terrain, and it is closely related to the wolfsbane herb. A poison that targets the muscular integrity of the target, it debilitates the arms, body, and heart when ingested (the target gains the *Numbness* and *Cramping* effects). An antidote (often made from Zurn Lilies, asphodel, or aconite extract as noted below) must be applied within a few hours, or the person will die if the dose is high enough (the target gains the *Heart Failure* effect). Aconite is deadly in its natural form, but if stewed, drained, and dried into flakes aconite's poison qualities are diluted and transformed into an anti-toxin, healing the body and restoring movement to joints and limbs.
- ❖ **Bat-Thorn** (*T2 Rarity*): A thorny herb whose leaves are covered in small, sharp spines, the bat-thorn is a nuisance to farmers and gardeners, as it is very painful to the touch, even though heavy gloves (targets that touch the tip suffer a 4D hit with *STR-3D Rending*). It is kept by herbalists across the world, though, because

its spines are known to be particularly dangerous to vampires (the target gains *STR+4D* against vampires). This has led to synthesizing poisons from crushed bat-thorns, the embedding of bat-thorn spines into outer clothing, and the painting of bat-thorns on mantles and doorways to ward away vampires. There is no evidence that the latter has any effect on vampire attacks, but there is strong evidence that the bat-thorn does, in fact, harm vampires more than any other creature (when applied to an item, the item gains an additional *STR+4D* against vampires).

- ❖ **Hazia** (*T2 Rarity*): A small herb with gray flowers, the hazia gives vibrant visions to those who smell its fragrance (bearer is *LOR+1D* to prophecy rolls, or to recite prayers/blessings). Often burned in a censer as part of temple ceremonies, hazia is more potent if chewed, though it blackens the walls and roof of the mouth.⁸ I have heard that the potency of the hazia is so strong, though, that even trolls and giants can be killed by the blackening. I recommend, like all things involving prophecy, discernment and caution if you use hazia.
- ❖ **Makarius** (*T3 Rarity*): Herb that blooms and must be picked within the hour or it will wither. The makarius is very sweet-smelling, and it is said that when the first hummingbird smelled the nectar of the first makarius when it bloomed, he drank its nectar and his heart became all aflutter, and that is why the hummingbird

⁸ I had a friend in school who was a prophetess, and she mentioned that the flower, unlike most vision-granting plants, is not a hallucinogen. Its active agent is actually similar to the carrot, in that it enhances the visual acuity of the person

instead of deadening their senses and replacing them with visions. I found this fascinating, as it changed my whole perception of seers.

flies as fast as he does. Its nectar is very sweet, arguably the sweetest nectar in all the world.

- ❖ **Parsley** (*T2 Rarity*): A small green herb with distinctive stalks, parsley is tied closely to death in all cultures. The elves say it is a potend of death, hence their saying, “the parsley is in his dish.” The ogres disagree, saying that it is a ward against death. Apparently every ogre herbalist carries parsley with him, and when an ogre receives a fatal blow they place parsley on the wound to save the life of the person.

I can find no medical evidence one way or another as regards the parsley. What I do know is that the oils of the parsley are very tasty, and thus parsley is used in some soups (especially among the deerkin). I also know that parsley has been present when people have died, and when people have lived, following brutal injuries. The rest, as far as I can tell, is merely superstition.

- ❖ **Wolfsbane** (*T3 Rarity*): Arguably the most poisonous herb in all of Zurn, where wolfsbane is found it is kept and cultivated with a fervor that would please a priest. Often applied to arrows and weapons when hunting as it paralyzes the target without leaving a lingering toxin in the meat after the meat is cooked (the target gains the effects of *Wolfsbane Poison*). It also does not leave a toxin on the hide, so it is ideal for downing and killing prey. Warriors have also applied it to weapons, and the arachnotaurs have taken to applying them to the outer layer of their armor.

Everyday Herbs

Some herbs are not useful due to medicinal or unique qualities, but rather because they simply give added taste to a meal. These herbs, commonly called everyday or common herbs.

- ❖ **Cinnamon** (*T1 Rarity*): An herb with thin brown stalks that can be ground into a tasty (and hot) spice. Good for cooking, cinnamon is a favorite of elegant dishes, as it gives a strong, tasty kick without overpowering the sense of the person. It is dangerous if swallowed dry, as the spice burns the lungs and throat of the person (the target suffers 10D of stun damage against their mass). Swallowing dry cinnamon is common though among the nachash, who have been known to play this game as children due to their lack of a wind passage in the mouth. All other races are discouraged from the practice, though.
- ❖ **Katterpod** (*T2 Rarity*): The katterpod is a gray root with a reddish stem and dark green leaves. The leaves and stem are harmless (and useless, as far as I can tell: they have no redeeming value beyond helping the roots grow), but the true beauty of the plant is in its roots. They are edible, full of nutrients, and very filling. They grow in the desert, and some tribes send only katterpod with their caravans because of its longevity (even in harsh conditions), heavy nutrients, and filling nature.
- ❖ **Presnar Pepper** (*T1 Rarity*): An herb that produces a small pepper about an inch long that is both very spicy and very sweet. The spice in the pepper is so potent that most humanesque races have illegalized the sale of presnar peppers in town because of associations with

kidney and liver failure, and I do not blame them. The active agent in the presnar pepper is very powerful, and humanesque organs like the kidney and liver are more fragile than that of the half-human and non-human races. In satyr and silverback culture, however, they are considered delicacies, and are commonly found at all the important feasts and festivals.

Conclusion

Herbs may be the smallest of all plants, but their smaller size concentrates their power into greater potency. They are not the lifeblood of the plant kingdom, but they are critical to the lives of all creatures on this earth.

Some do not see the need to grow your own herbs. And for those who lack the skill to care for a plant, perhaps it is best for the plants that they refrain. But if experience is any indicator, it is wise for as many people as possible to pick up the growing and learning of herbs. You never know when your knowledge of an herb may be required of you, and if you are wise and know what to look for, you will be quite safe, if not a good bit safer.

This art of discerning plants and their use is where we turn next to end our discussion of plant life in our world.

Chapter VII: Plant Identification

If the last five chapters have taught you anything, it is that the realm of the plant kingdom is very diverse, and not every plant can be distinguished purely by its size or color. Many flowers, fruits, and herbs share colors, so there is some finesse that goes into the recognition of a given plant. And with healing and poisonous plants sharing colors, this becomes even more critical.

So how do you properly identify a plant? There are four factors one should always consider regarding plant identification: **size**, **appearance**, **function**, and **coloration** in that order. We shall take each in turn, though note how the answer to one naturally leads to the next consideration.

Form and Procedure

The **size** of a plant tells you its category (tree, shrub, bush, flower, and herb in descending order) in the plant kingdom. This is a useful tool; though it does not answer the question of whether the plant is dangerous or poisonous, it does help us to narrow down the kind of plant we are investigating.⁹

Characteristics of the plant can help with identifying, so we then turn to **appearance**. I have discovered that properly viewing the appearance of the plant involves standing slightly angled from the plant, looking toward one's shoulder, and thus seeing the plant at an angle other than head-on.¹⁰ Note the leaf structure, branches, number of stems, types of blossoms (or flowers or fruit, depending on the season), and tendrils coming from the plant, as these will

⁹ I carve one exception to this statement: since all bushes in the world are known to be non-poisonous, if you are investigating a bush you know that it is safe to touch. For all other categories, you will need to investigate further.

¹⁰ *N.B. on the Text:* We are not sure how this posture aids in viewing the plant, but Grishtehlan is the master herbalist, so we have recorded his words here. Perhaps he will explain it further in a future volume on the subject.

assist you with identification. Look from top to bottom, right to left, looking for shapes, not colors (this is very important: don't look for colors just yet).

Function is next, and is the typical thing that people look for at the start. A youth thinks to himself, "If I can identify the function of what I see – a tendril for grasping, a poisonous berry or leaf that could injure me – then I shall know the plant faster." This is the foolishness of youth, for it assumes that all plants that exist, have existed, and will ever exist, have been found.

Assuming that function is the starting point is like assuming that you can estimate the danger of a creature by the presence of fangs or teeth. Trees lack dangerous appendages, but their sheer size makes them dangerous to most creatures if the conditions are right. What allows you to judge the danger of the tree? Its size and appearance – is it balanced, stable, and growing properly?

Begin with size. Then consider its appearance. Now consider its function: does it have dangerous tendrils that might grasp you? Teeth that might disembowel you? Berries that look too tantalizing not to eat? All of these will help to keep you safe.

But gauging function is not purely for the purpose of warding away danger. It can also tell you whether the plant before you will be the saving grace of yourself or a fallen comrade. It will tell you whether you have found food, medicine, a defense against your enemies, or shelter for the night? Function is key to our analysis.

And last of all we look at **coloration**. While usually the first thing used for differentiating plants, I find this wildly unhelpful as there are a multitude of things that could change the coloration of a given leaf, stem, berry, or fruit. Coloration is a refining trait, an aid to winnowing down the last few possibilities until we have the name of the plant in hand. It is crucial (as there are many plants that look similar but for their color), but not primary.

So it is the last element that we consider, and this is fitting. If the color of an element of a plant is transitory based on time of year, growth cycle, etc., it ought to be considered last.

Use this method to identify plants. Read about plants and then go into nature to find them. A plant in a drawing will look different from the plant in real life, so you will need to leave your desk to truly master plant identification. And that is how it should be.

Testing for Poisons

Plants can be very poisonous – probably more poisonous than creatures, pound for pound – so learning to identify which plants are edible and which are dangerous is critical to any herbalist.

I recommend a four-step method to identifying the toxicity of a plant, each using a different element of the body to test: **arm**, **hand**, **face**, and **throat**, in that order.

First, use a glove (or cloth, or spare shirt, or whatever you have on-hand) to grasp the leaf, berry, blossom, etc., and rub it on a portion of your **arm** that you are not likely to use in the near future.¹¹ Rub it until the juice or oil comes out, but not extensively. Then wait for a minute and observe the affected area: if it blisters, burns, or turns a ghastly color, seek medical attention. If it does not, move to the next test.

Take the plant and rub it on the back of your **hand**. Watch the affected area: if it blisters, burns, or turns a ghastly color, seek medical attention. If not, proceed with your investigation.

Rub the plant on your face, ideally on the forehead or lips (as those are the most sensitive portions of the face). If you are with your beloved and intend to be kissed by said beloved, you should choose a portion of the face that they do not intend to kiss (just in case it should turn out to be poisonous). Focus on whether you

¹¹ I recommend using the under portion of the forearm, as it is relatively easy to rub a plant on, is relatively flat, and quickly heals.

feel anything blistering or burning on your face: if you feel such a sensation, seek medical attention (and sympathy, because your face is about to look very bad). If not, it is likely that the berry, blossom, or leaf is not poisonous, but there is only one way to make sure.

Place it inside your mouth and chew, but do not swallow. Let it sit in your mouth for a minute, and focus on whether you feel a blistering or burning sensation. If you do, seek medical attention. If not, swallow, but be ready to spit. If you feel no side-effects, you may reasonably conclude that the plant is not poisonous.

This may seem involved, but trust me: you do not want to be the herbalist who administers a poison unwittingly to your patient, nor do you want to be a wanderer in the wilderness who never returns home because he ate the wrong berries. This process has saved lives, so I cannot commend it to you enough.

Conclusion

Plants are beautiful things: simple things, but beautiful. If you have not seen that to date, there is no more I can say. But for those of you who have heard the pines call in a rushing wind, to those who have seen heaven open with the blossoming of a lily, and to all who have enjoyed blowing the seeds off of a dandelion, I entrust the knowledge in this book to you. For you, and you only, have I written this text, for it is for such as you that this world will hold the greatest treasures.

“Deep roots are safe in winter,” as they say, and the only way for a plant to possess deep roots is to grow higher, bring in more nourishment to itself, and thus delve deeper into the earth. So reach high. Delve deep. Become strong, so that those around you will be sheltered in a day of need. This task I leave to you.

About the Author

Grishtehlan is a troll from the Cogливаal clan, and has resided for most of his life in The Lesser Wood by the shores of Lake Zurn. He has journeyed several times across the continent, and is said to be able to “speak the language of tree and flower alike” when identifying a plant and its properties, as if they were telling him their story.

He studied herbology under the great Master Horolocaal of the Cogливаal clan, arguably the greatest troll herbalist in recorded history. The only troll on record to have brought a person back from the dead with the use of herbal medicine, Grishtehlan was his prized pupil, taken from a list of over a hundred applicants spanning the globe. Grishtehlan became his apprentice at the age of nine, and when reflecting on his tutoring he simply said, “he was a good teacher.”

We asked him for more information on his master’s teaching style and way of instruction; all Grishtehlan gave us was a stern glare. We did not inquire a second time.

Grishtehlan lives in *Naratect*, a small cave near the Lake, with his wife and three daughters. Together they tend a garden and stand of trees on the hill near their house, and enjoy long swims and journeys along the lake. He enjoys fishing, tending his garden and tree stand, long walks with his family, and whistling (a purportedly difficult task for a troll).

Grishtehlan has been invited to many speaking engagements on the topic of plants, and has not enjoyed any of them. He does not believe this will change in the future. And that’s all he has to say about that.



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