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*The dose makes the poison.* – Paracelsus

*If you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die? And if you wrong us shall we not revenge?* – William Shakespeare

**poison (poi'zn):** a substance that, on ingestion, inhalation, absorption, application, injection, or development within the body, sometimes in just small amounts, may cause structural or functional disturbance.

## Introduction

Poisons, and their use, have been around since the dawn of mankind. From suicide and execution to assassination, poison is often times the weapon of choice. Socrates was given poison hemlock after being sentenced to death, while during the Renaissance and Enlightenment, a favored delivery method for poison was a chocolate drink. Even in modern times poisons are still used; the Bulgarian dissident Georgi Markov was killed by ricin poisoning in 1978 after being injected from a dart hidden in an umbrella. Poisons have also been a favorite method of murder in novels and movies from Agatha Christie to Arthur Conan Doyle, Frank Capra (*Arsenic and Old Lace*) to Alfred Hitchcock (*Notorious*).

The term poison is often loosely used to describe not only substances that can be created from toxic plants, metals and other materials but also to the toxins secreted or injected by all variety of animals. Poisons are used because they are deadly by nature; it is only the dosage that makes a poison less toxic. In contrast, many venoms and toxins created by plants and animals may have other non-lethal effects, such as paralysis, and are not necessarily designed to kill. This is an important distinction as most of the poisons listed in this book (arsenic, hemlock, cyanide, etc.) are extremely deadly. Many types of venom can be used to kill if applied in the right dosage, but they generally are less deadly than more ‘traditional’ poisons.

But why do people turn to poisons? For some, the use of a poison is a coward’s way of dealing death. For others, poisons represent a force multiplier, allowing a relatively weak or unskilled person the ability to take out a more powerful opponent. Sometimes poisonings happen by accident, or through negligence on the part of one party or another. No matter the reason or cause, poisons will always find a way to deal death.

This book focuses only on poisons and is divided into two parts. The first part is a general section looking at the basics of poisons (types, vectors, preparation, and delivery), skill challenges, tools and equipment necessary in the poisoner’s kit, and other useful items for the GM. The second part looks at the ‘traditional’ poisons and provides descriptions and stat blocks. All of the poisons listed in this book can be found in the ‘real’ world. Their rules for use during a game are designed to closely match the symptoms of the real poison, whenever possible.



## Part One Poison Types

Poisons can come from many different sources. No matter the source of the poison, the desired outcome is nearly always the same; to cause the death (or serious injury) of the intended victim. How this is accomplished depends on the type of the poison. Some poisons are better suited to being added to drinks, while others must be eaten directly.

Poison types can be categorized as coming from animal, fungus, mineral, or plant sources.

**Animal:** While many animals contain venoms that are used for attack or defense, there are some animals that have a natural toxicity that causes them to be poisonous. These poisons must be ingested to affect a person, and often require the food to be prepared in a particular manner to either avoid, or concentrate, the poison. Sometimes these foods are specifically sought out by people of means due to the dangerous nature of the food. This allows the poisoner the opportunity to kill a target without drawing suspicion.

**Fungus:** Poisonous fungi are generally found as mushrooms. Like animal-based poisons, mushrooms must be ingested in order for them to be effective as a poison. For a poisoner, the advantage of the mushroom is that many poisonous mushrooms are nearly indistinguishable from their non-poisonous, edible cousins. This makes it nearly impossible for the victim to know that they are eating a poisonous mushroom. (This also means that many people unintentionally poison themselves by eating what they thought was a 'safe' mushroom.) The other advantage of the lowly mushroom is that for some poisonous mushrooms the effects are delayed by several hours or even days. This gives the poisoner plenty of time to perform the task and be many miles away when the victim finally succumbs to the poison.



**Mineral:** These poisons come from acute or chronic exposure to toxic minerals or alchemical mixtures. These poisons can affect a person through contact, ingestion or inhalation. Mineral poisons are ideal when the poisoner needs a fast acting poison that can be easily mixed with food or drink and is nearly undetectable. These types of poisons can be difficult to administer and pose certain risks to the poisoner, but they are often more effective than other types of poisons.

**Plant:** Plant-based poisons are some of the most numerous types of poisons. They run the gambit from mildly toxic to very deadly and give the poisoner a wide variety of poisons to choose from in order to fit whatever situation may arise. These types of poisons also provide a variety of delivery methods, including contact, ingestion, and inhalation.

## Poison Vectors

Poisons can be administered through a variety of methods. These vectors give a poisoner choices when determining how best to poison their intended victim. Some poisons can only be administered through a single vector, while others are more versatile and can be delivered by multiple methods, depending on how the poison is prepared.

**Contact:** These poisons are administered through direct contact with the skin. A person only needs to be touched by the poisonous substance for it to be absorbed through the skin and into the bloodstream. Contact poisons can be dangerous to the poisoner, since a slight slip in their technique can result in self-poisoning.

**Ingestion:** These poisons must be eaten or drunk to be effective. For some poisons, such as animals or mushrooms, the trouble comes from slipping the poisonous food to the intended victim. Other poisons must be processed into a state that allows the poison to be mixed with a liquid or food so that it can be ingested.

**Inhalation:** These poisons are effective when the poison is breathed into the body. This makes these types of poisons only effective against targets that need to breathe, and simple precautions can be taken to protect oneself from an inhaled poison.

**Injection:** These poisons must be injected into the body through the skin. This makes these poisons ideal for use on weapons. These types of poisons can be safe to handle (with caution) so they can easily be applied to a weapon.

## Poison Kit

The poison is only one of the items needed by a successful poisoner, and not all poisons are created equal, so what works for one poison may not work for another. While the ultimate goal for the poisoner is to deliver the deadly dosage to the intended victim, how this is accomplished depends on the type of poison. A poisoner must know from the beginning what type of poison is needed for the job. For this reason, the poisoner must have access to a variety of tools from which to prepare, handle, and administer the poison.

**Preparation:** Some poisons are similar enough that they can be prepared in the same way, though most poisons must be prepared in their own unique method. The tools a poisoner needs vary from a simple mortar and pestle to complex alchemical equipment, depending on the type of poison.

**Animal/Fungus:** Generally all one needs for these types of poisons is a method for collecting and preparing the food for ingestion. Usually simple knives are used for cutting the food, though it might be necessary to cook certain foods so that the intended victim is unaware that they are being poisoned. Sometimes no preparation is necessary and the poison is just as effective if the food is eaten raw.

**Minerals:** Most mineral-based poisons must be manipulated and altered from their natural state to make them effective as a poison. This might simply require a mortar and pestle to grind the parent mineral into a fine powder, although frequently the poisoner needs access to complex alchemical equipment in order to properly prepare the poison. Because of the skill and technical expertise required, many poisoners rely upon skilled alchemists who are willing (or threatened) to keep their mouths closed to be able to prepare their poisons. In this case, the poisoner takes the obvious risk of detection if the alchemist is compelled to tell authorities what he's been working on, but also risks that the alchemist has delivered the proper goods in both the right potency and dosage.

**Plants:** In addition to being abundant, plant-based poisons are also relatively easy to prepare. Depending on where on the plant the poison is located (leaves, root, fruit, etc.) the nature of the preparation may simply involve adding the poisonous part of the plant into a natural medium for the poison to be ingested (such as adding a few belladonna leaves to a tea that is drunk by the victim). Some plants may need to be dried first, or the roots may need to be grated our ground to allow the poison to be mixed. These preparations require simple household tools available to any decent poisoner.

## Deadly Toxins: Poisons

**Storage:** Once a poison has been prepared it must be stored or carried in some fashion so it can be delivered safely to the intended victim. Most powdered poisons can simply be stored in a clay, glass, wood, or similar container with complete safety to the poisoner. Storage containers often contain several doses worth of poison and the prudent poisoner labels them in such a way that he does not accidentally poison himself.

Other poisons may require more specialized types of storage containers. Depending on the type of poison, these containers may have a higher price or require the services of a special craftsman. As with poisons requiring more skilled techniques to prepare the poison, enlisting the services of a craftsman to make a special container may alert people as to the intended use.

A few poisons, such as those that are animal-based, cannot be stored. Once prepared, the poison must be delivered immediately or the food will rot and become useless (few people would be willing to eat rotten food). Most mushrooms can be stored for short periods of time, and there are techniques available for drying and preserving mushrooms that will allow them to be stored for longer periods, although eventually even mushrooms will rot to the point where they are not edible.

**Delivery:** Many people have wild visions of a wicked blade, its edge gleaming with traces of poison on it. Weapons are often times coated with toxic material in order to make a simple weapon much more deadly; however, most of these toxins are animal-based venoms and not true poisons. A few poisons do lend themselves to being applied to a weapon, but the vast majority of poisons are most effective when they are eaten or drunk by the intended victim. There are many advantages for this, primarily that the victim generally does not know they are being poisoned and are usually caught defenseless (while a wild attacker with a poisoned blade generally causes alarm and panic among everybody nearby). The poison is also usually more effective as it has direct access to the victim's internal organs and blood allowing for a rapid delivery. Finally, it is generally safer for the poisoner himself who can be far away once the poison is ingested.

Excluding poison-tipped blades, darts, and arrows for a moment, let us look at a few items a poisoner would need in a kit meant to aid in the delivery of poisons or might offer some protection against poisons.

**Containers:** Poisons that exist as a gas are often stored in a sealed container made of clay, glass, or other non-permeable material. The poison is released when the container is broken. Powdered poisons can also be stored in a variety of pots, jars, or vials.

*Cost:* varies based on material and construction. A simple clay container costs 1 sp, a glass container 1 gp.

**Eye Droppers:** Since some poisons are prepared in a liquid state, an eye dropper is a useful tool for dispensing the poison in the proper dosage without risk of exposure to the poisoner. The eye dropper has many of the same advantages as the spoon for delivering a poison.

*Cost:* 5 sp

**Gloves:** Gloves are an essential item in any poisoner's kit. They provide a simple protective layer between the poisoner and his poison, especially if the poison is one of a contact nature. And they look stylish too! Seriously, gloves are a useful tool simply because they allow a poisoner to be protected from their own poison. Contact poisons can also be applied to the outside of the glove allowing the poisoner to simply touch their victim to deliver their deadly toxin. These gloves are generally made from leather or other non-permeable material.

