

The AD&D Guide to Trees

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Many varieties of trees common on Earth are also common in the Forgotten Realms. In warmer regions, the date palm, coconut palm, ebony, cypress, and mangrove are common. Evergreens exist in the northern regions, and most hardwoods live in the central forests. Birch and yew are rare in the Realms; alder, boxwood, the plane tree, redwood, and sycamore are unknown. Cork and rubber trees are found only in particular areas in the far South and are disappearing quickly due to heavy harvests. Many recent explorations of the lands of Chult have been undertaken simply to find new suppliers of these woods.)

Common trees of the Realms include:

Apple	Chestnut	<i>Hiexel</i>	<i>Phandar</i>	Thorn
Ash	<i>Duskwood</i>	Hornbeam	Pine	<i>Vundwood</i>
Beech	Elm	Ironwood	<i>Shadowtop</i>	<i>Weirwood</i>
<i>Blueleaf</i>	<i>Felsul</i>	<i>Laspar</i>	<i>Silverbark</i>	Willow
Cedar	Hawthorn	Maple	Spruce	<i>Zalantar</i>
Cherry	Hickory	Oak	<i>Suth</i>	

Trees in *italics* are unique to the Realms; these common species are described hereafter. Certainly, other unique species of trees may be found in the Realms as well.

Blueleaf trees have leaves of an eerie, gleaming blue hue, which are many-pointed and rather like those of maples in appearance. Blueleaf trees are very delicate and have many small branches. As a rule, these trees are very supple; they bend in high winds and under heavy ice loads (rather than breaking), and grow in thick stands which sometimes reach 40' in height. The trunks of these trees rarely attain diameters in excess of 8'. Blueleaf trees yield a vivid blue dye much favored by clothier's; the dye is derived from the sap and crushed leaves of the Blueleaf trees. These trees are also favored for firewood cutting because they produce beautiful, leaping blue flames while burning.

Duskwood trees are 60' tall. These straight trees have smooth, bare trunks marked by crowns of tiny branches. Duskwoods are named for the dark, eerie appearance of stands of these closely-clustered black trunks. Under the black bark (which shows a silver-gray color when newly broken or peeled) is wood that is smoky gray when cut - and as hard as iron. Most mast spars and building beams are made of mature Duskwood trunks. They are hard and resistant to fire, and they smolder rather than blaze when set aflame. As a result, duskwood trees tend to survive forest fires and the axes of woodcutters seeking firewood.

Felsul are gnarled, twisted trees with a deep brawn hue and a crumbling texture (old bark constantly rots and flakes away from a mature felsul). Young felsul trees are light green in color and are as fresh and soft as leafy plants. After felsul are 10 or more years old (and 3' or more in height), they darken in color and begin to twist and curve as their roots dig deeper and the winds shape their frail trunks. Felsul grow on rocky crags, cliff edges, and clefts, providing the only tree cover in many cold, rocky areas of the North. In the spring, these trees burst into flower; the crushed petals of their vivid yellow-and-purple blossoms yield a delightful, spicy perfume highly prized by ladies in the Realms. Faded felsul blooms are carefully gathered each year by venturesome souls, for a large sack of these petals can command a price of up to 3 gp if supplies are scarce. Felsul wood burns poorly and is too weak and gnarled for furniture or buildings, although felsul-root is a favorite of those who carve images, toys, and holy symbols.

Hiexel is a green, waxy wood used for signal beacon fires. It is also used to smoke meat or fish, or to drive out animals or enemies. As it burns, this wood creates clouds of thick, black, billowing smoke that are both oily and choking. Hiexel grows in thickets in ravines and on hillsides. The trees themselves are gently curved and are marked by sparse branches. As a whole, these trees have an upright, oval foliage shape. Hiexel is a brittle wood that tends to succumb to rot easily. Its durable bark, however, is resilient and lasting, and has been used in the making of tomes of magic and lore (see "Pages from the Mages III" DRAGON(c) issue #92). Windstorms often fell large or old hiexel; with age or much growth, these trees become unstable. In such instances, portions of their wood dry out unevenly, causing the trees to topple easily. This same tendency makes hiexel unsuitable for use in palisades, bridges, sledges, or other structures exposed to stress and hard usage. Hiexel is very common in the Dalelands.

Laspar trees resemble cedars in texture and aroma. They are ever-bearing and have flat needles that grow in spherical clusters on the ends of a "cloak" of delicate branches. These cloaks swirl protectively about a straight, strong, central trunk. Laspar wood is pitchy and tends to snap and spit numerous sparks when burnt. Beneath its close-shingled,

smooth dusky green bark (which often forms a surface of small, interlocking concave plates with few large fissures or rough spots), the laspar's wood is golden yellow and easily worked for furniture or building, much like pine. The needles of the laspar tree (the clusters of needles are known as shags) are used for many things. Boiled laspar needles are an effective laxative drink in the North, and crushed laspar needles are used in the making of certain scents, such as those worked into torches and candles of superior quality. Laspar moths, so named because they seem attracted to the smell of laspar trees, are gray, furry-winged insects of up to 4" in length, with a wingspan of up to 8".

Phandar trees are now uncommon due to heavy cutting of this wood for many years. This dearth comes as no surprise: The curving boughs of a phandar tree sprout in great numbers from a massive, knobby central trunk. These boughs are tough, springy, and terrifically strong. Phandar trees have triangular leaves of mottled shades of green. Often, these trees grow to 60' in height. The foliage of the phandar tree is shaped somewhat like an egg laid horizontally, the long axis of the egg growing in a tail in relation to the prevailing winds. Phandar wood is greenish brown, with thin, black grain lines running throughout the depths of the wood. Jewelry carved of the wood usually makes use of these grain lines in its cutting to create patterns or pleasing waves of parallel lines. Tocken (see "Music of the Forgotten Realms" DRAGON issue #123) are usually made of phandar wood. Bows and weapon handles are likewise often fashioned of phandar wood, although the curving nature of the wood makes it unsuitable for spear shafts and the like.

Phandar trees are very hardy; many young specimens have been uprooted and carried for many miles and long days before being replanted. Such private growing schemes have spread the phandar over a wider area of the Realms than the rolling Dales and upland hills of the central Sword Coast that was their previous habitat. This has probably prevented the complete extinction of this tree at the hands of loggers.

The massive central trunk of the phandar tree resembles the feared roper in natural appearance. The phandar's trunk is so strong that it can serve as a pillar to support the roof of a dwelling (although such trunks are rarely more than 20' tall) without preparation. These trunks may also be chiselled and notched to accept crossbeams without cracking or splitting.

Shadowtop trees are the soaring giant of the forests of the Realms. These trees grow very rapidly (up to 2' a year, if the weather is warm and damp enough), allowing some shadowtops to reach 90' or more in height. Trees of this size often have massive, pleat-ridged trunks flaring up to 20' in diameter at the base. The tree gets its name from the dense clusters of feather leaves which adorn its limbs. A shadowtop's leaves have frilled edges like those of an oak, with an irregular number of small fingers. These leaves are copper-colored on the underside all year round and deep green on the upper surface. The tops of these leaves fade to match the underside in the fall. The leaves cluster from spreading branches that make up the top 12' or so of the tree, which has few or no lower branches.

Shadowtop wood ("shadow wood") is fibrous and tough, but unsuitable for carving or structural work, as it has a tendency to split down its length under stress into a splayed mass of fibers. The fibers themselves are valued in ropemaking; a few are added to the twist when a rope is being made, increasing the strength and durability of the coil when it is complete. Shadowtop wood burns slowly (it must be ignited by a leaping fire composed of other woods) but very cleanly, with little smoke. The resultant flames generate a hot fire. Shadow top wood is thus favored for cooking.

If more than four wagon-loads of wood are felled, cut up, and carried off for sale in a city, there will be a large remainder, which is usually left behind for later trips. By custom, travelers can usually cut enough from this pile for a night's fire without evoking anyone's ire.

Silverbark trees flourish in wet ground, generally near bogs and swamps, but sometimes in deep ravines in the depths of large forests. Individual trees are thin and straight, and seldom more than 15' tall. Their trunks, which are usually 3-4' in diameter, serve the poor as staves, poles, and (with points hardened in a slow fire) defensive stakes. The silver bark which gives the tree its name is loose and crumbles easily (although it does not peel off in strips as birch does). The wood of this tree dries out thoroughly after it is cut and, after a year or so, is brittle and weak. As a result, silverbark will not do for lance shafts, fence rails, or structural work. Silverbark is plentiful and grows thickly. Its leaves are large and oval-shaped, with pointed tips and tiny saw-toothed edges. These leaves are a deep red in color, with purple patches starting where they attach to their stems and continuing to their branches. The leaves are durable and waxy, and are often used to wrap fresh game.

Suth trees are squat, splayed trees common around the edges of the Shaar, in the woods of Chondath, and farther south in the Realms (the name may be a corruption of "south"). They grow in almost horizontal, angled sections, slanting in one direction, branching out (the low branches providing balance), then slanting back upon themselves in another direction. Few of these trees can provide a visual screen or wall barring passage to all who can't crawl under the lowest branches, for the branches of the different trees intertwine and double back into a tightly-woven mass. Suth leaves are soft but long and spike-shaped. These leaves grow in bunches at the ends of branches and in a ring around each segment where the limbs branch and change direction. Suthwood is extremely hard and durable - so hard that it is difficult to work unless one has the finest tools. Suthwood is the preferred wood for shields; if soaked in water, such shields do not catch fire easily and almost never splinter. A heavy blow might crack a suthwood shield (any saving throw vs. crushing blow should be at +2), but it would not shatter it into pointed fragments. Suthwood is also used in the manufacture of

book covers because thin sheets of this wood retain astonishing strength for decades (see "Pages From the Mages V" DRAGON issue # 100).

Vundwood trees are short and scruffy. They grow on poor ground and are named for a famous nomadic tribe of bandits, the Vunds, who were wiped out long ago by the combined efforts of the fledgling kingdoms of Cormyr and Sembia. The Vunds raided with impunity for many years because none could field strength of arms against them. They rode like demons, as one merchant put it, and would melt away when faced with determined resistance, only to slaughter the next caravan that came along. The Vunds inhabited the lands west of the Sea of Fallen Stars, threatening the long, overland trade routes between the Inner Sea lands and the Sword Coast. Today, those rolling, seemingly endless plains are still dominated by small stands of vundwood trees.

Vundwood trees rarely top 15'. Rather than having a distinct central trunk, vundwood trees have many small radiating branches, which in turn split into smaller branches. Vundwood is mostly used for firewood, though it does have a variety of other uses. Felled vundwood trees, for example, are often dragged into lines to form rough fence enclosures, which are used by farmers to hold livestock or by caravans to serve as overnight paddocks. Vundwood is reddish brown and has a spicy smell much like that of cinnamon. The species has smooth, thin bark of a deep red color and leaves of pale green edged with white. These edges lighten to yellow in winter or when a tree is dying.

Weirwood is a rare and highly prized variety of tree that grows into huge many-branched forest giants if undisturbed. Most surviving Weir trees are found in the depths of the huge forests of the North, and they are actively protected by dryads, hamadryads, druids, treants, and rangers. Weirwood will not burn in normal fires; only magical fire can ignite or consume it. Weir trees yield resilient, durable wood that is favored in the making of musical instruments such as lutes and harps. Instruments fashioned of this wood create a particular warm, clear sound that resonates without distortion. Weir trees are very similar to oaks in appearance but are seldom seen by men. A bluelight, dancing lights, faerie fire, light, or continual light radiance that comes into contact with nondweomered weirwood, cut or living, lingers around the wood for 2-4 rounds, even if the source of the radiance is removed.

Zalantar is a wood of the South; it is seldom seen in northern lands. These trees grow in profusion in Chult and along the southern coasts of Faerun. The Zalantar tree is characterized by black bark and wood, and white or beige leaves. These leaves branch in groups of several trunks from a central root. Zalantar trees may reach 80' in height, but are usually half that height. The trees seem to grow in any terrain short of the most mountainous. Zalantar wood is strong and yet easily worked; many caravan wagons, litters, and wheels are made of it, as are parts of many southern dwellings. This wood is sometimes called "blackwood" in the North.