

HOW TO CREATE MAGIC ITEMS FOR FIFTH EDITION

This in-depth article is divided into two parts:

- **Part 1** covers the basic rules for magic item creation.
- **Part 2** covers how to handle magic item creation in-game.

Plus, I found a cool loophole in RAW that makes hunting monsters more profitable than it already is. Details in part two.

PART 1: MAGIC ITEM CREATION RULES

This first chapter of this two-part series dives into the actual rules for creating a magic item and how to write the perfect rules text for a new magic item.

MAGIC ITEM CREATION RULES: DMG

Your first biggest resource for creating your own magic item starts on page 284 of the DMG under the sub-header Creating a Magic Item.

The DMG offers two solutions for creating a magic item:

SOLUTION 1 - MODIFY AN ITEM

This is probably the easiest way to do it. All you need to make is one simple change and nothing else will have to change. There are three methods within this one:

- **Change the item's type.** For example, a ring into a wand or a cloak into a circlet, etc.
- **Change the effect.** For example, you can change a ring that deals fire damage to cold damage or one that boosts Stealth to instead of boost Perception.
- **Combine properties.** Take two similar items and combine their effects. However, this may change the power level/rarity of the item.

SOLUTION 2 - CREATE A NEW ITEM

This method is a little more involved and takes some doing to get right. Fortunately, DMG p285 gives a useful Magic Item Power by Rarity chart to help you align your item with the appropriate rarity. This is the best place to start and offers insight into how the folks at the Coast created the original batch of magic items for the DMG.

MAGIC ITEM CREATION RULES: XAN'S

Xan's, unfortunately, doesn't get too involved in the magic item creation process from a meta-perspective. However, where Xan's is useful is in explaining the levels certain magic items should be earned.

On page 135 of Xan's, there is a Magic Items Awarded by Rarity table. This is not only useful for helping you know when to award certain treasure but also gives you an idea of what sort of magic items you should create for the PC levels.

For example, a group of 6th-level characters should earn only 1 major rare magic item before they hit 11th-level. It's much more likely they'll find an uncommon magic item instead.

HOW TO CREATE A MAGIC ITEM (THE DM DAVE WAY)

Here is how I create magic items for Fifth Edition:

STEP #1 – DETERMINE RARITY BASED ON THE PCS' LEVEL

The best place to start with your magic item creation is with its rarity (unless you want something big time, like an artifact). Using the Magic Items Awarded by Rarity table on page 135 of Xan's, decide what rarity you want the item to be. Remember, if you give away PCs something powerful like a major rare item at 6th-level, the PCs ideally should not receive another major rare item until they reach 11th-level.

STEP #2 – DETERMINE THE CONCEPT

You might start with this step, but sometimes knowing the rarity of your new magic item can help temper you and your players' expectations. What I mean by the concept is essentially the answer to the question, "What does the item do?" Does it improve a character's speed or agility? Does it let them cast *fireball* a certain number of times each day? Or if they drink it, do they grow a third eyeball in the center of their head that lets them shoot disintegration beams from it?

STEP #3 – TRY TO FIND A COMPARABLE ITEM

Next, you'll want to check if there's an item in the DMG or Xan's that is similar to the item you're creating. With literally hundreds of items between the two books, most of the bases seem covered.

For example, let's say you wanted an item that could cast fireballs a certain number of times per day every day, like a *ring of fireballs*. We've got a couple similar choices to work with. First, there's the *necklace of fireballs* which gives you a limit to the number of times you can cast the spell and then the item is spent. It's also rare. And then there's a *staff of fire*, a very rare item that lets you cast *fireball* up to three times per day. Since the *staff of fire* regains its charges, that might be a good place to start. Of course, it's very rare so it will need some adjusting down.

STEP #4 – IF YOU CAN'T FIND A COMPARABLE ITEM, CREATE YOUR OWN

But what if what we're looking for isn't like anything else found in either of the books? Then the best solution is to create your own magic item.

Still, make sure you ground it in reality and can still somewhat tie it to something that already exists.

For example, a *potion of the third eye* sounds pretty cool, but there's hardly anything like it in the DMG. So we'll need to make it from scratch.

Break down the core concept.

What do we know about the item based solely on the concept? Using the *potion of the third eye* example:

- It's a potion, therefore it's consumable. That means once it's used it can't be used again.
- It transmutes the drinker to develop a third eye on their head. That sounds more like flavor than mechanics, though.
- The third eye is capable of firing beams that deal damage.

- It's a rare item.

Once we have our core concepts, we need to reverse engineer the concept's potential abilities so they can comfortably fit into our rarity. The eye beam that the third eye shoots is a good place to start. We can probably pick a spell that's similar to it. But what level of spell?

Pick your new item's spell level.

If you remember from the start of this article, I mentioned the Magic Item Power by Rarity table. That table shows us the highest level of spell that we can select for our magic item.

We want to turn our *potion of the third eye* into a rare item, so that means we can choose a 6th-level spell to put into it. Note the text below the table that mentions that at most the spell should be able to confer the bonus once per day (or just once, if it's consumable).

But what 6th-level spell duplicates the effect of a temporary eye that can fire eye rays?

If you don't have a similar spell for your item, make a new one (advanced).

This is where things get a little more complicated.

We need a spell that we can use for at least 1 minute (or 10 rounds) that can deal damage.

But how much damage? Turning back to page 284 of the DMG there is a Spell Damage table that gives us the average spell damage output for one or multiple targets. Remember that our item should be comparable to a 6th-level spell, and according to the table a 6th-level spell should be able to deal 55 (10d10) damage to a single target or 38.5 (11d6) damage to multiple targets.

But that's for single uses. What about multiple uses?

Fortunately, there's a comparable item that gives us a hint at multiple uses: the *necklace of fireballs*, which is also a rare item. The *necklace of fireballs* allows a player up to 10 uses of fireball and then it's consumed. Sound familiar?

Fireball deals an average of 28 (8d6) damage to multiple targets, pretty close to our 38.5 mark. According to the chart on page 284 of the DMG, that means that the *necklace of fireballs'* effective spell level is 5th because of its multiple (yet consumable) uses.

Still with me? Good!

But how much damage should our eye beam do? Easy! We know that we're probably dealing with a 5th-level spell's worth of damage here (thanks to the parallel of the necklace of fireballs), but it's not targeting multiple targets. Instead, it's targeting only one target for 44 (8d10) damage—we know this because it's on the same line of the table as the multiple damage line.

And there you have it. So long as the eye beam can deal no more than 44 damage (or close enough to that) in a single turn, it should still be a rare item.

STEP #5 – PUT IT ALL TOGETHER.

Once you have your magic item balanced, it's time to put it all together.

What elements does our magic item have so far?

Here's what we know so far about our *potion of the third eye*:

- It's a potion that's consumable.
- Upon consumption, the drinker grows a third eye.
- The third eye shoots beams.

- The eye beams deal roughly 44 damage to an individual target.

What else should we consider?

In addition to this information, we'll probably want to consider a few other elements:

- How does the eye beam hit creatures? With a ranged spell attack or on a failed saving throw?
- If it's a saving throw, does it deal damage on half?
- And if there is a saving throw, what is the DC?
- What is the range on the item?
- Are there any other special conditions we should consider?
- Does the magic eye have any additional side effects?

Remember, some of these factors can greatly affect the item's rarity, so you'll want to try to stay in line with some of spells and items that you've already modeled your magic item after.

Traditionally, "a certain eyeball monster" causes saving throws versus their rays (from the eye monster's MM stat block). A perfect example is their disintegration ray which necessitates a Dexterity saving throw to avoid taking 45 (10d8) force damage (now, doesn't that sound pretty close to our damage limit?). Also, the range on their rays is 120 feet. And there is no half damage on the save.

So I say we go with that. The newly grown third eye allows a Dexterity saving throw to completely avoid it, it deals 45 (10d8) force damage on a successful hit (and disintegrates a creature that goes to 0 hit points). Plus it has some other effects that make sense, such as blowing holes through Huge or larger objects.

Calculating item save DCs.

For the DC, usually, the magic item will use the caster level. But objects like potions are often used by characters that don't have caster levels. Therefore, we have to calculate one. There's no hard rule that any of the guides offer, but I say your best bet is to consider what a caster of the requisite level's DC would be. For example, a 3rd-level spell requires a caster to be 5th-level. A 5th level caster, in theory, should have maxed out their spellcasting ability up to that point (likely in the 18-19 range, or a +4 modifier). In addition, they get a proficiency bump at level 5 (+3). So the spell save DC for a third level spell should be: magic item save DC = 8 + proficiency bonus (+3) + spellcasting ability modifier (+4) = 15.

STEP #6 – WRITE OUT THE MAGIC ITEM'S RULES TEXT.

This part might seem a little difficult if you're not a professional copywriter, but don't worry, I can teach you a little hack: *find similar text and copy it word for word*. 😊

That's it! You have enough information all ready to put it together. It's just a matter of sewing it all up.

The elements of the magic item card.

The magic item card is the block of text that explains everything you need to know about a magic item. Here are each of the elements explained:

Name of the item. This is pretty simple. Unless it's an artifact, the naming convention for all Fifth Edition magic items is "[type of item] of [effect of item]."

Item category. Just under the name of the item is the item's category. There are only a few categories available for you to choose from: armor, potion, ring, rod, staff, wand, weapon, and wondrous item. The first few should be pretty self-explanatory. The wondrous item category is a catch-all for all the other random stuff your magic item can be.

Sub-category. A few categories have subcategories, notably armor and weapons. This is to help tie the item to a specific mundane item with which the item shares similar functions. For example, an axe of smiting would be a weapon (greataxe) to let you know that it functions exactly like a greataxe normally does with a few magical exceptions.

Rarity. Rarity is the power level of the item and helps balance the game more than anything else. Attunement. If a magic item requires attunement, it's noted at the end of the category-rarity line. Attunement does not normally affect the rarity of an item. If anything it's there to balance out magic items that players might trade amongst each other and try to cheat with. For example, multiple PCs using winged boots to get to the top of a high cliff by simply flying up, taking them off, passing them down, repeat.

Rules text. Finally, the rules text explains exactly what the item does, how it triggers, and what happens once you're done using it.

Multiple effects. A few items have more than one effect. Each power is usually described separately from the rest. A good example is the staff of power.

Tables. Finally, some magic items have special tables that the player or the Dungeon Master may need to refer to in order to create a random effect or better develop the item. A classic example is the wand of wonder which creates random effects upon use.

Writing it all out.

Let's use our *potion of the third eye* example again. We'll start with the basics, the name of the item, the categories, and the rarity.

POTION OF THE THIRD EYE

Potion, rare

Pretty simple right? No need for a sub-category or to attune it.

Next, we just need to create our text. If you check out page 187 of the DMG, that's where every potion is. Each potion starts with text that reads "when you drink this potion" with a few variations such as "after drinking this potion" or "you [effect] when you drink this potion." Either is fine, but I'll go with the classic:

When you drink this potion,

The next part of that phrase tells us exactly what it does in the simplest terms. Our potion causes the drinker to grow a third eye that lets you use your action to fire a disintegration beam at a target within 120 feet of it. So that's what we'll put.

When you drink this potion, you grow a third eye that allows you to use your action to fire a disintegration ray at targets within 120 feet of you.

That's the basics. Now it's time to expand on the concept and introduce limitations. I'm going to borrow from the eye ball monster's text block in the MM.

If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 45 (10d8) force damage. If this damage reduces the creature to 0 hit points, its body becomes a pile of fine gray dust. If the target is a Large or smaller nonmagical object or creation of magical force, it is disintegrated without a saving throw. If the target is a Huge or larger object or creation of magical force, this ray disintegrates a 10-foot cube of it.

So far, so good. All we need now is the time limitation. I'm stealing from the potion of fire breath's text for this.

The effect ends when 1 minute has passed.

One last touch. Each potion gets a flavor description of what the bottle looks like.

An eyeball on a stalk bobs in this greenish liquid but vanishes when the potion is opened.

And that's it. We've just created a fully-fleshed out magic item that comes complete with RAW-ready text. Let's see what it looks like all together:

POTION OF THE THIRD EYE

Potion, rare

When you drink this potion, you grow a third eye that allows you to use your action to fire a disintegration ray at targets within 120 feet of you. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 45 (10d8) force damage. If this damage reduces the creature to 0 hit points, its body becomes a pile of fine gray dust. If the target is a Large or smaller nonmagical object or creation of magical force, it is disintegrated without a saving throw. If the target is a Huge or larger object or creation of magical force, this ray disintegrates a 10-foot cube of it. The effect ends when 1 minute has passed. An eyeball on a stalk bobs in this greenish liquid but vanishes when the potion is opened.

PART 2: IN-GAME MAGIC ITEM CREATION

As a GM, you now understand the basics of item creation and how to create your own magic items relatively quickly.

But let's say that you have a player that wants their character to create a magic item of their own design. How do they go about creating a magic item in-game? And what steps will their character need to take?

IN-GAME MAGIC ITEM CREATION: DMG

On page 128 of the DMG, there are rules for using downtime to create magic items. Magic items creation comes with a few restrictions, of course:

- **A formula is needed to create the magic item.** I'm going to assume that probably doesn't come for free.
- **Crafting a magic item costs a lot of money.** Assuming that you have none of the resources already on hand to create a magic item (more on that in a moment), it's almost as expensive to create a magic item as it is just to buy one (reference Xan's p126 for costs). In fact, it can be up to 42% times more expensive! It's half that cost for consumables, but still!
- **You must be a certain level to create magic items and must be able to cast the involved spell.** Even a common item requires a character to be a 3rd-level spellcaster.
- **Crafting a magic item uses up a lot of time.** Not only does it cost a lot and require you to be a certain level, but it takes 8 hours per 25 gp worth of value of your magic item to create it. Therefore, a rare magic item could take as long as 200 days.

All in all, using downtime to create magic items sounds like it *sucks*.

IN-GAME MAGIC ITEM CREATION: XAN'S

On page 128 of Xan's, there are rules for creating both mundane and magical items in Fifth Edition. These rules expand upon those set forth by the DMG. Ignoring mundane for now, we'll focus on the good stuff: crafting magic items.

What makes Xan's different from the DMG is that it offers up a cool quest hook in the form of requiring exotic monster parts or rare ingredients in addition to the formula and casting requirements.

Page 129 of Xan's gives a cool chart that breaks down the challenge rating range for the monster or encounter one can find magic item ingredients per rarity level. For example, if a character was creating a *potion of the third eye*, they would need to fight a CR 9+ creature. Those "famous eye ball monsters" are CR 13, so obviously that'd be perfect for it.

CHEAPER TIME AND COSTS

What really stands out with Xan's is that once you have the exotic ingredient on hand, the cost of crafting the magic item and the time it takes to do it actually goes down.

So instead of it costing 5,000 gold pieces and 200 days to create a rare magic item, it only takes 10 workweeks (50 days) and 2,000 gp.

Why is it cheaper and faster? Because a big part of the magic item creation is finding the rare part. And that doesn't come cheap or easy!

Armed with that information, consider these two roleplaying situations:

Roleplaying situation #1 (making an item without the ingredient).

Picture this situation. You're a 6th-level wizard that has a formula for creating a *potion of the third eye* that the king has commanded you to create. Your party isn't capable of taking down a beholder itself. So you've got to rely on some other higher-level adventurers to do it for you. They say, "Okay, fine. But it's going to take us probably 150 days to track one down and will cost you 3,000 gp."

In addition to the cost and time of hiring the party, it's going to cost you another 2,000 gp to assemble it, and then 50 days to cook it up. So your total all-around cost is 5,000 gp and 200 days worth of work.

You just hope the king is patient.

Roleplaying situation #2 (making an item with the ingredient).

Let's pretend now that you're a 9th-level caster with a pretty strong party. You've heard that the king demands this *potion of the third eye* to be made and will pay handsomely for it (anywhere from 2,000 to 20,000 gold pieces). You've got some great leads on eyeball monsters, so you're pretty sure this can be fairly lucrative.

You track down an eyeball monster in just a month, slay it and collect the eyestalk. Now you just have to brew the potion. The good news is, the time and cost to put the potion together is only 2,000 gp and 50 days of work. Because you didn't have to seek out others to help you find the monster's eye stalk, you're able to beat every other alchemist to the punch, too.

The king pays you a handsome reward of 11,000 gp. All in all, you netted 9,000gp for your efforts!

EXOTIC MATERIALS HUNTING AS A BUSINESS MODEL

Now that you understand the downtime rules for characters creating magic items outlined in the two guides, perhaps you've already noticed a third business model involving magic items: exotic materials hunting!

Consider this: you just got done clearing out an eye tyrant's lair. You earned roughly 7,000 gold pieces when all was said and done between the treasure and magic items you gained. But you've heard a rumor that wizards around the land are paying for eyeball monster eyestalks to brew potions, specifically the disintegration stalk. In fact, they're paying as much as 3,000 gp for those items!

Severing the defeated BBEG's stalk, you've now increased your loot haul by another 3,000 gp (maybe even more if you put your haggling pants on).

A CAMPAIGN BUILT AROUND EXOTIC MATERIAL HUNTING.

Hunting down magic item parts can be a great business and an awesome hook for a group of traveling PC's. Who cares about saving the world when you can make money skinning yetis or collecting vampire blood?

In addition, the entire process can bring up different sorts of benefits and complications, allies and foes. After all, you know what they say: mo gold, mo problems.

HOW MUCH ARE EXOTIC MATERIALS WORTH?

For quick reference, here's a table I cooked up to show you exactly how much exotic ingredients and materials are worth (by subtracting the with-ingredient creation cost from the without-ingredient creation cost):

Exotic Ingredient Market Value

Item Rarity	CR Range	Ingredient Value
Common	1-3	50 gp
Uncommon	4-8	300 gp
Rare	9-12	3,000 gp
Very Rare	13-18	30,000 gp
Legendary	19+	400,000 gp

In addition, here is a profitability table for magic items that have to source the exotic ingredient:

Magic Item Creation Profitability (sans Exotic Ingredient)

Item Rarity	Market Value	Creation Cost	Profit & Loss
Common	100 gp	100 gp	0 gp
Uncommon	400 gp	300 gp	-100 gp
Rare	4,000 gp	3,000 gp	-1,000 gp
Very Rare	40,000 gp	50,000gp	-10,000 gp
Legendary	200,000 gp	500,000 gp	-300,000 gp

And here is the profitability table for magic items that have the exotic ingredient on-hand:

Magic Item Creation Profitability (sans Exotic Ingredient)

Item Rarity	Market Value	Creation Cost	Profit & Loss
Common	100 gp	50 gp	50 gp
Uncommon	400 gp	200 gp	200 gp
Rare	4,000 gp	2,000 gp	2,000 gp
Very Rare	40,000 gp	20,000gp	20,000 gp
Legendary	200,000 gp	100,000 gp	100,000 gp

Obviously, finding your own exotic ingredients makes a hell of a difference and seems like a lucrative line of work when you create magic items out of them. But can we make it even more profitable than it already is? Is it possible that you can make more profit selling the actual ingredient itself than creating a magic item with the ingredients?

The answer is yes.

Let's compare the profits for creating your own magic items and selling it to the values of the exotic ingredients themselves:

Ingredient Profits vs Magic Item Sales Profits

Item Rarity	Ingredient Value	Magic Item Profits	Difference
Common	50 gp	50 gp	0 gp
Uncommon	300 gp	200 gp	100 gp
Rare	3,000 gp	2,000 gp	1,000 gp
Very Rare	30,000 gp	20,000gp	10,000 gp
Legendary	400,000 gp	100,000 gp	300,000 gp

Therefore, it's better to sell the ingredients outright than it is to create the magic item.

Now, I realize this is probably just a minor break in the rules of the game. But this is RAW, after all, as proven by the math above.

LET ME BREAK IT DOWN FOR YOU.

Here's the TL;DR version of everything I just wrote.

- The DMG gives crafting costs for magic items if you don't possess the key ingredient (page 129).
- Xan's gives crafting costs for magic items if you do possess the key ingredient (page 129).
- Therefore, the difference between the cost without the ingredient and the cost with the ingredient is the cost of the ingredient itself (see the Exotic Ingredient Market Value table above).
- The cost to sell magic items is outlined on page 133 of Xan's.
- It is not profitable to sell items that you lack the key ingredients to as proven by Magic Item Creation Profitability table above.
- On the other hand, you can double your investment selling the magic items that you create for which you have the key ingredients.
- However, the Ingredients Profits vs the Magic Item Sales Profits table shows that selling the ingredient itself is **far more profitable** in the long run than creating the magic item.

Well, how do you like that?

THANKS FOR READING!

This in-depth article on magic item creation was requested by one of my Patrons. If you'd like a similar guide or something else requested, feel free to become a patron by going to www.patreon.com/dmdave.

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See you next time!

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