

THE FESTERWOOD



THE FESTERWOOD

The Festerwood is a large, underground forest ecosystem that is miraculously self-sustaining through its frequent natural cycles of life and death. Flora in the Festerwood is largely devoid of color, relying on hardiness and slow growth to survive. Color makes for a prime target in this otherwise gray landscape. When a tree dies, it is quickly reborn as a host of mushrooms and loamy soil. The entirety of the forest floor of the Festerwood is soft and spongy: the result of many life cycles of growth and decay.

The bountiful array of fungus growing in the Festerwood is matched only by its population of beetles and other insects. Swarms of insects plague the forest, devouring the most easily available nutrients before moving on.

The Festerwood is unsettling, to say the least. Many strange plants and insects thrive in this forest, feasting on those foolish enough to cross into it. Despite that, some intelligent creatures have made this place their home, and may have interesting rewards, requests, or stories for your players to experience.

AMBIENT MOOD

The air is damp and stale, filled with the scent of mildew. While there is no breeze here underground, the slow movement of cool air replacing the warm air of the surface brings some small comfort. Trees creak as if their branches ache, echoing discordantly throughout the wood. Yellow, slowly pulsing ambient light peaks through the forest as small clusters of strange knots made from an amber-looking substance break through the trees' barked exterior. The soil is loamy and soft, but oily to the touch and perpetually fetid. Small pools and trickles of water can be found, although their origin and quality are always questionable.

- The Festerwood is typically quiet, as the sounds of walking feet are muffled by the soft ground. The only discordance breaking through the silence are the echoes of creaking wood and the thrumming of insect swarms.
- Play up the closeness of the trees. Despite being underground, festerwood trees have unusually thick trunks and grow very close together. A variety of small to middling flora and fungi grow in the few openings between fallen tree branches and occasional gaps in the trees.
- Fungus grows on almost everything here. Only on very rare occasions is it safe to eat. An exceptionally skilled survivalist, cook, or herbalist can attempt to identify and forage for edible varieties. Use sensory language about the smell, texture, and color of these varieties.
- At the center of the festerwood, an enormous, glowing mushroom called the Lightspore sheds dim light across the forest. While adventuring, a party will likely use that as their main landmark.
- The temperature is constant due to the Festerwood's placement underground. Combined with the strange, ambient light sources within the forest, this makes it very

difficult for a creature to tell what time it is or how long they've been inside the forest.

- Some patches of earth dip downward suddenly, having filled in a previously exposed sink hole. Similarly, various flat areas will abruptly drop into an earthen pit.
- Emphasize how repetitive the trees become over time. While there are an enormously large number of varieties of fungi and underbrush, the innumerable festerwood trees are very nearly identical to one. Navigating the Festerwood is very difficult for inexperienced travelers because of the scarcity of prominent landmarks.
- Because of the tight spaces created by the crowding trees and fierce underbrush, the Festerwood promises numerous hidden areas and sudden chance discoveries. For that same reason, when creatures are hunting or hungry, they thrive on ambush.

LIGHT IN THE FESTERWOOD

At the center of the Festerwood is the Lightspore: a colossal, glowing mushroom that drives the natural order of the wood. Although sunlight evades the Festerwood, the Lightspore provides its own perpetual bioluminescence. The light fluctuates in a repeating cycle of dim light and near darkness. Each cycle of light takes place over 8 hours. At its brightest, the Lightspore covers the entire Festerwood in a twilight of blue and purple light, but when it's darkened, the light cast by the mushroom is merely reminiscent of a partially cloud-covered moon.

THE LIGHTSPORE

At the base of its stalk, the Lightspore's light is considered bright light during its light cycle, and dim when it's darkened. The area surrounding the mushroom is devoid of other plantlife in a 1,000-foot radius around its gargantuan base. If you choose to include a town in the Festerwood for your campaign, this may be an ideal location for it—depending on the inhabitants you choose to place there. See the *Settlements* segment later in this document for more insights into what type of creatures might call this place home.

The Lightspore's stalk is roughly 750 feet in diameter at ground level. The cavernous cap of the great mushroom extends roughly 1,250 feet out from its base, totaling almost three quarters of a mile across from edge to edge. With a texture almost like marble, both cap and stalk emit an identical fluctuating glow of magenta, blue, and purple light. Its flesh is a pale blue, but due to its size, no other discernable features have been found.

DANGEROUS SPORES

The spores that drift from the Lightspore are toxic. Many creatures native to the Festerwood developed a resistance to their harmful effects centuries ago, making surface-dwelling visitors the easiest to fall victim.

When a creature is subjected to enough of these spores,

they become a shambling husk of their former self. These husks become relentlessly driven to slowly migrate toward the Lightspore, ignoring calls to sleep or eat until they have reached the foot of the mighty fungus. The details on spore-husks are found at the end of this section.

Transformative Spores

At the end of every 24 hours that a creature spends above ground in the Festerwood, that creature is forced to make a DC 5 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, that creature gains one Spore Counter. Rolling a 1 on this saving throw is always considered a failure, regardless of the roll's total. If a creature reaches 3 Spore Counters, that creature becomes a sporehusk using the template at the end of this section.

Once a sporehusk reaches the stalk of the Lightspore, it becomes frozen in place and does not move as it eventually dies. Risen Sporehusks immediately collapse at the base.

If a creature dies and has at least one Spore Counter, the corpse rises after 24 hours as a Risen Sporehusk. If a hungering creature eats a husk, it automatically gains two Spore Counters.

A creature is immune to these spores if it's immune to disease. One Spore Counter can be removed when a creature becomes the target of a *lesser restoration* spell or similar magic. If a creature does not gain any Spore Counters over a period of 5 days, any remaining Counters are removed.

EXPLORATION

The Festerwood's abundance of claustrophobic spaces and scarcity of identifiable landmarks makes it challenging to navigate. Most traveled pathways are along the occasional narrow trails of water that are scattered throughout the wood. As a result, it can be particularly difficult to pinpoint the same location twice without proper expertise and preparation.

Traveling in the Festerwood

Navigation. The repetitive nature of the wood makes it troublesome to find a specific location without luck or practice. Traveling anywhere besides the Lightspore's stalk or beneath its cap requires a navigation check based on its location within the Festerwood.

Foraging. DC 14; water is uncommon, and light game excels at hiding. Experienced characters can forage for edible plants and fungi among the mostly poisonous flora (DC 16). If a creature normally eats insects instead of traditional game, the foraging DC becomes 10 instead.

Special Rules. Every 24 hours a creature spends in the Festerwood, it must roll a d20 to see if it gains a Spore Counter.

NAVIGATION

Because of the wood's unmoving light source, creatures are always able to tell which direction leads towards the Lightspore. However, the scarcity of other landmarks and lack of astral bodies make it difficult for the average traveler to judge anything further. Failing a navigation check causes you to become lost and roll on the Becoming Lost table.

Festerwood Navigation DCs

DC	Location
None	The Lightspore
None	Any unhidden location beneath the Lightspore
15	A location nearby the Lightspore or among the sparse edges of the forest
20	A location one or more miles into the forest
25	A location hidden deep within the thickest and most feral part of the Festerwood

Becoming Lost

d6	Result
1-4	After countless wrong turns and bug bites, the party ends the day up to 2d6 miles in a random direction away from their destination.
5-6	Using the Lightspore as a guide despite being lost, the party ends the day up to 1d6 miles away from their destination.

FLORA AND FORAGING

Within the Festerwood is a rich ecosystem of exotic plants and fungi. A character that is experienced with foraging (or exceptionally lucky) may be able to collect and identify certain edible flora following a successful DC 16 foraging check. The resources found by successful foraging are nutritious and safe for ingestion. If a character rolls a 20 or higher on their foraging check, roll on the Exceptional Foraged Food table to determine if the foraged food grants any additional benefits.

On the other hand, eating hazardous foraged foods can have dangerous consequences. When a character eats food found by a failed foraging check, they must roll on the Dangerous Foraged Food table to determine if any adverse effects occur. Regardless of the outcome, the character is not sustained by the food.

Exceptional Foraged Food

d6	Result
1-4	The food is enough to sustain the character for up to 24 hours.
5-6	The character is nourished for 24 hours and removes one Spore Counter if it has any.

Dangerous Foraged Food

d6	Result
1	The character is poisoned for next 8 hours and gains one Spore Counter.
2-5	The character is poisoned for 1 hour.
6	The character is not nourished but suffers no other ill effects.

COLLECTING AMBER PUSTULES

The bits of amber covering the trees in the Festerwood are unique to the forest. These organic gem-like pustules glow with a dim yellow light and allow the tree to grow using the unnatural luminescence from the Lightspore. The pustules are toxic to creatures and other plants, inflicting 1 acid damage for every round (10 acid damage for every minute) that the pustule is in physical contact.

Most veins of this amber are found in narrow channels along the grain of a tree. Occasionally, it can coalesce into a larger knot or clump. To the right buyer, a fist-sized chunk of the glowing amber can sell for as much as 100 gp. Transporting the amber is difficult because it burns through most containers. Festerwood is uniquely immune to the amber's acid, so collectors in the wood can be identified by their small festerwood chests.

Festerwood trees are extremely difficult to cut down or carve, acting like a strange metal instead of wood.

EXAMPLE ENCOUNTERS

The forest is filled with potential, both good and bad. Use this table for to fill out your party's time in the Festerwood with exciting and flavorful encounters and events:

d12 + d10	Result
2	1 purple worm
3	An odd twisting of the large festerwood tree branches seems to align and spell the word 'resistance' in celestial. Saying the word aloud causes the speaker and up to 4 allies of their choice within 60 feet to become the target of a <i>lesser restoration</i> spell. If a character loses a Spore Counter in this way, the next time that they are forced to roll to see if they gain a spore counter, they must roll a 1 to gain one Spore Counter.
4	1d2 behir
5	1 werebear in personal exile who is fighting their curse. Their alignment is neutral evil.
6	1d2 festerwood treants . They offer amber pustules in exchange for the eradication of a nearby hive of 3d6 + 3 festerwood beetles (use statistics of giant wasps), one fist-sized chunk for every 6 beetles slain.

d12 + d10	Result
7	1d3 shambling mounds . Altered by the Festerwood, they have poison immunity and absorption instead of lightning.
8	1 spirit naga
9	2d4 will-o'-wisps . If the party decides to follow them, roll again on the encounter table, ignoring results that are multiples of three.
10	4d8 swarm of insects (beetles)
11	1d12 twig blights
12	1d4 + 1 xorn . Though well-fed by the ever-present amber pustules, they offer guidance to locations in the wood in exchange for any gems or precious metals the party may have.
13	3d10 violet fungus
14	2d6 duergar raiding party
15	A copse of trees containing 3d4 easy-to reach amber pustules.
16	A strange knotting of roots seems to reveal the entrance to a cave. At the DM's discretion, this may lead to a ruin or dungeon of any size or shape.
17	8d6 giant fire beetles . Enhanced by their diet of amber pustules, their bite attacks deal an extra 1d4 fire damage.
18	1 guardian naga . It is protecting the ancient burial site of a legendary hero on behalf of the deity they championed.
19	1d4 small orange magical mushrooms can be seen at the bottom of a recently opened sinkhole. A creature that eats a mushroom gains the benefits of the <i>detect poison and disease</i> spell for 8 hours. Once picked, a mushroom loses its magic after 24 hours. Mushrooms regrow after 4 days, but if all visible mushrooms are picked, no more will grow in this area.
20	2d8 black puddings
21	1 stone giant . A craftsman on a journey to master carving festerwood, he trades information about the area for any amber pustule-free festerwood that the party have with them.
22	4d4 goblins riding worgs . They roam the wood searching for food and supplies for their tribe.

RUINS AND DUNGEONS

Because of the soft ground, most stony caves within the Festerwood are pathways to and from it instead of contained caverns. However, because of the dense root systems and strength of Festerwood lumber, dungeons and hidden passageways can potentially be found underneath any tree in the woods. Some entrances become exposed when a sinkhole

suddenly appears underfoot, or when a stream eventually erodes enough of the surrounding soil to uncover it. Other entrances can be found in the tangles of exposed roots beneath the great trees. In very rare cases, they can be found carved into the trees themselves.

When making a dungeon in the Festerwood, remember the moist nature of the surrounding earth and the eerie creaking of the trees. Ambient light within the dungeon can be found as amber pustules exposed on roots or as small glowing fungus along the floors. Regardless of the purpose of the area's existence, be sure to play up the fetid, earthy smells, the soggy atmosphere and creaking noises, and powerful sense of unease that exudes from the Festerwood.

EXAMPLE DUNGEONS

The Festerwood has the potential for magical secrets and dungeons to exist within it, including the following:

d6 Example Dungeon

- 1 On top of the Lightspore, a colony of kobolds worship their black dragon overlord. They have carved out a network of caves and tunnels within the Lightspore's cap, and rumors tell of a dark blessing being bestowed upon them.
- 2 Somewhere near the edge of the Lightspore, a cult of necromancers has learned how to control the Risen Sporehusks along with their more typical undead servants. Their arcane knowledge threatens to destroy the natural order by raising and controlling the hundreds of Sporehusks below the Lightspore.
- 3 The goblinoids have continued to thrive in the Festerwood's hazardous environment: a tribe of bug-bears and their Goblin peasantry ravage the forest on their trained wolf mounts, gathering supplies for their nomadic existence. They stand as a looming threat against all travelers and settlers of the wood due to their large numbers and extensive use of amber pustules and fungal toxins in their arsenal.
- 4 While there was once a community of deep gnomes under the Lightspore in decades past, an invasion from slaving Duergar has held sway in the Festerwood for years now. With their utilitarian crafting skills and slave labor, they have amassed a stronghold full of festerwood defenses, weaponry, and magics to fuel their expansion.
- 5 Hidden in the depths of the Festerwood, a circle of corrupt druids seeks to harness the unfathomable power of the Lightspore. They've come well prepared with large numbers, festerwood armor, and magical weaponry to accompany their frenzied crusade.
- 6 Long exiled from their tribe on the surface and cursed with deformities of the flesh, a clan of orcs have eked out a miserable existence in the Festerwood's network of root-supported caves. Recent threats have pushed them to new and dangerous magics, activating a vile sort of symbiosis with the local insects, transforming the starving orcs into moving sentient hive horrors with a craving for flesh.

SETTLEMENTS

Most settlements within the Festerwood are likely to be found beneath the Lightspore or among the branches of the forest canopy. Staying within one of these towns for a prolonged period of time may improve your defenses against the perpetual toxic spores from the Lightspore if you spend sufficient time indoors.

The materials used in building Festerwood settlements can vary based on the culture that founded it. Stone masonry brought in from the underground forest's cavernous walls may be used, as well as natural fibers from the sundry plants in the area. Skilled craftsman experienced with working with local materials may also be able to provide lumber to construct durable festerwood buildings.

These settlements would likely prioritize defense against invasive swarms over hearty welcomes and cheerful attitudes. Unlike their surface counterparts, these settlers would forgo colorful decorations in favor of survival.

SUGGESTED INHABITANTS

Classic underground-dwelling creatures may make these settlements their home, with dwarves and deep gnomes being the friendliest options. Other unsavory creatures such as drow, duergar, goblins, or kobolds could create their own settlements here as well.

EXAMPLE SETTLEMENTS

Consider using these sample ideas as inspiration when building your own settlements within the Festerwood:

- Blocks of worked stone, dragged miles from the forest's stone walls hundreds of years ago, make up a muted community of dwarves beneath the Lightspore who excel at working with the unnaturally dense festerwood.
- A tangle of hollowed branches, trunks, and woven plant fibers make a comfortable nest among the trees, giving a settlement of drow hunters a dim and safe place to reside while satisfying their ancient fey affinity for trees and plant life.
- Deep within the thickets and roots of the Dim Marsh, kobolds gather resources to offer unto the great black dragon that they believe is living atop the Lightspore.
- The large shelf fungi of the Eastern Quarter of the Festerwood is a protective barrier for the deep gnomes that call it home. Small, tangled webs of bridges weave their way between the mushrooms to form an elevated highway of foot traffic among the sturdy trees.



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SPOREHUSKS

The creatures that fall victim to the Lightspore's influence become sporehusks: empty shells of their former selves whose only purpose is to nourish the great Lightspore at the center of the festerwood.

When a creature dies while it has at least one Spore Counter, it becomes a Risen Sporehusk after 24 hours. If it is slain again, the corpse remains dead.

Sporehusks will not attack unless provoked. Their natural

RISEN SPOREHUSK

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 9

Hit Points 37 (5d8 + 15)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	6 (-2)	16 (+3)	1 (-5)	5 (-3)	3 (-4)

Damage Vulnerabilities fire, radiant

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned, unconscious

Senses blindsight 30 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Radiance Susceptibility. If the sporehusk takes radiant damage, it loses its damage resistances and gains vulnerability to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage until the start of its next turn. If the sporehusk is ever within an area of sunlight, it has disadvantage on attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws until the end of its next turn.

Regeneration. The sporehusk regains 5 hit points at the start of its turn. If it takes fire or radiant damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the sporehusk's next turn. The sporehusk dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The sporehusk makes one grab attack. If that attack hits, the sporehusk can make one bite attack against the same target.

Grab. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage and if the target is a creature, it is grappled (escape DC 11).

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target grappled by the sporehusk. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

preference is to shamble their way towards the Lightspore, but will defend themselves if attacked or otherwise prevented from reaching their destination.

BECOMING A SPOREHUSK

Any creature made from living tissue can become a sporehusk, including undead risen from such creatures. When a creature becomes a sporehusk, it retains all its statistics except as noted below.

Alignment. The sporehusk's alignment becomes neutral evil. The sporehusk loses all motivations, bonds, and loyalties it had in its previous life.

Natural Armor The sporehusk's armor class can't be less than 12 + its Dexterity modifier.

Hit Points. The sporehusk gains 2 hit dice, increasing its hit point maximum accordingly.

Ability Scores. The sporehusk's Strength and Constitution scores increase by 2, and its Dexterity, Wisdom, and Charisma are reduced by 2 (minimum 1). Its Intelligence score becomes 6, unless it is already lower.

Senses. The sporehusk has blindsight with a radius of 15 feet and darkvision with a radius of 60 feet, unless it has a superior darkvision range.

Damage Vulnerabilities. The sporehusk has vulnerability to fire and radiant damage.

Damage Resistances. The sporehusk has resistance to poison damage.

Condition Immunities. The sporehusk has immunity to the charmed and poisoned conditions.

Languages. The sporehusk understands any languages it knew previously, but can't speak.

Regeneration. The sporehusk regains 5 hit points at the start of its turn. If it takes fire or radiant damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the sporehusk's next turn. The sporehusk dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

Sunlight Weakness. While in sunlight, the sporehusk has disadvantage on attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws.

Multiattack. The sporehusk makes one grab attack. If that attack hits, the sporehusk can make one bite attack against the same target. If the creature already has a multiattack, the GM can decide to either replace it, or add this as an alternative.

New Action: Grab. *Melee weapon attack* using Strength. On a hit, the attack deals 1d6 + Strength modifier bludgeoning damage and if the target is a creature, it is grappled. The escape DC of the grapple is equal to 10 + the creature's Strength modifier.

New Action: Bite. *Melee weapon attack* using Strength, targeting a creature grappled by the sporehusk. On a hit, the attack deals 1d8 + Strength modifier piercing damage.

EXAMPLE SPOREHUSK

Use the new abilities and features from the *Becoming A Sporehusk* section to create the statistics for a newly turned sporehusk. As an example, the sporehusk template has been applied to a human scout to create a scout sporehusk:

SCOUT SPOREHUSK

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 37 (5d8 + 15)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	6 (-2)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)

Skills Nature +2, Perception +2, Stealth +3, Survival +2

Damage Vulnerabilities fire, radiant

Damage Resistances poison

Condition Immunities charmed, poisoned

Senses blindsight 15 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages understands Common but can't speak

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Keen Hearing and Sight. The scout has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or sight.

Regeneration. The sporehusk regains 5 hit points at the start of its turn. If it takes fire or radiant damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the sporehusk's next turn. The sporehusk dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

Sunlight Weakness. While in sunlight, the sporehusk has disadvantage on attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The sporehusk makes one grab attack. If that attack hits, the sporehusk can make one bite attack against the same target.

Grab. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage and if the target is a creature, it is grappled (escape DC 11).

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target grappled by the sporehusk. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

Special Thanks

Festerwood Battlemap. Cze and Peku.

Risen Sporehusk & template. It's a DnD Monster Now.

Additional Content & Editing. Logicspren.

REMINDER: Changing Ability Scores

When you change a creature's ability scores, remember to adjust any bonuses for attack and damage rolls, as well as for AC, hit points, saving throws, and skills.

SAVING SPOREHUSKS

A sporehusk subjected to 8 or more hours of sunlight each day for 5 days is cured of its affliction. A risen sporehusk becomes a nonmagical corpse, and a living sporehusk has no memory of its time spent as a husk.

If you reduce a sporehusk to 0 hit points and magically revive it again before it becomes a risen sporehusk, the creature returns to its normal faculties with 1 level of exhaustion and two Spore Counters.

EXAMPLE TREASURE

When determining treasure for the festerwood, consider the denizens that live there. Items that are suited for creatures who live in darkness or deal with swamps or poison, such as the *Plaguebane Mask*, *Quagmire Maul*, *Retaliating Bloom Shield*, *Shadowshawl*, or *Snuff* may all be good fits. Other more woodland-themed items, such as the *Druidic Throwing Club*, *Timber*, or *Trident of the Dryad* may also be good fits depending on the nature of any woodsmen or druids living within the wood. Of course, any item with "Festerwood" in its name is a perfect fit for this environment.

