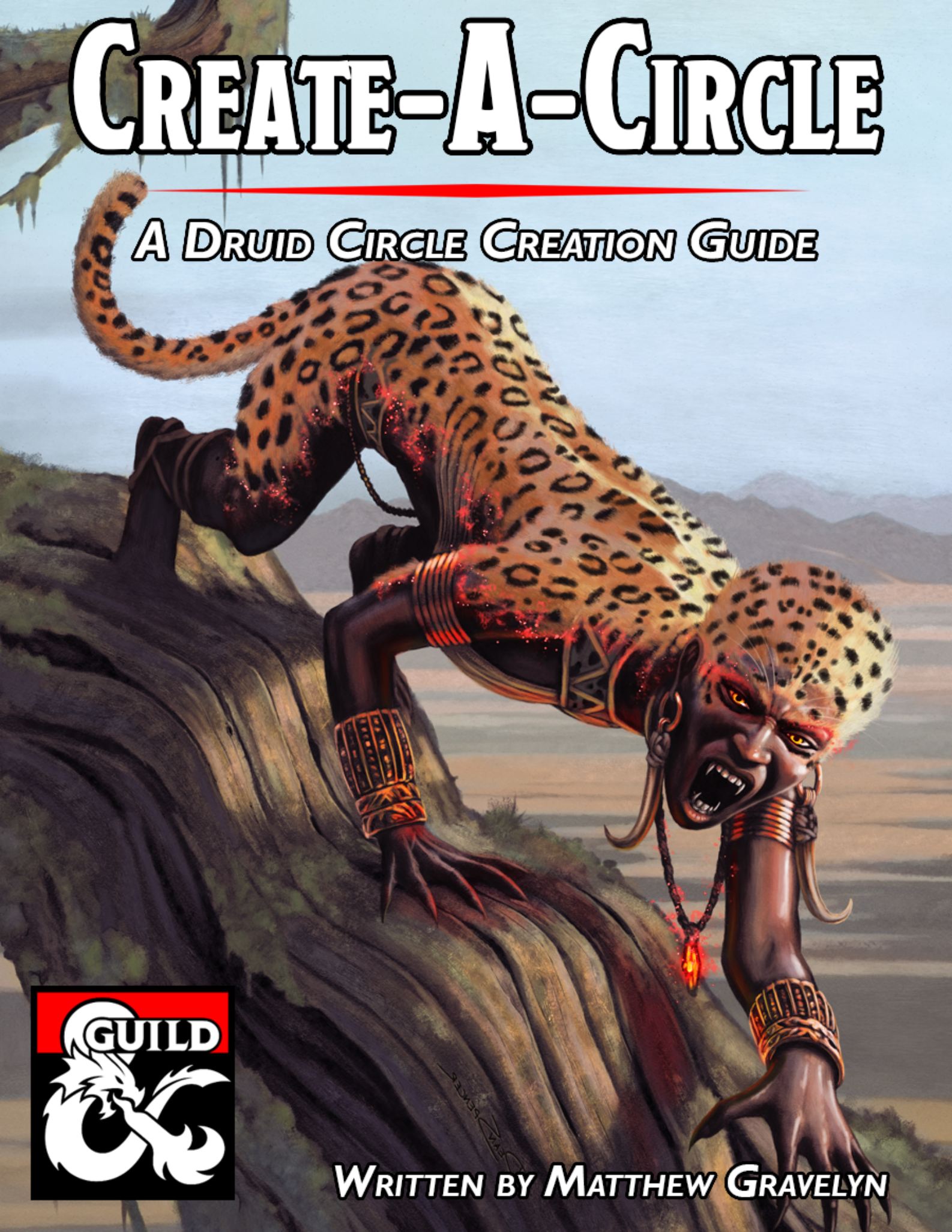


# CREATE-A-CIRCLE

A DRUID CIRCLE CREATION GUIDE



WRITTEN BY MATTHEW GRAVELYN



# CREATE-A-CIRCLE

*A how-to guide for creating a druid Circle in 5e*



Written by MATTHEW GRAVELYN

*Cover image © Dean Spencer*

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Create-A-Circle: A Druid Circle Creation Guide by Matthew Gravelyn

# INTRODUCTION

## JOINING A CIRCLE

While you are almost certainly familiar with the druid as a natural being, one who leverages beasts and the land itself as readily as they do spells and weapons, there is a deeper level of druidic society that most are completely unaware of. There is not grand meeting hall, faction banners, or widespread renowned for members of a druidic Circle but it is as important to individual druids as any city council or war committee.

Very early on their path, druids align themselves with a Circle, a society of like-minded druids who hold the same goals and ways of life. They regularly come together to achieve the preservation of nature and uphold a balance of life. Usually druids of a Circle utilize the same means as well, focusing on specific areas of magic or woodcraft.

It is here, in this secret druidic society that we will focus our creative energy to create your very own, custom druid Circle.

## USING THIS SOURCEBOOK

This book is meant to be a template, a guide to help you create your very own druid Circle that is compatible with virtually any 5e setting or campaign. In this way, you have nearly limitless potential to entertain yourself and find new ways to bring the druid to life in your game.

Each section covers an area of Circle creation, including an overview of existing options, concepts to consider during creation, and how to balance the features that go into a Circle.

This book is based on research of the official druid Circle options as well as many other homebrew and self-published options. Using that research as a framework, I created this guide to help you create a Circle as quickly and easily as possible.

## EXAMPLES

Included at the end of each section are two example Circles that I have created following this guide. Feel free to use these Circles in your game, but their true purpose is to illustrate the practical application of the guide.

Examples are found in blue boxes at the end of each section and detail the choices of that section. Complete versions of Circle of the Branch and Circle of Stone can be found at the end of this guide.





## DRUID FEATURES

Before diving into creating your Circle, it's important to fully understand the base class it builds upon. For the druid, this is an easier task as the class is relatively simple and only has a few class-specific features. This section is a quick refresher of the class and points out some of the more unique aspects of the druid to consider when building your subclass.

## PROFICIENCIES & GEAR

When creating a druid, there are some specifics that you'll note in the setup section. First, druids will not utilize armor or shields made of metal. Some players will also not utilize weapons made of metal, but this is personal preference. There are also some spells, like *shillelagh*, that don't affect metal weapons.

Additionally, druids are limited to light or medium armor, which translates to either leather or hide. Studded leather could be possible with DM approval, but you'd have to rationalize what it's studded with if not metal.

The druid also doesn't start with much in the way of arms. At most a druid can begin with a scimitar and a wooden shield, two simple weapons, or some combination thereof. Either way, they are not as ready for physical combat as most classes, so make sure your Circle features don't rely on fancy weapons.

## SPELLCASTING

Right out of the gate the druid is armed with two cantrips from the druid list and two 1<sup>st</sup> level spell slots. The druid also operates on a prepared list of spells that can be updated after completing a long rest. The number of spells prepared is equal to your character's druid level + their Wisdom modifier and these are the only spells the druid can cast. As the druid progresses in levels, they gain additional cantrips and spell slots and the size of their prepared spell list increases with each level.

When considering spellcasting features in your Circle, make sure to check with the class guide and spell list to see what the base druid class is already offering. This will help ensure you're not overlapping or contradicting an existing ability.

## WILD SHAPE

Arguably the most unique and defining aspect of the druid class is the druid's ability to shapeshift into beasts. This feature is available at 2<sup>nd</sup> level alongside the druid's Circle choice. There are a lot of rules around this feature, including which beasts are available to the druid, limitations on beast movement speeds, how often the druid can use this feature, as the duration of its effects. Even if you don't think you'll be utilizing Wild Shape in your Circle, it is highly recommended that you familiarize yourself with this ability as it will almost certainly come into play.

If you craft a feature that modifies or enhances Wild Shape, make sure it doesn't contradict any of these base rules too much. Some areas that I would consider off limits are the CR and movement limitations as well as the number of uses. Outside of that, you can consider improving damage or defense of the beast form or offering the beast form an ability it wouldn't otherwise have.

## TIMELESS BODY

This feature doesn't come until 18<sup>th</sup> level and is more of a thematic element of the class. My only recommendation here is to make sure anything you add to the class doesn't clash with this, such as other rates of aging.

## BEAST SPELLS

Also at 18<sup>th</sup> level, the druid gains the ability to cast druid spells while under the effects of Wild Shape but are unable to use material components. This limits the spells usable while in beast form, but I'm also acutely aware that many players don't follow the letter of the rules when it comes to spell requirements. Again, keep this in mind when crafting Circle features that make use of spellcasting as it relates to Wild Shape.

## ARCHDRUID

Finally, at 20<sup>th</sup> level, the druid can use Wild Shape an unlimited number of times. Like the previous few features this one comes very late in progression, so it likely won't influence a lot of your Circle creation but keep it in mind. Any Circle features you introduce that modify or alter Wild Shape will also be impacted by this ability in the long run.

# CIRCLE CREATION

Creating a Circle is a relatively straightforward affair.

## NAMING YOUR CIRCLE

There is a very simple naming convention for druid Circles that looks like this: **Circle of \_\_\_\_\_** or **Circle of the \_\_\_\_\_**. You would fill in the blank with a single word that sums up the goals and methods of your Circle. This doesn't need to be immediately obvious to anyone who hears it, but it should make sense in context. For example, the Circle of Dreams found in Xanathar's is all about a connection with the Feywild and utilizing the spaces between reality. While none of this is explicitly called out in "Dreams", once you understand the background it becomes clear.

Think about what you want a druid of your Circle to be doing and, more importantly, why they're doing those things. Think about all that in terms of themes and use that as a jumping off point for naming your Circle.

## A CIRCLE'S PURPOSE

Circles are often extremely widespread, not focusing on a seat of power or political borders. The druids are not bound by arbitrary lines on a map, respecting the natural borders of the land instead. Their ranks may even be separated, scattered across similar regions throughout the land.

There is usually some form of hierarchy within a Circle; high-ranking archdruids forming a council or even multiple levels of seniority. This is less of a management structure and more of mentorship and leadership. Organizing hundreds or thousands of druids is no small task and ensuring that the Circle's goals are met requires planning and structure.

While not a required part of defining a playable Circle, thinking about the structure of your Circle can help flesh it out for roleplaying and possibly even inform actual features and abilities. To get started, consider the following topics:

- Where are the members of your Circle primarily located? Are they found across the land or in a localized region?
- How is the Circle lead? Is there a council, a single presiding figure, or some kind of democratic vote?
- What is the Circle's guiding purpose? What cause above all others would they prioritize in times of need?

### Example: Circle of the Branch

Most druids rely on their magic or the creatures of the land to come to their aid. For some, they seek a more direct path to protect their ancestral home. Druids who embroil themselves in the thick of combat have found ways to craft the natural energy of the world into powerful attacks and impenetrable defenses. These druids are found in the Circle of the Branch.

While still entirely focused on the preservation of nature, druids of this Circle are not limited to any one region or land. These druids are organized similar to a city militia, training in magic-aided combat to push back those who would seek to destroy or exploit their lands.

### Example: Circle of Stone

Most folks associate druids with lush forests, fertile plains, or even windy coastlines. There is a faction of druids, however, that are drawn to something deeper, the very bedrock of the land. These druids, known as the Circle of Stone, attune themselves to the rocks, minerals, and soil, believing this to be the closest to nature's spirit one can get.

Druids of the Circle of Stone are stoic and patient. They craft complex plans to achieve their goals, some of which might take decades to unfold. These druids utilize their connection with stone to extend their own senses as well as to aid them in combat, should the situation call for it.



## ORIGIN FEATURE

Druids choose their Circle at 2<sup>nd</sup> level and gain access to the first feature. This early-progression feature will be used often and should define their Circle in both action and theme.

## FOUNDATIONAL ABILITY

Think of this feature as the druid's default ability, the move they will make in virtually any situation. If you create a 2<sup>nd</sup> level feature and the druid isn't using it at least once per combat, it might be a good idea to go back to the drawing board. This feature is as thematic as it is practical, defining the Circle. As such, it should be used early and often.

This is also the place you want to put any new mechanics for the class, such as a pool of dice used to activate abilities, a list of Circle spells, or any other new rules. Later features are much simpler, tending to improve existing abilities rather than introduce new ones. More on that later.

## FEATURES WITH OPTIONS

To really stretch your mileage with this early feature and keep it interesting throughout progression you can offer a set of options that the druid can choose from each time they make use of the feature. In this way the druid can adapt to many situations, making the feature feel more effective and not situational.

For these options, you can have them be in the moment, choosing a new option each time the druid uses the feature, or a choice they must make when gaining the feature. The latter can be thought of as a specialization, like an elemental druid pursuing a path of fire versus water.

## BONUSES & EXTRAS

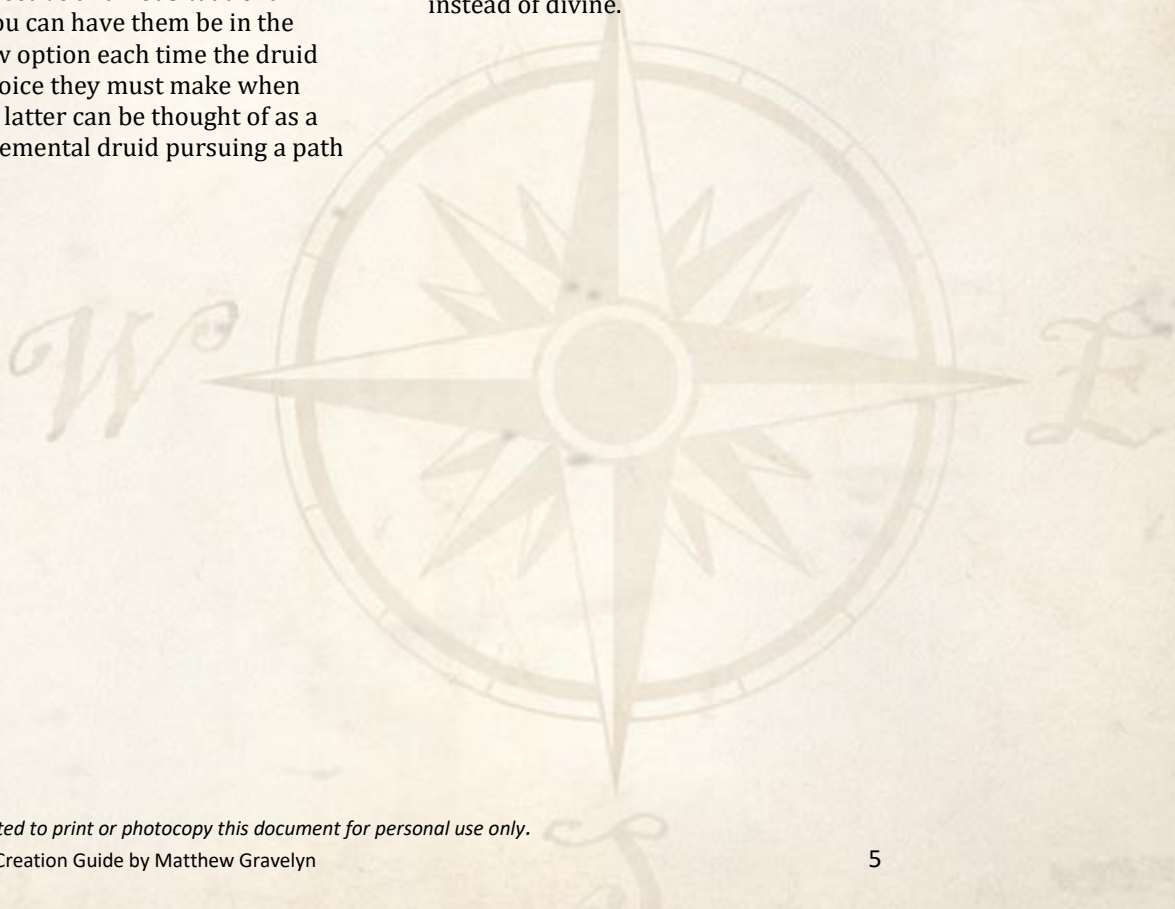
If you're having trouble coming up with a suitably potent ability for this feature or are happy with a less powerful ability that fits well with your theme, you can add some oomph by including some extras. These could range from bonus proficiencies, languages, or even an extra cantrip. These can also be great ways to add in some extra thematic elements for the druid to leverage outside of combat.

## CIRCLE SPELLS

There is only one official Circle that offers a list of Circle spells and it can be found in the Player's Handbook. While rare, I wanted to add in a little information about that here as there is a structure for creating a list of subclass spells.

To start, you will need to select spells that become available to the druid at 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> level. At each of these levels you will choose two spells of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> level, respectively. These spells will, once unlocked, be always available to the druid to cast.

The spells you choose for this list should fit two criteria: they should be thematically representative of the Circle and they should offer the druid spells they wouldn't otherwise have access to. Search through the spell lists for the ranger, sorcerer, and wizard to find new spells that fit the Circle. If it makes sense, you could pull from the cleric and paladin lists and give a little note about portraying these spells as natural instead of divine.



### Example: Circle of the Branch

One of my favorite druid spells is *shillelagh*. I wanted to take the concept of a melee combat druid and expand upon it with an entire Circle. This feature sets the stage for the druid to empower their weapons strikes or increase their defenses.

**Bolstered by Nature:** Starting at 2nd level, you can use your action to grant a natural blessing to one nonmetal weapon, shield, or armor that you touch. This effect lasts until you dismiss it as a free action, use this feature again, or are physically separated from the item. While blessed, the item has one of the following traits:

**Weapon.** You can use your druid spellcasting modifier for attack and damage rolls with this weapon, and the damage is magical for the purposes of overcoming resistances or immunities. The damage die of the weapon is a d8.

**Shield.** You can add your shield AC bonus to Dexterity saving throws against spells or effects that deal damage. When taking damage from a spell or effect you can use your reaction to half as much damage.

**Armor.** Reduce the amount of bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage you take from nonmagical attacks by an amount equal to your druid spellcasting modifier.

### Example: Circle of Stone

I see this Circle being more geared toward defense and patience, so I wanted these druids to have a skill that can protect them or their allies. It also scales nicely with the druid's level, so it won't become obsolete in later levels.

**Stone Shield:** Starting at 2nd level, you have an innate bond with the very land and can call on it for aid. You have a pool of primal energy represented by a number of d4s equal to your druid level.

When you or an ally is the target of a ranged attack or a targeted spell that deals damage, you can use your reaction to spend a number of these dice equal to half your druid level or less. Roll the spent dice and add them together. Add the total to AC against the attack as the ground rises up to protect you.

You regain all spent dice after you finish a long rest.





# UPGRADE FEATURE

For the bulk of official Circles, the 6<sup>th</sup> level feature offers an improvement to their existing arsenal, a boost to an existing ability or general playstyle. When considering this feature, look to the standard options of the druid class and see if it makes sense to modify or enhance any of these to fit with your Circle.

## COMBAT POTENCY

Your character's ability to fight and defend against enemies is a large part of the game, and an area to create a great deal of value for your druid if you use this feature to improve upon their battle prowess. You can use this feature to improve the way your druid deals or receives damage in relatively small ways here but given the vast amount of opportunities the druid will utilize them makes them quite impactful.

One thing to keep in mind is that the druid's primary source of combat damage will come from spells or their Wild Shape. Improving upon weapon attacks would require more enhancements to balance it against enemies. I'll explore that more in the Circle of the Branch example.

Some examples of improving combat is to make the druid's attack magical for the purposes of overcoming resistances or altering the type of damage they deal.

## SPELLCASTING

The bulk of many druids' power comes their ability to cast spells. If your Circle focuses on wielding magic, especially in combat, consider improving upon their magic with this feature.

Some considerations for this type of feature would be to grant an at-will spell that is thematic to the Circle. At lower levels this could be unlimited, but if the spell is powerful or could unbalance combat, consider limiting its usage to once per short or long rest.

## MOVEMENT

Improving how a character maneuvers the battlefield or just how they cross distances can be a huge boon. You can accomplish this in a variety of ways, especially given that the druid has connections to nature and animals, which can be thematic elements in how they move through the world.

The easiest addition here is to alleviate issues traversing difficult terrain, especially when caused by natural environments like thick woods or treacherous rocks. You could also create a feature that allows the

druid to move stealthily through terrain they might not otherwise be able to due to their ability to blend in seamlessly with nature.

### Example: Circle of the Branch

Since druids have limited options for armor, I chose to create a feature that would mitigate some of the attacks that they will certainly be exposed to in a melee.

**Natural Guardian:** You can call on your natural surroundings to intervene on your behalf. Vines grasp at the heels of your enemies or the very ground shakes beneath them, putting them off balance.

Starting at 6<sup>th</sup> level, when an enemy makes a melee attack against you, you can use your reaction to impose disadvantage on the target's next melee attack against you.

### Example: Circle of Stone

I'm a big fan of all the different senses and sights available in the game and I wanted to utilize a lesser known one here. It also fits nicely with the theme of druids who are connected to the stone and soil.

**Ear to the Ground:** Starting at 6<sup>th</sup> level you gain tremorsense. You are able to pinpoint the origin of vibrations within 60 feet of you as long as you and the source are in contact with the same ground or substance. Tremorsense cannot be used to detect flying or incorporeal sources.



## UPGRADE FEATURE

There isn't a lot of difference between the previous feature and the feature for 10<sup>th</sup> level. Both are meant to enhance or modify the druid's existing abilities while also shaping them in the image of the Circle. Keep in mind that each feature is an opportunity to define the theme and playstyle of your Circle and really sell this new type of druid and not just a collection of abilities.

You can reference the suggestions for the 6<sup>th</sup> level feature here again but try not to double up on any one area. If you used a movement enhancing feature for 6<sup>th</sup> level, don't use one again at 10<sup>th</sup> level. The exception to this rule would be combat abilities, but even that should be considered as to whether it truly fits the theme of your Circle. Here are some more suggestions for how to improve the abilities of your druid.

## DEFENSIVE POSTURE

While many of the 6<sup>th</sup> level features focus on fighting, the features at 10<sup>th</sup> level tend to focus on defending. This is a great place to add some defensive options for your druid to utilize, especially if your Circle is combat oriented. This is important, as the druid is limited to medium armor or the defensive stats of a Wild Shape.

There are a lot of simple options here that will offer some bang at this level. For example, you could use this feature to grant resistances or even immunities to certain damage types based on the theme of your Circle. If your druid is born of the frigid icelands it stands to reason they could have built up a resistance to ice damage. You could even have a list of options based on regions and let the druid pick, which also lets them further a narrative about their druid.

## WILD SHAPE

This is arguably the stand-out feature of the druid class. While you could create an entire Circle around Wild Shape, that doesn't mean you can't add one or two features that modify Wild Shape to your Circle. Before diving in here though, make sure to review how Wild Shape functions and how it progresses with druid levels to help you keep it balanced.

To enhance Wild Shape, you can do a few things here. First, since Wild Shape is limited to two uses per long rest (at least until 20<sup>th</sup> level), you can offer the druid an option to utilize both uses for a greater affect, like shifting into an elemental or empowered form. You could also modify how the beasts do damage, like making their attacks magical or adding some other damage type to the mix, like necrotic or poison.

## CIRCLE FEATURES

You can also use this ability to modify or enhance the previous Circle features. This is a great way to build upon the theme of your Circle and also make sure the lower-level Circle features remain interesting and effective in higher levels of progression.

A good place to start is with the 2<sup>nd</sup> level feature. This has likely been the druid's bread and butter up to this point and, after ten levels of use, is primed for an upgrade. The enhancement here is largely defined by what you set up initially, but consider things like extending duration, range, or potency. You can even think about allowing the druid to share some of this feature's effect with allies by adding an aura or other spell-like action. Make sure keep this balanced, possibly by allowing the druid to share the feature but then not be able to utilize it for themselves.

### Example: Circle of the Branch

The druid becomes a master of melee combat allowing them to extend their blessing to multiple items at one time.

**Empowered Bolster:** Starting at 10th level, up to two items can be affected by your Bolstered by Nature feature at one time. The effect of the first use is dismissed first if you use this feature again.

### Example: Circle of Stone

Melding with the stone and soil around them and passing calmly through is a very cool image and also an exciting movement ability for the druid here.

**Soil Step:** Starting at 10th level, as a bonus action you can meld into any stone, mineral, or soil surface and reappear from the same surface up to 60 feet away. You can use this feature a number of times equal to your Wisdom modifier. You regain all uses after a long rest.

## CAPSTONE FEATURE

The final Circle feature is available at 14<sup>th</sup> level and is typically a unique ability unto itself, whereas a lot of the features up to this point have been about enhancing or modifying other abilities of the class. This, along with the 2<sup>nd</sup> level feature, is your opportunity to really embrace the theme of your Circle as well as providing brand new utility to the druid.

This type of feature in other classes is typically a very powerful effect, one that would radically shift the flow of combat when used. From my research into the existing Circles, that's not as true for the druid. While this feature is still potent, it is not the game-changing type of ability you might see from other subclasses.

## BIG MAGIC

Most of the existing Circles utilize spellcasting or spell effects for this feature. This is a good fallback for any druid, especially those focused on magic. If you're Circle is intentionally focusing on non-magical abilities, you may need to buck the trend and come up with something fresh (see below).

For most druids though, this feature opens up new spell options for the druid to use. The simplest version of this is gaining access to a spell that can be cast at will, bypassing the need to prepare it or even granting access to a non-druid spell. If the spell you choose here is on the more powerful side, consider limiting it to once per short or long rest.

## NEW HOTNESS

As mentioned above, you definitely should consider this as a new, unique ability for the druid. You can certainly look to existing spells and abilities for inspiration but try to come up with something fresh here. For example, in one of the existing Circles, the druid will automatically cast a very high-level spell when they are reduced to 0 hit points. This leverages existing mechanics (spellcasting, hit points) but puts a new spin on things just for the druid.

### Example: Circle of the Branch

To cap off the circle, the druid can pass along their boons and share with an ally. Now the druid has more choices about how they empower themselves or support their allies.

**Bolstered Allies:** Starting at 14th level, one item affected by your Bolstered by Nature feature can be carried or worn by an ally. This effect ends if you dismiss it as a free action or if they are physically separated from the item.

### Example: Circle of Stone

I knew I wanted *stone shape* to feature in this Circle, which is tough because it's already on the druid spell list at 4<sup>th</sup> level. So, to spice things up, I add in several bonuses here to allow for more freer use of this spell.

**Stone Shaper:** Starting at 14th level, you can cast *stone shape* at will without any material components and without using a spell slot. You can use this feature a number of times equal to your Wisdom modifier. All uses are regained after a completing a long rest.





# CIRCLE OF THE BRANCH

Most druids rely on their magic or the creatures of the land to come to their aid. For some, they seek a more direct path to protect their ancestral home. Druids who embroil themselves in the thick of combat have found ways to craft the natural energy of the world into powerful attacks and impenetrable defenses. These druids are found in the Circle of the Branch.

While still entirely focused on the preservation of nature, druids of this Circle are not limited to any one region or land. These druids are organized similar to a city militia, training in magic-aided combat to push back those who would seek to destroy or exploit their lands.

## CIRCLE OF THE BRANCH FEATURES

### Druid Level Feature

2 <sup>nd</sup>	Bolstered by Nature
6 <sup>th</sup>	Natural Guardian
10 <sup>th</sup>	Empowered Bolster
14 <sup>th</sup>	Bolstered Allies

## BOLSTERED BY NATURE

Starting at 2<sup>nd</sup> level, you can use your action to grant a natural blessing to one nonmetal weapon, shield, or armor that you touch. This effect lasts until you dismiss it as a free action, use this feature again, or are physically separated from the item. While blessed, the item has one of the following traits:

**Weapon.** You can use your druid spellcasting modifier for attack and damage rolls with this weapon, and the damage is magical for the purposes of overcoming resistances or immunities. The damage die of the weapon is a d8.

**Shield.** You can add your shield AC bonus to Dexterity saving throws against spells or effects that deal damage. When taking damage from a spell or effect you can use your reaction to half as much damage.

**Armor.** Reduce the amount of bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage you take from nonmagical attacks by an amount equal to your druid spellcasting modifier.

## NATURAL GUARDIAN

You can call on your natural surroundings to intervene on your behalf. Vines grasp at the heels of your enemies or the very ground shakes beneath them, putting them off balance.

Starting at 6<sup>th</sup> level, when an enemy makes a melee attack against you, you can use your reaction to impose disadvantage on the target's next melee attack against you.

## EMPOWERED BOLSTER

Starting at 10<sup>th</sup> level, up to two items can be affected by your Bolstered by Nature feature at one time. The effect of the first use is dismissed first if you use this feature again.

## BOLSTERED ALLIES

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## CIRCLE OF STONE

Most folks associate druids with lush forests, fertile planes, or even windy coastlines. There is a faction of druids, however, that are drawn to something deeper, the very bedrock of the land. These druids, known as the Circle of Stone, attune themselves to the rocks, minerals, and soil, believing this to be the closest to nature's spirit one can get.

Druids of the Circle of Stone are stoic and patient. They craft complex plans to achieve their goals, some of which might take decades to unfold. These druids utilize their connection with stone to extend their own senses as well as to aid them in combat, should the situation call for it.

### CIRCLE OF STONE FEATURES

#### Druid Level Feature

2 <sup>nd</sup>	Stone Shield
6 <sup>th</sup>	Ear to the Ground
10 <sup>th</sup>	Soil Step
14 <sup>th</sup>	Stone Shaper

## STONE SHIELD

Starting at 2<sup>nd</sup> level, you have an innate bond with the very land and can call on it for aid. You have a pool of primal energy represented by a number of d4s equal to your druid level.

When you or an ally is the target of a ranged attack or a targeted spell that deals damage, you can use your reaction to spend a number of these dice equal to half your druid level or less. Roll the spent dice and add them together. Add the total to AC against the attack as the ground rises up to protect you.

You regain all spent dice after you finish a long rest.

## EAR TO THE GROUND

Starting at 6<sup>th</sup> level you gain tremorsense. You are able to pinpoint the origin of vibrations within 60 feet of you as long as you and the source are in contact with the same ground or substance. Tremorsense cannot be used to detect flying or incorporeal sources.

## SOIL STEP

Starting at 10<sup>th</sup> level, as a bonus action you can meld into any stone, mineral, or soil surface and reappear from the same surface up to 60 feet away. You can use this feature a number of times equal to your Wisdom modifier. You regain all uses after a long rest.

## STONE SHAPER

Starting at 14<sup>th</sup> level, you can cast *stone shape* at will without any material components and without using a spell slot. You can use this feature a number of times equal to your Wisdom modifier. All uses are regained after a completing a long rest.



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