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Last revision: Dec 19th 2009

The Druid Handbook Part 1: The Wild Mystic



Welcome to part one of Trentmonk's Druid handbook! This is part 1 of a 3 part series on the Druid. The Druid is a very complicated class, offering many different class abilities, some amazing, some very minor, and some with fantastically different options which will shape your Druid in massively different ways.

In 3.5 the Druid was extremely straightforward. It was a more versatile fighter replacement, with an animal companion as a secondary tank, and was a primary caster if he ever got time to cast in between ripping the guts out of the enemy with teeth and claw. It is no wonder that the Druid was considered the most powerful class in core 3.5 D&D, and one of the most powerful in any 3.5 game.

In Pathfinder, as we will discover, the Druid has more options, but simply cannot do it all anymore. A Druid who focuses on casting cannot hold his own in melee combat, even with Wild-shape, and a Druid who focuses on melee combat simply does not have the staying power or the spell DC's required for filling the role of a primary caster.

All aspects of the Druid build change depending on this focus, which is why I have created a three part handbook, or perhaps two different handbooks and a spell guide if you prefer. This first part will concentrate on the Druid style I have named, "The Wild Mystic". The Wild Mystic is **not** a warrior in any respect. The Wild Mystic has as many spell castings as the party Wizard, with comparable DC's and Metamagic abilities. A slightly inferior spell list (though probably not as inferior as you may have been led to believe, we will tear that apart too.) is made up for with spell-like abilities that improve maneuverability and defenses, and the inclusion of spontaneous casting, which leads to a more versatile memorization list than most primary casters will have.

The Wild Mystic is a powerful caster, worthy of filling a niche outside of melee combat, contributing to the party success through Buffing, Battlefield Control, Blasts and Healing magic. Yes, I did include blasts. The Druid is no better at blasting than a Wizard or Sorcerer, but in order to maintain staying power in combat, the Druid will need to fill some actions with blast spells.

[Chapter 2: The Spirit of the Beast](#)

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Colour Coding the Guide:

In this guide I will be Colour Coding your various options to provide opinion on each.

Red: Warning. This is a poor option and should be avoided. For spells, simply don't expect to ever memorize these.

Orange: This is an OK option. I'm not recommending it, but it's not bad. For spells, not an everyday memorization, but in the right circumstance, good to have.

Green: I recommend this option. It is a strong choice. For spells, this is a worthy memorization option.

Blue: A must have. Your best possible option. For spells, this would be a "must have" memorization in my opinion.

The Druid Class Abilities:

Nature Sense: A simple bonus to two class skills. Nature Sense is gained at level 1 and provides an untyped +2 bonus to Knowledge (Nature) and Survival. As we will see later, the former is a very important skill for Druids, so this bonus is welcome. Certainly both skills are very flavor appropriate for the class. Not a flashy power, but as a free bonus, we will gladly take it. To take advantage of this ability we should ensure that both of these skills see ranks put into them.

Wild Empathy: This is basically like getting a skill maxed out for free. Wild Empathy, gained at level 1, is diplomacy for animals. The Druid uses his class level plus his CHA bonus as the base, plus d20 for improving the attitudes of animals. Cha is not going to be a strong ability for your Druid, and there is no "Class Skill" bonus, so you will hardly be Dr. Doolittle. An appropriate skill for the class, and certainly worth a try when confronted with potentially noisy guard dogs, or similar situations. Don't expect miracles though.

Woodland Stride: At level 2, this provides the Druid the ability to move through overgrown terrain without hinderment. This is important, as it essentially gives the ability to move through natural difficult terrain without penalty, allows 5' steps and all that good stuff. Personally, I've found natural difficult terrain comes up a reasonable amount of times through a campaign, so although this remains circumstantial, you will likely benefit from it a couple times.

Trackless Step: At 3rd level the Druid leaves no trail and cannot be tracked. This is like a Pass Without Trace spell on all the time. Note that there is no contested roll with the tracker, it's just total immunity. The 20th level Ranger can't hope to track the 3rd level Druid. Not going to come up a lot, but worthy to note, if it does, it will work.

Resist Nature's Lure: At level 4 this ability gives a +4 bonus to save against the supernatural or spell-like abilities of fey. Yep, sounds just as circumstantial as it is. I think in 80% of campaigns this will never see use. No big deal, it's a minor ability.

Venom Immunity: At 9th level the Druid gets total immunity from poison. Not a bonus to save, total immunity. A Periapt of Proof against poison costs 27,000 gp and

takes up a magic item slot. Druids get the ability for free while still in single digit levels. This is a big deal. Also note, the "Use Poison" ability would now be completely redundant to you. Use poison all you want, and if you accidentally poison yourself, who cares?

A thousand Faces: The Druid can change their appearance at will by 13th level as if using the Alter Self spell. Note that we are not talking about the disguise self spell here, Alter Self provides real changes with real bonuses. A 13th level human Druid can simply choose to be in Dwarf form, gaining permanent Darkvision and a +2 Size bonus to Str, or a Gnome to get permanent Low Light vision, small size, and a +2 size bonus to Dex, or switch back and forth, or take another form. This is a good power. Note that you cannot use it in conjunction with Wild-shape.

Timeless Body: You gain none of the negative effects of aging by 15th level. Aging doesn't come up in a lot of campaigns, though you can choose to be of different age in some campaigns (Check with your DM.) Specifically the Wild Mystic might benefit from being slightly older, taking some small penalties to physical stats while boosting Wisdom (and CHA and Int), however, note that Timeless body won't make previous penalties disappear, it will prevent any new penalties.

Ability Scores

When we discuss ability scores for the Wild Mystic, we must remember the Wild-shape ability. Go ahead, peek ahead at Wild-shape if you like, as I will discuss these matters again there. First of all, a Wild Mystic will be wild-shaping, even if not entering melee. Better to be a small bird circling overhead raining mystical barrages from above than a squishy little caster hiding behind the fighter right?

Therefore, remember that Wild-shape no longer provides the Dexterity of the creature, so a Wild Mystic cannot ignore his dexterity. Furthermore, as with any caster, Con should not be ignored either. Int is less important, though I don't recommend a straight Dump as it will gimp your skills, and Cha also is less important, though again, I wouldn't recommend a full out dump. Str is going to be a full dump stat. Wisdom of course, is primary. Consider Wisdom as primary a stat for the Wild Mystic as you would consider CHA a primary stat for a Sorcerer. Wild Mystics need Wis even more than a Cleric, as a Cleric tends to have more non-casting options, while the Wild Mystic is casting consistently in combat.

So the order of ability priority ends up being: **Wis, Dex, Con, Int, Cha, Str.**

If it was my 15 point buy, before Racial Modifiers, my Wild Mystic would have an ability array that looked something like this:

Str: 7 (-4), **Dex:** 14 (5), **Con:** 13 (3), **Int:** 10, **Cha:** 8 (-2), **Wis:** 17 (13)

As you can see, Wisdom is not just the primary stat, it is head and shoulders above the next stat in terms of priority. Although this example is a guideline only, hopefully the point is made that Wisdom doesn't need to be good, it needs to be great. I think 17 is a very appropriate starting ability score for Wis (before racial modifiers), but if I had more than 15 points, I would consider getting that Con to 14, or that Cha to 10. A 12 Int would be nice too.

Race

There are a few general guidelines to discuss before we start getting into the specific examples. First and foremost, we must again consider Wild-shape. One of the things Wild-shape provides is the same base speed as the form taken. Therefore, once Wild-

shape and Natural Spell become options, expect to be Wild-shaped into creatures providing either non-standard movement forms (like fly, climb or swim), or land movement speeds significantly higher than the party Monk.

As such, racial disadvantage in regards to land speed becomes less of an issue. Furthermore, Size, which also changes to the form chosen, becomes less of an issue as well. Finally, special senses such as Darkvision or Low light vision are lost from your primary form, and gained from your assumed form, so they become less of a factor as well. So when it comes to Race we are considering the following, likely in this priority sequence:

- 1) Does it have a bonus to Wisdom? If not, this might make an OK Wild Mystic, but definitely won't be tops on your list
- 2) Are the racial abilities going to still work in Wild-shape? If so, will they be of great benefit or simply circumstantial?

Not to say you will be Wild-shaped all the time. At levels 1-3 you can't, and at level 4 it's not a really good idea except out of combat for utility. However, at level 5 on, expect to be Wild-shaped quite a bit, even if it's not all day. By level 10 you may find yourself very rarely in your original form at all.

Human: I think Human is probably the Stellar choice for the Wild Mystic. The flexible stat bonus is put in the one overwhelmingly primary stat, and the bonus feat and skill point that encompass the entire Human benefit package, will serve you just as well in Wild-shape as when you aren't.

Dwarf: A very good choice for Wild Mystics. Dwarves are the only race with Set stat modifiers that give a Wisdom bonus. In addition, the 20 foot movement is less of a factor than for most other classes because of Wild-shape. The Con bonus is a good trade for the Cha penalty, and a number of the racial benefits, though circumstantial, will translate to other forms.

Half-Orc: A decent choice for Wild Mystics. I would put it behind the Dwarf, but still not bad at all. The flexible stat bonus goes to Wisdom, and the Orc Ferocity works well with healing magic (you fall below 0 HP, then use your standard action to heal yourself). That combination is worthy of special mention.

The others: There aren't any really bad choices for the Wild Mystic, so if another race fits your concept, it's not a deal-breaker, but the other races bring less to the table than the ones mentioned above. Of the remaining races, I would rank the Half-Elf the highest, again for the Wisdom boost.

Feats

Being a primary caster who will be spontaneously summoning as well as a Wildshaper, we have a few "must have" feats come to mind right away right? After that, there's quite a bit of flexibility, but I'll present a few choice options here:

Spell Focus (Conjuration): Not of a lot of use to you as you have very few conjuration spells that require a saving throw, but it's a prerequisite for Augment Summoning, so it's a must have

Augment Summoning: This feat improves your summons significantly. A +4 Str bonus isn't just a damage boost, it's also a +2 to hit, and that's on every attack the creature has. The +4 Con is 2 hp/HD. This too makes a significant difference. This is a must have.

Natural Spell: This is your level 5 feat. If you could take it at level 4 you would. This feat makes Wild-shape a combat viable ability, well worth a feat slot. It is also the reason you are a better polymorpher than Wizards or Sorcerers.

Combat Casting: Sometimes you will need to cast on the defensive, and a +4 is a decent bonus.

Improved Initiative: Always a great feat, especially for a Primary caster. Tactically, initiative is a big deal in this game.

Spell Penetration: A +2 to Caster Level checks to defeat the SR of enemies. You have more non-direct spell options than direct spells, but still a good investment. Not a requirement though, remember, summoned creatures don't care about SR.

Extend Spell: A nice metamagic feat to have. You do a lot of long duration buffs, and extending these is often a decent option in the mid level range.

Quicken Spell: Eventually a must, but not until later levels.

Toughness: +1 HP per level is almost as good as 2 points of Con. Extra HP is always welcome to pretty much any class.

Heavy Armor Proficiency: Later on you will be wearing Ironwood armors. Honestly, getting a "Wild" enchantment on Hide just isn't worth it. Ironwood Full plate armor is going to be the best armor you can get, and assuming you aren't wild-shaped all the time, you will find that being proficient is a good choice.

Craft Feats: I've said my piece on these before, selling off your feat slots for cash. However, if that's what you want to do, consider:

Craft Staff: A good way to increase your sustainability in combat. CL is brought up with your level, and Staves remain good right through level 20.

Craft Wondrous Item: A very versatile craft feat

Scribe Scroll: For Divine Casters, this is quite useful, because in off time you can simply memorize those spells that you would normally not memorize and scribe them. Then the circumstantial spells are still available when you need them.

Feats from the Bestiary: Upon GM approval, consider these feats as well...

Flyby attack: A great way to deliver touch spell effects. Get in, get out.

Hover: A very nice feat to have, especially when fly maneuverability isn't that great

Improved Natural Armor: Self explanatory right?

Quicken Spell Like Ability: If available, this is your level 11 feat. That's 3 quickened Wild-shapes per day.

Skills

Although you have 4 skill points + Int/level and that might sound pretty good, expect to be feat-starved. The reason is you have a few "must have" skills, so once you have those...well, there just aren't many points left for the "nice to have" skills. I'm only going to list the blue and green ranked skills, because there is more choices between those than you have skills slots to spend unfortunately.

Knowledge (Nature): Firstly, you can only Wild-shape into creatures you know, what creatures you know is defined by this skill, so it is a must-have and a must-max. Secondly, getting the most out of "Nature Sense" involves taking this as well.

Perception: Not only is this the most used skill in the game, you are actually probably as good at it (or better) than anyone else because it is based off of Wisdom.

Handle Animal: This is a close call between Blue and Green, the ability to teach animals tricks, as well as "push" an animal are part of this skill. This will allow you to have your summoned creatures do more than just blindly attack the enemy (though this will be your normal task for them). If it's not an absolute must-have, it's really close.

Survival: Between being a Wisdom based skill and getting a bonus with Nature Sense to this skill, this is something that you will be really good at if you take it. Maxing it out may not be necessary.

Fly: You will be doing a lot of flying, and your maneuverability isn't always going to be all that hot, so this is really an important skill. Not quite a "must-have" (eventually you will probably be using Air Elemental forms for perfect flight), but still a very good choice.

Spellcraft: The importance of this skill depends upon your party makeup. If you can delegate the responsibility for identifying magic items to a party Bard or Wizard, that would be a relief, otherwise, you probably need this.

Heal: Mainly valuable for treating poisons and diseases. You have spell options for this, but often not memorized.

Linguistics: Consider a couple levels to pick up Undercommon and Fey. This will allow you to communicate with a number of creatures on your Summon Natures Ally list.

In addition, some single level dips into some other class skills would probably be helpful. Swim, Climb, and potentially Ride as well.

Favored Class

I'm inclined to think, considering how many feats there are that you want to have, that the extra skill point might be the better choice, though I might mix it up as well. Probably either choice is going to be similarly helpful.

Equipment:

Remember in Wild-shape that you cannot speak (and therefore can't use spell trigger items), and you may or may not be able to hold something like a metamagic rod. Your equipment melds into your form, but equipment that has constant effects continue to function (except for armor), so when purchasing magic items, those with constant effects should be favored.

Wands: A great choice, especially at lower levels. First level wands are useful and cheap. Wands of Cure Light Wounds, Magic Fang, Obscuring Mist and Faerie Fire would all be very inexpensive and good options. If you don't mind spending a bit more, spells

like Delay Poison, Sleet Storm, and Lesser Restoration also are great wands. However, be aware that after level 5 you will be spending a lot of time wild-shaped, so combat-based wands really are only going to be used when you are running out of spells, as you will need to switch back to your regular form (note that even if you can hold a wand in your wild-shaped form, you cannot activate it, because spell trigger items require speech)

Also worthy of a special note is a wand of Mage Armor. You can't use it, but odds are someone in your party can, whether through availability on a spell list or UMD. If you buy this wand, you can have them use it on you for a 1 hour +4 Armor bonus. Much cheaper than the "wild" enchantment on your armor.

Scrolls: Look down at the spell list, if the spell is ranked orange, it's probably not a candidate for a wand, but as a scroll it's probably a decent investment. Again, just be aware these are out-of-wild-shape use only.

Metamagic Rods: All of this are great. The lesser rods are inexpensive and good choices for magic items at lower levels. At higher levels, the Quicken metamagic rod is the ultimate metamagic rod. Whichever you get, these are good selections. I strongly recommend a Lesser Silent Rod as well, for dealing with silence spells. Once again, remember wild-shape, though Metmagic Rods do not require speech to activate, so something like an Eagle could probably carry one in a talon. I would double check with your DM for their interpretation, but you should be OK.

Armor: At low levels Hide armor will do the trick until Wild-shape is the form of choice. However, later on, you will want Darkwood Armor with the "Wild" enchantment for the best AC possible. The Wild enchantment ain't cheap, so be patient. In mid levels, you can live without it.

Shields: As of the current rules, Shield bonus to AC translates into Wild-shape. As such, a large wooden shield seems like a pretty obvious starting item. As you progress, a magic shield should be of greater priority than magic armor, as the enhancement bonus to shield should also translate. Not needing a "wild" enchantment means you can open the door for other enchantments like Fortification, though you may just want the highest enhancement bonus possible instead.

Weapons: Not much there for a long range Druid. You might want to pick up a sling for use if and when your spells run out, but beyond that, not much to choose from. A couple tanglefoot bags are never a bad ranged weapon to have available.

Staves: I'm not a big fan of most of the standard staves, but a custom staff could serve quite nicely, especially once wands aren't pulling their weight in combat anymore. Best to throw in two different spells of massively different effect, something like Animal Growth and Air Walk for example. Remember you aren't using these in wild-shape.

Wondrous Items and Rings: The obvious items are on the list like Rings of Protection, Cloaks of resistance, Belts of Dex or Con, and Wisdom boost headbands. Amulets of natural armor won't stack with the natural armor from Barkskin, but do stack with the NA granted from Wild-shape. The strand of prayer beads is nice for the Karma bead specifically. A couple low level pearls of power are always a good idea for a primary caster. Druids vestments will be an economical way to get an extra wild-shape in the levels where you could really use an extra use (levels 5 through 7). Special note that a Monk's Robe is not so good anymore, as Wis bonus is no longer transferred to AC.

Nature Bond

I am about to recommend something, and you are not going to like it. However, before your defenses get up, please consider my reasoning. I'm convinced for the Wild Mystic this is the best course of action to take.

I'm recommending you give up your animal companion.

The reason is because of staying power. One of the greatest weaknesses of the Druid as a primary caster in the past has always been that although the level of spell he can cast is equivalent to an equal level Cleric or Wizard, he has less castings per day. A Druid will have one less casting per day of every spell level to an equivalent Wisdom Cleric. If you are planning for Spells to be your exclusive form of contribution to combat, this is a near insurmountable problem.

However, in Pathfinder you can make a painful sacrifice to deal with the problem. Give up your animal companion and take a Domain, granting you the one extra spell per spell level to bring you back in line on numbers of castings to a Wizard or a Cleric. It hurts to give up that companion, but what will hurt even more is the feeling of playing a caster who is out of spells, and the animal companion on its own just doesn't cut it.

It's going to hurt the most at level 1, where that animal companion makes up a significant measure of a Druid's power, but as each level goes by, it will hurt less. Promise.

The Druid, unlike a Cleric, only gets one domain. Furthermore, they pick from a reduced list. Finally, the spells they get from the domain cannot be spontaneously converted into Summon Nature's Ally spells. This means, that to make this choice worthwhile, we need to have spells through the list that the Druid won't just have memorized daily, but spells he will be glad to have daily. The spell list becomes much more important than the domain power to determine which domain to choose. Let's look at each option in turn.

Note that I'll be ranking the spells here a bit differently. Spells that we can count on using everyday get a higher ranking. Those that we can't be certain of casting daily get a penalty. This is because we must consider that these spells cannot be spontaneously converted into Summon Nature's Ally spells - so if we don't cast them, it's no different than not having them at all. Therefore, we may end up with different rankings here than on the greater spell list. (For example, Fireball isn't a great spell, but we can be certain of casting it regularly. Entangle, on the other hand, is a fantastic spell, but has some terrain requirements which mean we may not be casting it daily)

Air: The powers are fairly tame. A mild blast ability and electricity resistance. The spell list overall is above average. Elemental body is rated low because Wild-shape is superior. Overall, this is an above average choice.

The Spells: 1st—**obscuring mist**, 2nd—**wind wall**, 3rd—**gaseous form**, 4th—**air walk**, 5th—**control winds**, 6th—**chain lightning**, 7th—**elemental body IV** (air only), 8th—**whirlwind**, 9th—**elemental swarm** (air spell only).

Animal: The 4th level ability makes this very tempting (regain your animal companion, although at Level -3), but don't get suckered in. This is a poor, circumstantial and redundant spell list. That makes this a poor choice. Note that Natural Spell will work with Wild-shape, but not with Beast shape. Also note the animals only restriction on the summon spells, This means SNA VIII can't summon any creatures of the SNA VIII list - only those off lower level lists. Unfortunately, I'm now recommending giving up your animal companion yet again.

The Spells: 1st—**calm animals**, 2nd—**hold animal**, 3rd—**dominate animal**, 4th—**summon nature's ally IV** (animals only), 5th—**beast shape III** (animals only),

6th—[antilife shell](#), 7th—[animal shapes](#), 8th—[summon nature's ally VIII](#) (animals only), 9th—[shapechange](#)

Earth: Similar to the air abilities, except now the minor blast and resistance are acid rather than electricity. The overall strength of the spell list also is quite comparable to air, although the use of the spells differs greatly.

The Spells: 1st—[magic stone](#), 2nd—[soften earth and stone](#), 3rd—[stone shape](#), 4th—[spike stones](#), 5th—[wall of stone](#), 6th—[stoneskin](#), 7th—[elemental body IV](#) (earth only), 8th—[earthquake](#), 9th—[elemental swarm](#) (earth spell only).

Fire: Similar to the air abilities, except now the minor blast and resistance are to fire rather than electricity. Why am I rating some blasts green here? Because although they may not be earth-shattering, they are spells I would use everyday. This makes me rate them differently in this circumstance. Even then note that overall the spell list is worse than the other element options. Poor fire.

The Spells: 1st—[burning hands](#), 2nd—[produce flame](#), 3rd—[fireball](#), 4th—[wall of fire](#), 5th—[fire shield](#), 6th—[fire seeds](#), 7th—[elemental body IV](#) (fire only), 8th—[incendiary cloud](#), 9th—[elemental swarm](#) (fire spell only).

Plant: You gain abilities that help you fighting in melee, which of course you don't want to be doing. I will say that overall the spell list was better than I originally expected, although it's still not great. Between the poor abilities and the below average spells, this is a skip it domain. I was disappointed not to see Liveoak or changestaff on this list...

The Spells: 1st—[entangle](#), 2nd—[barkskin](#), 3rd—[plant growth](#), 4th—[command plants](#), 5th—[wall of thorns](#), 6th—[repel wood](#), 7th—[animate plants](#), 8th—[control plants](#), 9th—[shambler](#).

Water: Similar to the air abilities, except now the minor blast and resistance are to cold rather than electricity. The spell list overall is slightly above average.

The Spells: 1st—[obscuring mist](#), 2nd—[fog cloud](#), 3rd—[water breathing](#), 4th—[control water](#), 5th—[ice storm](#), 6th—[cone of cold](#), 7th—[elemental body IV](#) (water only), 8th—[horrid wilting](#), 9th—[elemental swarm](#) (water spell only).

Weather: The minor blast here seems to include a minor debuff as well. Then the greater ability is a more impressive blast. The spell list is the strongest here, especially at lower levels when you need it most. This domain centers largely on blasting, but it's the best choice overall IMO.

The Spells: 1st—[obscuring mist](#), 2nd—[fog cloud](#), 3rd—[call lightning](#), 4th—[sleet storm](#), 5th—[ice storm](#), 6th—[control winds](#), 7th—[control weather](#), 8th—[whirlwind](#), 9th—[storm of vengeance](#).

Wildshape:

First off, let's discuss how Polymorph spells work, then how Wildshape differs from Polymorph spells, then look at the specifics of each ability the Druid gets. Finally, we will evaluate based on the needs of the Wild Mystic. Don't think that because you will not be

a melee character that this doesn't remain a very good ability. Wildshaping is going to be a regular thing for you.

Unlike in 3.5, where the only real difference between Wildshaping into an animal as a level 4 Druid and a level 10 Druid was the size of form you could take, in Pathfinder, you will get more abilities of the creature as you level up, so Wildshaping into an Eagle will be different at level 10 than it was at level 4.

Polymorphing first of all, makes you look like the creature (+20 to disguise). Secondly, you get the Size of the creature, thirdly, you get the natural attacks of the creature, and fourth, you gain the base movement of the creature. Your items "meld" into the new form, and armor bonuses are lost. Other items that grant permanent effects function as normal.

Wildshaping works similarly to Polymorph spells, but there are a few notable differences, pretty much exclusively in the Druid's favor.

- 1)** First and foremost, Wildshape allows the "Natural Spell" feat which allows spellcasting to take place when Wildshaped.
- 2)** Secondly, Armor with the "Wild" enchantment can still provide an armor bonus in Wildshape.
- 3)** Wildshape has a duration of 1 hour/level. This is significantly longer than the Polymorph spells
- 4)** Using Wildshape does not provoke an attack of opportunity when used, no defensive casting required
- 5)** Being a Supernatural ability, Wildshape cannot be dispelled (though it can be suppressed by an antimagic field)
- 6)** When you wildshape into a creature that Swims or Burrows, you are able to breath in these environments
- 7)** This is obvious, but worthy of mention anyways: Wildshape doesn't use up valuable casting slots.

The abilities of a Druid's Wildshape improve with level. The Natural attacks are always gained, but more abilities are gained depending on the level of the Druid:

4th level: Wildshape as Beast Shape 1, 1/day. Small or Medium animal

6th level: Tiny or Large animal as Beast Shape 2, or small Elemental as Elemental body 1, 2/day

8th level: Huge or diminutive animal as Beast Shape 3, medium Elemental as Elemental body 2, Small or Medium Plant creature as Plant shape 1, 3/day

10th level: Large Elemental as Elemental body III, Large plant as Plant Shape II, 4/day

12th level: Huge Elemental as Elemental body IV, Huge plant as Plant shape III, 5/day

1/day extra uses every 2 levels afterwards.

Lets go over the various abilities gained with Each form of Wildshape, and I'll go over some form options for each. You will find a lot of animals bring very much the same things to the table, so I'll cover the best choices. For example, Goblin Dog, Hyena and Wolf all bring identical abilities to the table for Beast Shape I, and the Riding dog is just worse (as it's slower), so listing all these creatures really makes no sense. Instead, I'll list your "go to" forms for each, covering the various abilities you may want to access.

Beast Shape I: You aren't getting much here, but do get Climb, Fly (up to average), or Swim at a maximum of 30 feet if the creature has this movement. Also, you get Darkvision 60, Low-light vision, and scent if the creature had the ability. If you take the form of a small animal, you get a +2 size bonus to Dex and +1 Natural Armor bonus. If

you take the form of a medium animal, you get a +2 size bonus to Str and +2 natural armor bonus.

Form options to consider:

Rat, Dire: Choose this form for versatility in movement types. Base speed 40, but climb and swim at 20 each. Add in scent, low light vision, and small size.

Dog: A form which offers the ability to disguise yourself as something that most people like, meaning you can gain access to places you may not otherwise. This gives some infiltration options.

Eagle: Gaining the ability to fly at this level is very nice. This is your standard combat form. You will get the fly at 30 (average), and a 10' land speed. You also get the bonuses of being small sized and low light vision.

Octopus: If you need to swim and breathe water, this is as good a form as any. You do get a very minor ability to move on land as well (20'). Low light vision is provided.

Dinosaur, Deinonychus This is your form for speed. You get a 60' base movement, low light vision, and scent. Medium sized.

Horse, Pony A form you can choose if you want to operate as a mount for a small rider. 40' base move, low light vision and scent.

Beast Shape II: Significantly better than Beast Shape I. Now the movements can reach 60 feet (and Fly maneuverability up to good). Grab, pounce, and Trip are received if the animal has the ability. If you take the form of a tiny animal, you get a +4 Dex, -2 Str, and +1 NA. If you take the form of a large creature you get +4 Str, -2 Dex and +4 NA.

Form options to consider:

Familiar, Hawk: Gain 60 ft fly (average) in combination with tiny form. Low light vision as well.

Familiar, Monkey: Worth mentioning for being tiny, but having opposable thumbs. The ability to sneak into small areas and pick up small objects could be handy. Climb speed is 30ft

Familiar, Rat: The movement versatility of the Dire Rat (but slower, now 15'), but with tiny size.

Squid: Note that in order to get a 60' swim you need to upgrade from the Octopus. Squid does the job.

Ape, Dire: Mix a climb speed with Opposable thumbs. A large creature.

Bat, Dire: You can actually become a flying mount, which is certainly handy. Also, you can get a (good) maneuverability on fly (40'). A large creature.

Horse: A standard mount for a medium sized creature. 50 foot move is OK. Add in low light vision and scent. A large creature.

Beast Shape III: You can now gain burrow up to 30 feet, 90 feet on other movement types, Blindsight up to 30 feet, Constrict, Ferocity, Jet, Poison, Rake, Trample and Web. (You won't find Web). For Diminutive animals, it's a +6 Dex, -4 Str and +1 NA, for Huge Animals it's a +6 Str, -4 Dex, and +6 NA.

Forms to consider:

Familiar, Bat: Get 20' blindsense and the advantages of being Diminutive, all mixed with flight (40' good). A great combo for defense, maneuverability and utility in combat.

Eagle: A fast small form, giving you an 80' fly (average).

Dolphin: A fast swimmer (80') and you get 30' blindsense.

Bat, Dire: Gain 30' blindsense to this form. Giving it a very real advantage over the other large flying options.

Elemental Body I: Take a form of any of the 4 elementals (small size). This includes Darkvision with every form as well as special movement types (like Fly(perfect))

and Earth glide). A size bonus of +2 to a variable ability score and a variable Natural armor bonus. A few special abilities (like Whirlwind and Push) are also gained. The way I read it, Natural spell should still work even if you are in the near-invulnerable whirlwind form. However, this is a loophole, and I can't recommend it for gameplay.

Forms to consider:

Earth: A nice little form. Earth glide is handy, and you are getting a nice +4 NA bonus. Not a form I would regularly take, but in a cave like environment, could be decent.

Fire: A Dex bonus is always welcome, and fire resistance is often handy. The burn ability is situational, but occasionally nice to have. Nothing super here, but OK.

Air: Going to be your preferred elemental form. The 60' fly (perfect) is the primary selling feature, though a Dex bonus is always nice too. The Whirlwind feature I've spoken of earlier.

Water: The Drench ability will be a very circumstantial power, but when you need it, quite effective. Otherwise, this form isn't offering you too much.

Elemental Body II: As Elemental body I except the Elemental form is now Medium. The Ability score bonuses move up to +4, and the Natural Armor granted increases as well (by a straight +1 across the board). Defensively, a Dex bonus form like Air Elemental should come out a bit ahead of the Elemental body I (by one AC). The other forms will trade size bonus to AC to NA bonus to AC and come out even.

Forms to consider:

Medium Fire: Not a significant improvement over small, though AC should be one higher.

Medium Air: Not a big increase from small, but slightly better, so you might as well upgrade.

Elemental Body III: As Elemental Body II except now you are large size, you NET +6 to ability scores (no longer a single stat - and some forms include a penalty), and NA goes up by one again. Not a big improvement over EBII IMO.

Forms to consider:

Large Air: No significant improvement from Medium, I would stay with medium personally, though you can probably use the whirlwind to some effect at this point I suppose.

Elemental Body IV: Now you are huge, and you get some nice goodies. DR 5/-, and immunity to critical hits and sneak attack. Natural Armor does not increase this time (which will likely result in a net loss of AC for most forms), but ability score net bonus is up to +10. Also, Air and Water elementals double their movement. That's a really nice enhancement. Since Elder elementals are Huge, you might as well take the Elder form.

Forms to Consider:

Air, Elder: When size permits, this should become pretty much a standard for you. Your Defense improves, your movement is fantastic, overall, this is the right choice. Note too that you can start to do things with Whirlwind that you may find fun.

Water, Elder: Now probably your best water form. The Vortex ability is getting fairly decent as well.

Plant Shape I: Not a very good ability, as you can turn into a Small or Medium plant, which, after scouring the entire Bestiary, totals 4 forms. Every single one is a bad option. Therefore, until more plant creatures are available, this is a wasted ability. I'll go over why they are all poor options here:

Forms you shouldn't waste your time with:

Vegepygmy: Darkvision, Low light vision, 2x1d4 natural attacks. Nothing especially wonderful here, and it's a very silly creature. (You decide if that's a bonus or not)

Basidiron: Low light vision and a 1d8 slam attack. The best feature of the form you don't get with plant shape (the hallucination cloud). Not much here.

Violet Fungus: Here's a ripoff. Violet Fungus can be harvested to create a venom, but they don't have a "poison" attack, so what you get are 4x1d4 attacks and a crappy movement speed. The "Rot" ability will not transfer.

Yellow Musk Creeper: This may be the worst polymorph option in the game. Reduce your speed to 5' and get a 1x1d4 attack. We're done. Nothing else translates. I wish I had a ranking worse than red.

Plant Shape II: For the Wild Mystic not much better. For a melee Druid a couple options present, but for you, nothing.

Forms not to consider:

Assassin Vine: You are going to be all but immobile (5' move) but you do get a single 1d8 attack with 10' reach. The reason you may want this form is for grab and constrict, however, you should note that Entangle does not translate. For a Wild Mystic, this is a poor form choice.

Shambling Mound: It gets Darkvision, Low light vision, and 2 decent slam attacks (2d6 each) and both attacks have grab and constrict. Also, both attacks have 10' reach. However, there is nothing here for a Wild Mystic.

Plant Shape III: Ohhhh you can get Regeneration...just kidding. In fact, there is only one Huge plant form, and it's the Treant which is a crappy form, and since no Plant creature in the Bestiary has regeneration, until more creatures are available, this is horrible.

The good news: There's only one bad option with PSIII. The bad news: It's the only option:

Treant: Sigh. No longer a good polymorph. You get 2 slam attacks for 2d6 each and that pretty much covers it.

Playing the Wild Mystic:

So the obvious question is, "Why not just play a Wizard?". Good question. I would have to say here and now, that spell for spell, I think the Wizard has a superior spell list. However, there is more to spellcasting than just the spell list.

The Druid can expect more spell versatility on his memorization list. The reason is because every spell is in fact 2 spells. You may memorize Sleet Storm as a 3rd level spell. If you are a Wizard, you either cast sleet storm, or you don't. That's pretty much it. For the Druid, that Sleet Storm spell is also a Summon nature's ally 3 spell. If an opportunity to use sleet storm does not come up, then the Druid spontaneously converts the spell, and has the always solid option of summoning at hand instead. The Druid has this for an option for all 9 levels of spells (unlike the Cleric). Furthermore, I'll take Summon Nature's Ally over the "Cure" line of spells any day.

The second reason to play a Druid over a Wizard is the Divine Spell mechanics. Most particularly, that the Druid can memorize any spell on his spell list, no spell book required. A Wizard may have more highly rated spells for each spell level, but he doesn't know them all. Instead, the Wizard gets 2 spells per level, plus whatever he can find or buy, and then scribe in his spell book. Not an issue for the Druid, who gets access to every spell on his spell list as soon as the spell level is available.

The third reason is number of castings. A Druid (with a domain) and a Wizard (specialist) should be looking at a very similar number of spells per day. However, the Druid will be using Wildshape as a form of Fly, Water Breathing, Burrowing, Earth glide, natural armor, gaining Darkvision, Low light vision, enhanced speed, etc. This saves spells, by using spell like abilities that are not available to a Wizard instead. This leaves more spells available for casting for the Druid.

If you look beyond casting, there's more:

Saving throws. A Druid will have a significantly higher Fort and Will saving throw, and likely equal Reflex saving throw.

HP: The Druid can expect to have more HP than an equivalent level Wizard

AC: Also likely better with the Druid than the Wizard

I'm not suggesting however, that the Druid Wild Mystic is a superior choice to a Wizard, but instead pointing out it has different strengths. If these strengths appeal to you, then you should consider the Wild Mystic as a real option next time you wish to play a primary caster for your group.

Limitations: The biggest reason not to play this type of character is at low levels the Wild Mystic is going to have a hard time. Expect to run out of spells at low levels very easily, and feel the pain of pulling out a sling. Look longingly at the Wizard firing his crossbow. Lucky wizard. Unfortunately, this is unavoidable, 1st level Wild Mystics just aren't very good. This is the sacrifice you make when you give up an animal companion. Expect the Wild Mystic to come into his own around level 5, then peak around level 10 or 11. However, it should hold its own nicely right into the upper levels.