

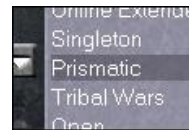
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A Prismatic Primer

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Prismatic
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You head to the **Casual Play** room, plop your virtual behind down to fire up a new game, only to notice "Prismatic" as one of the options. "What's this?" you ask yourself. "A format for prism theme decks, featuring the power of **Celestial Prism**, **Prismatic Ward**, and **Prismatic Wardrobe**?" Clever you, but no. Prismatic is a five-color, casual constructed format with the following deck construction rules:



- Your deck must contain at least 250 cards.
- Your deck must contain at least 20 white cards, 20 blue cards, 20 black cards, 20 red cards, and 20 green cards. Multicolor and split cards count as one color or the other, not both.
- Your deck can't have **Battle of Wits** in it; it is banned.

Prismatic also has a special mulligan rule.

- If your starting hand has 0, 1, 6 or 7 lands in it, you can take a "big deck mulligan" for free; that is, you can get back a fresh hand of seven cards. After that, you'll have to Paris mulligan as normal if you don't like your hand. Note that if you take a "big deck mulligan," your opponent has the opportunity to take one too, for "free." Same goes for you if your opponent takes a "big deck mulligan."

Congratulations. You're already on your way to a brand new vista of **Magic** gameplay.

An Extremely Brief History of Prismatic

Prismatic is the **Magic Online** answer to the **5-Color format**, invented by Kurt Hahn. 5-Color, or "Five," is not a DCI-sanctioned format, but it has gained a wide following recently due to:

- the number of old and powerful cards allowed in the format (it stretches all the way back to the *Alpha* set, with its own [banned and restricted list](#)),
- the fact that it's played for ante (an original **Magic** concept), and
- the sheer fun of the format.

During the **Magic Online** beta period and after, testers and players attempted to replicate the 5-Color format online, playing enormous decks with self-imposed five-color deck construction rules. The **Magic Online** developers received enough requests for the format that "Casual Format 2," with the above deck construction rules, was implemented. Soon after, the Wizards R&D department decided on a better name for CF2, and Prismatic was born.

How to Build Your First Prismatic Deck

So, you own a bunch of cards—when do we start? My advice—start now! Go launch the program, throw a lot of land and a lot (and I mean a *lot*) of your favorite cards into a deck (remember: 250 cards, at least 20 of each color, no **Battle of Wits**), and play some solitaire games. (If **Magic Online** doesn't start the game with your deck, it's probably because your color ratios are off. Count those colors again!)

Once you've played some solitaire, try your deck out against a real opponent. There are usually several games of Prismatic being played in the **Constructed (Casual Decks)** room of the **Casual Play** area. See what happens with your deck. Get a feel for all those cards and all those colors. When you're done there, come on back and we'll discuss.

What you'll probably notice right away are problems with mana. Hey, it's a five color format; the mana is bound to be tough. People get color screw even with sixty-card two-color decks, so five is going to be a real challenge. We'll deal with that.

What else you'll probably notice is how different your draws are, game to game. Every game can be like playing a whole different deck. That's good and bad—it's awfully fun, since you can play your Prismatic deck over and over again and see new possibilities and combos that you never suspected were in there. If your **Magic Online** finances are a bit tight, that replayability is key.



Banned, of course.



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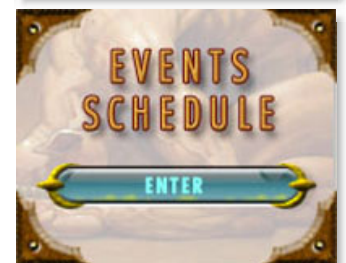
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The bad is that, while consistency may be the hobgoblin of little minds, inconsistency is the hobgoblin of big decks. Drawing good cards consistently is tough when your deck weighs in at 250 big ones. Happily, there are ways to deal with that too. But let's start with the mana.

Prismatic Mana

In Prismatic, you have two enemies. The big, mean elephant avatar labeled "Majik_d00d_92" across the table is the first one. The second is your own deck's mana woes—and it can be almost as deadly as Mr. Majik_d00d. Prepare yourself by following three rules:

- Run enough land.
- Emphasize some colors over others.
- Use cards that smooth your mana.

Run Enough Land

First, how much land should your Prismatic deck have? (A perennial **Magic** problem in any format.) It's best to think of it in terms of percentages. If a Standard deck should have 23-25 land cards out of 60 (about 38%-42% land), your Prismatic deck, as a rule of thumb, should start with around 40% too. That's 100 land cards—which sounds like a huge amount, but for now, trust me. Depending on the average costs of the cards in your deck, how many land-searching and cycling cards you've got, your color distribution, and other factors, that number will go up or down, but keep 100 in mind as your guideline. After you playtest your deck you'll get a sense of how to adjust it.

Emphasize Some Colors Over Others

As fun as it is simply to pick your 30 favorites from each color (30 times 5 is 150, plus 100 land is 250) and shove them in, your mana woes will make you run screaming (or at least walk away grumbling). You need to choose one to three colors to emphasize over the others. For example, you can decide to fill your deck with mostly red and green cards, and keep your black, white, and blue near the minimum for those colors. Remember that cards such as **Anurid Brushhopper** and **Wax/Wane** can count toward your white *or* your green total—so if you're maximizing green cards, count them toward your 20 white cards and have more room left over for purely green cards.

The mana gods will thank you. Since you've emphasized red and green, you can pump up the number of mountains, forests, **Shivan Oases**, **Karplusan Forests** and **Mossfire Valleys** in your deck. That reduces the number of times you draw those sad hands full of green cards complemented by swamps and islands. Pick a color or two, or three, to emphasize over the others, and pull out cards from the remaining colors or substitute them with multicolor and split cards. When you play the deck the next time, you'll be glad you did.

Use Cards That Smooth Your Mana

Way back in 1993, Richard Garfield repurposed some art intended for **Tropical Island** into what has become one of the most useful Prismatic cards ever (MagicTheGathering.com's [Card of the Day, March 29, 2002](#)). Of *course* you should run those **Birds of Paradise** if you've managed to put your paws on some, but you'd be surprised how well you can get along without them. And even if you own some, you'll need more than just a few Birds to cover your Prismatic mana woes.

Prismatic doesn't have the advantage of the original dual lands like the 5-Color format does, but luckily there are still a *lot* of mana-helping options open to you. The color green is your main ally here, but there are cards from all walks of life ready to serve, from the *Seventh Edition*™ set's **City of Brass** to recent favorites such as the *Onslaught*™ set's delicious **Weathered Wayfarer**. For your convenience, I've compiled a list of the cards that produce, fetch, filter, or otherwise get you multiple colors of mana, broken down by the expansion in which they appear. You may or may not choose to mentally title it "My Prismatic Shopping List."



Seventh Edition	Painlands, Birds of Paradise, City of Brass, Rampant Growth
Invasion	Taplands, Sac-lands, Archaeological Dig, Chromatic Sphere, Dream Thrush, Elfhome Sanctuary, Fertile Ground, Frenzied Tilling, Harrow, Lotus Guardian, Nomadic Elf, Phyrexian Altar, Phyrexian Lens, Pulse of Llanowar, Quirion Sentinel, Quirion Trailblazer, Scouting Trek, Utopia Tree
Planeshift	Dragon Lairs, Mana Cylx, Multani's Harmony, Primal Growth, Quirion Explorer, Star Compass, Terminal Moraine
Apocalypse	Painlands, Ceta Disciple, Gaea's Balance, Helionaut, Lay of the Land, Necra Disciple, Reef Shaman
Odyssey	Filter lands, Saclands, Crystal Quarry, Deep Reconnaissance, Diligent Farmhand, New Frontiers, Tarnished Citadel
Torment	Tainted lands, Far Wanderings
Judgment	Krosan Verge, Riftstone Portal, Centaur Rootcaster, Harvester Druid, Living Wish

Especially effective are the inexpensive spells above ([Lay of the Land](#), [Harrow](#), [Rampant Growth](#), [Weathered Wayfarer](#), [Krosan Tusker](#), [Living Wish](#), and of course those much-sought-after [Birds](#)) and all of the lands you can get your hands on (most of them are rare, but [Invasion™](#) taplands, [Planeshift™](#) dragon lairs, and [Terminal Moraine](#) are great and uncommon).

Prismatic Consistency

To win, you want to draw good cards consistently. Again I've got three guidelines for you:

- Think in ratios.
- Use analogues.
- Mind that mana curve.

Think In Ratios

How many creatures and non-creature spells should you include in your deck? How many big monsters, how many weenies, how many cheap instants, and how many board-shattering sorceries? Follow the same method we did for land: think in terms of ratios or percentages. If your 60-card beatdown deck has a certain ratio of creatures to other spells to land, then to make a similar Prismatic deck follow those same ratios.

Here is a red-green beatdown deck from a recent [Sideboard article](#). Let's analyze its ratios.

R-G Beatdown		
Courtesy of Kai Budde from Sideboard Online		
60 cards		
4 Karplusan Forest	4 Basking Rootwalla	4 Elephant Guide
4 Wooded Foothills	4 Llanowar Elves	4 Firebolt
2 Mossfire Valley	4 Grim Lavamancer	4 Volcanic Hammer
2 Barbarian Ring	4 Wild Mongrel	4 Violent Eruption
6 Forest	2 Skirk Marauder	
4 Mountain	4 Call of the Herd	16 other spells
22 land	22 creatures	

We'll start with the creatures. It has 18 small, cheap creatures, plus [Call of the Herd](#), which makes 22 creature slots. That comes out to about 37% of the 60-card deck. 37% of 250 is about 92, so to have our Prismatic deck run similarly, we'll need around 92 small, cheap, efficient beaters—from across all five colors, if need be. (This is Prismatic after all.)

The deck above has 12 cheap burn spells, which amounts to 20% of the deck. Since 20% of 250 is 50, our Prismatic version would need around 50 burn or other creature removal spells, including some big sweeper-type spells to replicate [Violent Eruption's](#) effect.

The remaining spells, 4 [Elephant Guides](#), are creature enchantments that pump the deck's weenies. Since 4 out of 60 is about 7% of the deck, it amounts to about 17 cards out of 250. So we'd have about 17 creature-enhancers in our Prismatic version.

The rest of the deck would be land. If using a calculator and actual percentages isn't your thing, simply multiply the number of a certain card that you want to see in your Prismatic deck by 4 or 5 and you'll come pretty close.

In summary, use the same deckbuilding principles you would for a 60-card format, but scale them up using ratios. That way, you'll tend to draw a consistent distribution of land, critters, and other spells.

Use Analogues

Okay, so we need 92 small, efficient creatures, and we can only play 4 [Wild Mongrels](#). Where are we getting our other creatures? The answer is *analogues*—cards that have a similar function and cost to one another. Cards that are analogues of each other will fill the same role consistently, so you can use them to effectively have more than four of a given card in your deck. (Sixty-card tournament decks apply this same principle to get maximum consistency. For example, the deck above runs not four, not eight, but twelve efficient red burn spells to ensure that it always has cheap direct damage of some kind on hand.)

Say you've decided that your deck needs 16 creatures similar to [Flametongue Kavu](#) (haven't we all). [Flametongue Kavu](#), as a creature that can destroy a creature when it comes into play, has several analogues in the Prismatic format. Some are close and some aren't as close but are still effective. [Faceless Butcher](#) is a close analogue, since it has a medium-sized body (2/3 to [Flametongue's](#) 4/2), has a creature-removal effect as its comes-into-play ability, and costs about the same amount of mana (2 to [Flametongue's](#) 3). So up to four of your [Flametongue](#) analogues could be [Faceless Butchers](#). [Pardic Arsonist](#), a 3/3 for 2 that does 3 to target creature or player when it comes into play is another close analogue, but you'll want to keep in mind that you'll need to achieve threshold to use the ability. [Thornscape Battlemage](#) also has a damage effect when it comes into play, if you pay the red kicker; so that could be a fourth [Flametongue](#) analogue. As a bonus, [Thornscape Battlemage](#) has an artifact-destroying option too—a versatile critter. (The [Invasion](#) [Battlemages](#) are great in Prismatic.)

Expand your search to other cards and you'll find even more analogues. You might consider **Barbarian Lunatic**, **Zombie Assassin**, **Skirk Marauder**, and **Skinthinner**. All four are small creatures that have abilities that potentially destroy a creature for a bit of mana. All of them give you the advantage of wrapping a creature and a bit of removal up in one package, and so all of them could serve that role in your deck. Perhaps it's not as hard to come up with those 16 "Flametongues" anymore, assuming you can get Majik_d00d_92 to agree to a trade for that Battlemage....

Mind That Mana Curve

Now you're armed with ratios and ready to search for analogues. Still, you have a mind-boggling array of options laid out in front of you—all your favorite cards from across the **Magic** spectrum—and Prismatic *demands* you use at least 20 from each color. A temptation is to go haywire with all the biggest, meanest creatures and spells you can think of, from every color, throwing everything including 2 copies of the kitchen sink in your deck. But beware, even though all your stuff is theoretically castable in a deck that sports all those Lairs, painlands, and Cities, (and 100 lands for Pete's sake) you still have to worry about your mana curve. You still only get seven cards in your opening draw, you still only get one draw per turn, and a game still lasts a limited number of turns. Having a ton more land in your deck does not translate to having access to a ton more mana come game-time.



The point is, don't just add a couple **Shocks**, call yourself done for the 1-mana spells, and start adding **Pit Fighter Legends** willy-nilly. Think through those ratios again—if your favorite 60-card deck has eight 1-mana spells, you're going to have to come up with 33 or so 1-mana spells for your Prismatic version.

Now Go Build One!

That's the lesson for today, kids. I hope you'll all throw a Prismatic deck together—it's one of the most enjoyable **Magic** formats. Join me next time when I take a tour of some of the gems of the format.

To review: Keep those five colors of mana flowing by playing enough land, skewing your deck toward a couple colors, and running mana-helping spells. Keep the rest of the deck consistent by thinking in terms of ratios, using analogues, and watching that mana curve. Have fun!

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