Guide for the new, big for the empathy, Dwarf Fortress

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Introduction

Welcome to Dwarf Fortress, the legendary open-world sandbox game that has shaped the history of gaming for over two decades.

In this guide, you will learn the basics of Dwarf Fortress, from creating your first fortress to managing your dwarves' needs and surviving your first few years. Whether you're a complete beginner or a returning player looking for a refresher, this guide has something for you.

Dwarf Fortress is known for its incredibly deep simulation, which means that every dwarf has their own personality, needs, and relationships. This can be overwhelming at first, but it's also what makes the game so rewarding. Don't worry if you don't understand everything right away — we'll take it one step at a time.

What You'll Need

- A copy of Dwarf Fortress (available on Steam or from bay12games.com)
- A willingness to read and experiment
- Patience — you will lose your first few fortresses, and that's perfectly normal

How to Use This Guide

Each section builds on the previous one, so we recommend reading them in order. However, feel free to jump around if you're looking for something specific.

Basic Concepts

Before you start digging, there are a few things you should understand about how Dwarf Fortress works.

The Interface

The game's interface can be overwhelming at first. Don't worry — you don't need to memorize everything. Here are the key areas:

- **The map** — This is the main view of your fortress. You can move around with the arrow keys or WASD.
- **The menu** — Press `d` to designate, `b` to build, `q` to look around, and `t` to view your units.
- **The status screen** — Press `z` to see your dwarves' thoughts, needs, and skills.

Your First Dwarves

When you start a new fortress, you'll have seven dwarves. They're all different, with their own strengths and weaknesses. Pay attention to their skills when you're choosing where to dig.

Time and Seasons

Dwarf Fortress has a detailed calendar system. Each year has 12 months, and each month has 28 days. Seasons affect the weather, crop growth, and the behavior of animals.

Starting Out

Your first few years are the most challenging. Here's how to get off to a good start.

Choosing a Location

When you create a new world, you'll be asked to choose a location for your fortress. Look for:

- A river or stream nearby (for water and fishing)
- Trees (for wood)
- Stone (for building and crafting)
- A flat area to start digging

Digging Your First Rooms

Press `d` to enter designation mode, then `r` to designate a room. Dig out a small area for your dwarves to live in. Don't worry about making it perfect — you can always expand later.

Assigning Jobs

Your dwarves will automatically start working on the tasks you've designated. You can also assign specific jobs to individual dwarves by pressing `u` and selecting a dwarf.

Basic Survival

Keeping your dwarves alive is the most important part of the game. Here's what you need to know.

Food and Drink

Your dwarves need to eat and drink regularly. If they run out of food, they will start to starve. If they run out of drink, they will die of thirst much faster.

- Plant crops in designated farm plots
- Hunt animals for meat
- Fish in nearby water
- Brew alcohol from plants (dwarves love this)

Sleep and Rest

Dwarves need to sleep in beds and rest in chairs. If they're forced to work without rest, they'll become exhausted and start making mistakes.

Dealing with Threats

Goblins, wild animals, and other dangers will eventually come your way. Build walls and doors to keep them out, and consider training a military squad to defend your fortress.

Intermediate Concepts

Once you've survived your first few years, it's time to start thinking about more advanced strategies.

Workshops and Production

Workshops are where your dwarves turn raw materials into useful items. Some important ones include:

- **Carpenter's Workshop** — Makes furniture and wooden items
- **Mason's Workshop** — Makes stone furniture and blocks
- **Craftsdwarf's Workshop** — Makes crafts and trade goods
- **Kitchen** — Cooks food
- **Still** — Brews alcohol

Stockpiles

Stockpiles are designated areas where your dwarves store items. You can create specific stockpiles for different types of items, like food, stone, or weapons.

Trade

Once a year, a caravan will arrive at your fortress. You can trade with them to get items you don't have. Make sure you have something valuable to offer!

Military

Setting up a military is essential for defending your fortress. Here's how to get started.

Creating a Squad

Press `q` to look around, then select a dwarf and press `m` to make them a military dwarf. You can then create a squad and assign dwarves to it.

Training

Dwarves will train their military skills during their free time. You can also set up a training area with dummies.

Defending Your Fortress

When a threat arrives, your military dwarves will automatically respond. You can also set up fortifications like walls, traps, and doors to help defend your fortress.

Trade

Trade is a great way to get items you don't have and to make some extra money.

Setting Up a Trade Depot

Designate a trade depot near the edge of your fortress. Your caravan will arrive here and you can trade with them.

Making Trade Goods

Craftsdwarf's workshops can make valuable trade goods from raw materials. Gems, metal bars, and finished goods are all good options.

Advanced Concepts

Ready to take your fortress to the next level? Here are some advanced concepts to explore.

Fortress Design

Efficient fortress design can make a big difference in how smoothly your fortress runs. Consider things like:

- Keeping workshops close to stockpiles
- Minimizing the distance dwarves have to travel
- Creating defensible choke points

Magma and Water

Magma and water can be powerful tools for defense and mining, but they can also be dangerous if not handled carefully.

Mechanisms and Traps

Mechanisms allow you to build complex traps and doors. They require a bit of learning to use, but they're very powerful.

Endgame

Once you've established a thriving fortress, you'll start to run into the endgame challenges.

Megabeasts and Titans

These are the most dangerous creatures in the game. They can destroy your entire fortress if you're not prepared.

Artifacts

Artifacts are unique, legendary items that can be created by your dwarves. They're very valuable and can be traded for a lot of wealth.

Retirement

Eventually, you'll want to retire your fortress and start a new one. You can do this by abandoning your current fortress and creating a new one.

Modding

Dwarf Fortress is highly moddable, and there are thousands of mods available. Here's how to get started.

Finding Mods

The best place to find mods is the Dwarf Fortress subreddit or the official forums.

Installing Mods

Most mods are installed by copying their files into the `data/installed_mods` folder in your Dwarf Fortress directory.

Troubleshooting

Running into problems? Here are some common issues and how to fix them.

The game won't start

Make sure you have the latest version of Dwarf Fortress installed. If you're using a mod, try disabling it to see if that's the problem.

My dwarves are starving

Check your food supply and make sure you have enough farms and hunters. You may need to expand your food production.

My fortress is under attack

Build walls and doors to keep the attackers out. If you have a military squad, make sure they're armed and ready.

Appendix

Useful Keybindings

Key	Action
`d`	Designate
`b`	Build
`q`	Look around
`t`	View units
`z`	Status screen
`u`	Unit list
`m`	Make military dwarf
`r`	Designate room

Glossary

- **Dwarf** — A player-controlled character
- **Fortress** — Your base of operations
- **Embark** — The process of starting a new fortress
- **Caravan** — A trade group that visits your fortress once a year
- **Megabeast** — A powerful, unique creature that can destroy your fortress

Credits

Thanks to the Dwarf Fortress community for their support and feedback.

Special thanks to Bay 12 Games for creating such an amazing game.

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