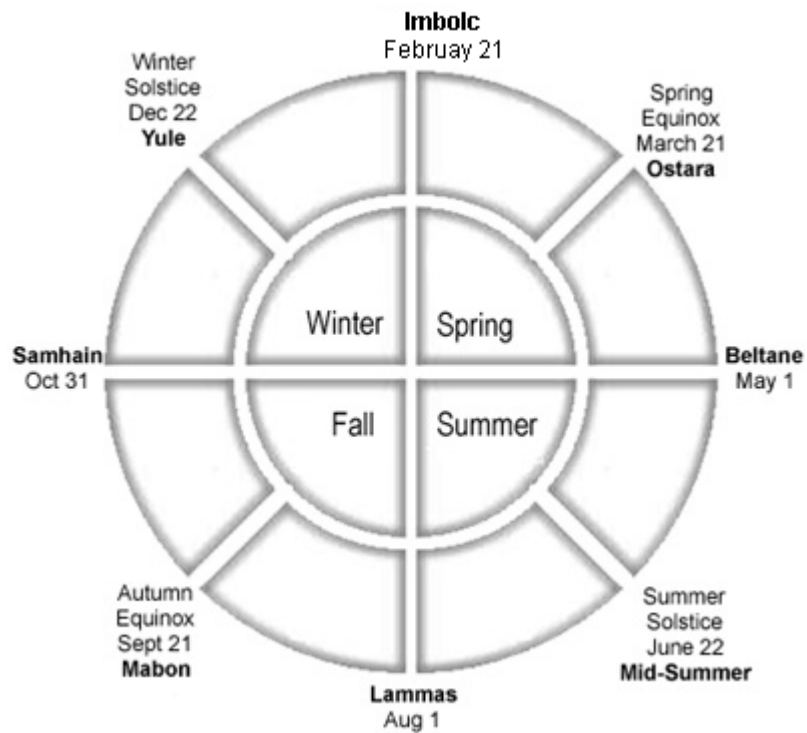


The Little Book of Sabbats



The Wheel of the Year

By Tony and Tatia

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Introduction

There are eight Sabbat celebrations that mark the annual solar cycle. These fall into two categories - the Greater Sabbats (Samhain, Imbolc, Beltane and Lughnasadh) and the Lesser Sabbats (the equinoxes and solstices given the names of Yule, Ostara, and Mabon).

A Celtic day ran from the time the sun set, so the Greater Sabbat celebrations generally begin on what we would consider the evening before, as soon as the sun has set (i.e. Lughnasadh celebrations start at sunset on 31 July). The Celtic year starts and finishes with Samhain (pronounced 'Sow-een') for much the same reason - in terms of the solar year, having passed the autumn equinox and daylight getting shorter, Samhain is the equivalent of sunset. Yule then, is the equivalent of midnight.

The traditional Wiccan texts divide the solar year into two parts ruled by the Oak King who is reborn at Yule taking over from the Holly King. The Oak King rules from Yule to Litha (the midsummer solstice) where the two kings battle it out and the Holly King takes over to rule until Yule. Each King is subject to a sacrifice and resurrection (through mating with the ever-living Goddess in her various guises) between each cycle at Beltane, Lughnasadh or Samhain. The important thing, however, is to mark the solar year sinking to its lowest at Yule (the winter solstice) and waxing in strength to Litha (the summer solstice) and then waning to start the process again at Yule. The energies can be used in much the same way that the waxing and waning cycles of the moon are. It is also important that any rituals that you might write mark the relevance of those cycles to the fertility of the Earth, helping to germinate the seed in spring, coming to full flower in summer, fruit and harvest as we approach autumn and decay ready for rebirth as we approach winter.

SAMHAIN

The Wheel of the Year turns ever onward and is seen to begin at Samhain. This is the Celtic New Year when the veil between the worlds of life and death stands open. Samhain is a festival of the dead; when we remember those who have gone before and acknowledge the mystery of death. It is traditional on Samhain night to leave a plate of food outside the home for the souls of the dead. A candle placed in the window guides them to the feast.

Starting at the beginning of the Celtic year, around the end of October in the modern calendar, when the first hard frost whitened the grass, shrivelled any greenstuff and iced over a shallow puddle, the community began their preparations for winter. Cattle, pigs and sheep which had roamed the unfenced moors or woodlands would be brought back the farmyards or perhaps one of the great earthworks which dot the southern hilltops. It would be a great round-up and time for sorting out the stock. Some would be selected to be killed as, before the times of extensive haymaking and the production of winter feed, not all could be expected to survive through the winter months. Pigs would be salted into ham and bacon, but a great feast of those parts which could not be preserved would be eaten. The White Harvest of this time would be fat, hides and fleeces, all vital to see the people through the winter,

The Celtic Year draws to an end at Samhain, 'Summer's End', time of the Great Gathering, when all come home. It is a time of celebration and of remembering those who departed from their earthly forms. The spirits that enter open doors and manifest in the sacred bonfires' smoke are kindly ones, the old friends, grandparents, kindred from many ages, all thronging round with their wisdom, their accrued knowledge of the community and its needs. Now is the time of oracles, to see what lies in the year to come. It is a time to bid farewell to those who have died, and welcome the new-born, and even the spirits of children scarcely conceived, as yet unborn. All the family come in and share the feasting, of the best and the fattest of the beasts, the whitest bread; the sweetest honey and the lushest fruits of this short season of plenty, before winter.

Our ancestors had other reasons for feeling tension at Samhain. If the harvest had been good, decisions still had to be taken about distribution, storage and the rate at which particular foods should be eaten. Trade matters must have been considered too. Which foods could safely be bartered for other things? Which must be kept? By Samhain, the doorway to winter, all this must have been decided. Had the right decisions been taken? Was everything in order? Our ancestors would have looked for answers and reassurance through divination.

Today, as in the past, the Goddess as Wisewoman and the God as Lord of Shadows (the Dark Lord) are guides through death's realm. The God is Lord of Night, the old Wiseman, teacher and guide on both sides of the Veil. The Goddess brings a Samhain gift of wisdom, and it may be sweet or bitter to receive, according to our circumstances and desires. As part of all this, we can consider death as an aspect of our lives. Perhaps some old plans or aspirations need to die now.

Samhain is a mischief night on which sprites are expected to play tricks on humankind on behalf of the Lord of Misrule, that aspect of the Horned One who will not let us take ourselves too seriously. The festival is about the year's death and therefore is the New Year, for death implies rebirth. But at this time, death is more tangible than rebirth. Fields lie fallow, the sap has sunk down into roots and all of nature rests. There is an atmosphere of weirdness in the autumn mists and

the smoky colours of evening. This is, in fact, the Festival of the Returning Dead, as well as an acknowledgement of the end of one solar cycle. That is why it has its reputation for ghostly happenings, its bat's wings and black cloak associations.

The old year dissolves, it breaks down, at Samhain, and the result is a breakdown of all boundaries, including those between the living and the dead. It is, therefore, more possible than usual to perceive the psychic presence of those who have gone before us but who are still connected, still watching over us. The living, the dead and the unborn can meet in spirit on this night, psychically communing and exchanging information. Likewise, the nature spirits walk among us, both the kindly and the more mischievous ones.

Some of the visions and messages received at Samhain are said to be sent by the Beloved Dead, that is by family members with whom we are still joined by bonds of affection. Others may be a direct gift from the Goddess. All are to be taken seriously.

But remember, there is no justification for attempting to call the dead back. They join us freely on Samhain night, if they are able and if they wish to. Calling them back may interfere with stages of purification, rest and preparations for a new life, which all go through between incarnations. If attempts to do so should succeed they could disrupt a natural process and actually be harmful to the returning spirit. If a loving spirit should desire to come back then we can welcome them and they will be recognised. If not, we can remember them freely with love and then accept their absence.

The God and the Goddess are, at this time, happily united in the Underworld as equals, and He exhorts us as "Summer is Dead" to "Feast with Death". The Goddess is both pregnant and the Old One, the Wise hag, in this dark time when the veil between the worlds is thinnest, and knowledge and spiritual powers of magic can pass back and forth. She is always a changeable deity. She is Ruler of the Otherworld, wherein Her God/Lover rests, between His evolving incarnations. She is Persephone, Queen of the Dead and the Unborn, Bringer through the Veil of Life those to be born, carrying across the dark still waters of the River of the Night those who have passed from the world of flesh. She is All-Knowing, All-Seeing and All-Revealing to those who dare to ask her the right questions

Samhain for Kids



I'll admit it. Halloween has always been my favourite night of the year, even as a little girl, before I discovered the Pagan mysteries. It was even more exciting than Christmas. Looking back, it's easy to see that as a young child, I was open to the magical energies of the night. I can remember running from house to house, flinging hellos and trick or treats at everyone we met. And something wonderful seemed to happen to the community, as well. Neighbours you rarely ever saw donned silly masks and sat on their front lawn, chatting amiably to parents and

making comments about the parade of costumes passing by. "Oh, look at the adorable puppy. Jane, come see this precious little princess. Did you see the scary vampire?" At no other time of the year do I ever recall such a feeling of pure goodwill and sheer camaraderie. People were genuinely friendly and interested in a way they can never be at Christmastime, given the crowded malls and monetary demands of the season. I never lost that feeling of enchantment and wonder. My skin still tingles on Halloween. Yes, yes, I know that Halloween is the name given Samhain by those pesky Christians. Yes I know that they bastardized all of our harvest-y beliefs and turned our beloved Crone into a wart-faced hag. But you know what? I love all of it anyway because it remains steadfastly a beloved tradition and because we are slowly and stealthily reclaiming the ancient roots of our Pagan New Year.

Get this...right wing, Christian groups are unhappy with the name Halloween for their children's school party. Oh no, that name is too evil sounding. Never mind that's the Church's name, All Hallows Eve. So they want to call them fall harvest parties now because that sounds so much tamer and less Pagan-y than Halloween. Oh I just laugh and laugh at the irony of it all. After all, Samhain is traditionally the Pagan festival of the third and final harvest, isn't it? If they only knew!

It is also the time of the year for honouring those who have gone on before us, whether it's the ancestors or a dear friend or relative who has passed. The veil between the worlds is thinnest on this night and so communing with our beloved dead is much easier. In fact, they are most likely trying to contact us! Set up an ancestors altar or place pictures of those who are gone on your altar. Don't forget our animal friends as well. Share the pictures and memories with your child, even if they are too young to remember the person. Encourage your child to draw a picture or write a letter to someone they miss and place that on the altar, as well. Place sprigs of rosemary or a rosemary bush on or near the altar, as rosemary is the traditional herb of remembrance. You could even cut a sprig to carry in a philtre (a small bag of dried herbs and stones charged for a specific magical purpose) that day. When you have your Samhain meal, make sure to set an extra place for the spirits of those who wish to join you. When the meal has ended, set that plate outside as an offering to those travelling to the other side. You can also bury apples and nuts for the same purpose.

Because pumpkins are not native to the U.K., ancient custom dictated the hollowing of turnips and setting lights in them to guide the spirits of the dead. This custom lives on with our jack 'o' lanterns. Carving pumpkins is a traditional custom on Halloween. Try saving the seeds, salting them and baking them in the oven. They are delicious. You could also dry 25 of the seeds and then, using a fine-tipped black marker, draw the runes for your child to attempt divination. This can also be done on large lima beans. You and your child could collect 25 stones of a uniform size or use small pieces of sanded wood to paint the rune symbols on. Finish with a clear coat and they will last for quite awhile. Obviously, depending upon your child's age, never leave them unsupervised with beans and pumpkin seeds. Use the pumpkin "guts" to bake pumpkin pie, bread or cookies.

A great idea from Celebrating the Great Mother is to allow your child to dress up for Halloween as his or her power animal. A simple guided meditation can help them to discover what animal it is or perhaps they already know because they have 50 stuffed lions. They could also dress as a character from your ethnic background. If you are of Native American heritage, help your child create a costume that reflects that. If you are of Norse decent, they could dress as a Viking warrior. Don't just buy the first plastic costume you see at WalMart because you've watched Shrek a million times. Be creative.

I got this idea from an e-list I used to be on, called Mystic Moms and Dads. It seems such a great idea I wanted to share. I don't know who the creator is but if you do, please feel free to contact me so I can give credit where credit is due. I think you could use dried flowers and herbs, which would look gorgeous in the kitchen. Crayon shavings would also add a colorful and creative touch as they melt and blend.

Items needed:

- fall leaves
- wax paper
- iron
- towel
- picture frame

Directions:

Collect as many different colored and size fall leaves as possible!

Cut two pieces of wax paper slightly larger than your picture frame.

Lay one piece of the wax paper on the towel, and arrange the leaves in a pleasing design.

Lay the other piece of wax paper over the leaves, and press the two together using a hot iron and moving quickly but firmly. Tape the "stained glass" to the picture frame and cut off the excess. Hang in a window for best results.

YULE

Yule is usually celebrated on the actual Winter Solstice, which may vary by a few days, though it usually occurs on or around December 21st. It is a Lesser Sabbat in the modern Pagan calendar, one of the four quarter-days of the year, but a very important one. It is deeply rooted in the cycle of the year being the longest night and the shortest day, where the Goddess once again becomes the Great Mother and gives birth to the new Sun King. In a poetic sense it is on this the longest night of the winter, 'the dark night of our souls', that there springs the new spark of hope, the Sacred Fire, the Light of the World, the Coel Coeth. The God's birth is symbolized by the return of the Sun, as from Yule onwards the Sun's power is no longer in decline, but begins to return towards its height at the Summer Solstice. Symbolically the God grows along with the Sun, growing as the Sun gains in power, staying above the horizon longer and warming the planet more each day.

This time of year is also the Christian Christmas celebrated on the 25th December (yes there is a Pagan relevance to this!). But why the 25th? It is clear that the New Testament does not provide the slightest indication of the date on which Christ was born. Early Christian tradition preserved no knowledge of one, and different writers made different guesses, most preferring dates in the spring. The first absolutely certain record which places it on 25th December is the calendar of Philocalus, produced in 354CE. The reason for the choice of this date was stated by a Christian writer, the Scriptor Syrus, in the late fourth century CE:

It was a custom of the Pagans to celebrate on the same 25 December the birthday of the Sun, at which they kindled lights in token of festivity. In these solemnities and revelries the Christians also took part. Accordingly when the doctors of the Church perceived that the Christians had a leaning to this festival, they took counsel and resolved that the true Nativity should be solemnised on that day.

The pagan feast which Christians replaced was not, however, itself much older. It had apparently been decreed only in 274CE, by the emperor Aurelian as major holy day of a new syncretic state cult with the sun as its official chief deity. The imperial reform built on a much older Syrian cult of the Unconquered Sun which had spread across the western Roman empire in the second and third centuries CE.

So what about the word Yule? In the eleventh century Danish rule over England resulted in the introduction of the colloquial Scandinavian term for Christmas, 'Yule', which provided an alternative name for it among the English. It became popular with them in the next century, and in the thirteenth is first recorded in Scotland, where it had become standard in vernacular speech by the end of the Middle Ages. In Old Norse it is jol, in Swedish jul and in Danish jull. The derivation of the name has baffled linguists; it is possibly related to the Gothic heul or Anglo-Saxon hweal, signifying a wheel, or to the root-word which yielded the English expression 'jolly'. Nothing certain is known and there is equal doubt over whether it was originally attached to a midwinter festival which preceded the Christian one.

One tradition that originated in the UK, (though later spread across Europe) and was practiced in Ancient times was that of the Yule Log, a branch of Ash or Oak that was cut, decorated with evergreens and pine cones, and then burnt in the hearth to symbolize the returning Sun.

The Yule log is lit on Christmas Eve and kept burning through the 12 nights of Christmas until Twelfth Night. A portion of the Log is then to be kept to light the following years Yule Log, allowing for warmth to stay for the whole year within the household. Some say that the Yule Log had to light at the first attempt, otherwise ill luck would haunt the home for that year! The twelve nights are symbolic of the Celt's belief that, for twelve days at the end of December, the sun stood still (which is why the days grew shorter and shorter). If they could keep Yule logs burning bright for those twelve days, then the sun would be persuaded to move again, and make the days grow longer. If a Yule log went out, then there would be terrible luck.

In England, it was considered unlucky for the Yule log to be bought, and had to be acquired using other means, as long as no money changed hands. Often it was given as a gift by landowners, and sometimes decorated with evergreens. In Cornwall a figure of a man was sometimes chalked on the surface of the log, mock or block. In Provence, where it was called the *tréfoire*, carols were sung invoking blessings upon the women that they might bear children and upon the crops, herds and flocks that they might also increase.

In some parts of the Scottish Highlands, a variation of the Yule log was observed, here a figure of an old woman, the *Cailleach Nollaich*, was carved from a withered tree stump. At dusk, the figure was brought into the house and laid upon the burning peat of the house fire. The family would gather round the hearth and watch the figure consumed into ashes, the rest of the evening was spent in games and merriment. The figure, represented, not fertility and life but of the evils of winter and death, the figure had to be totally consumed if misfortune and death were to be averted in the coming year.

Another tradition still used today is that of the Christmas tree, originating in Germany and Scandinavia. Pagans have always decorated with whatever greenery they could find growing at this time of the year. The German Martin Luther is credited with being the first person to decorate his tree with candles, after seeing how beautiful the stars were one night, and wanting to show his children, though nowadays much safer Fairy Lights are often used.

Fire festivals, celebrating the rebirth of the Sun, held on the winter's Solstice can be found throughout the ancient world. The Roman festival of Saturnalia was held on the winter solstice, boughs of evergreen trees and bushes would decorate the house, gifts were exchanged and normal business was suspended. The Persian Mithraists held December 25th as sacred to the birth of their Sun God, Mithras, and celebrated it as a victory of light over darkness. In Sweden, December 13th was sacred to the Goddess Lucina, Shining One, and was a celebration of the return of the light. On Yule itself, around the 21st, bonfires were lit to honour Odin and Thor.



There are many plants connected, in Pagan Lore, with this time of year, the most obvious being holly and ivy. Birch is another tree sometimes associated with Yule, or the Winter Solstice, the time when the year's wheel of the seasons turns. It is the traditional wood for the twiggy part of the witch's broom as well. In magical lore the wood is said to bring about purification and to be able to drive out demons.

Along with the evergreen, the holly and the ivy and the mistletoe were important plants of the season, all symbolizing fertility and everlasting life. Mistletoe was especially venerated by the Celtic Druids, who cut it with a golden sickle on the sixth night of the moon, and believed it to be an aphrodisiac.

Mistletoe, from the Old English *misteltān*, is a parasitic plant that grows on various trees, particularly the apple tree, it is held in great veneration when found on Oak trees. The winter solstice, called 'Alban Arthan' by the Druids, was according to Bardic Tradition, the time when the Chief Druid would cut the sacred mistletoe from the Oak. The mistletoe is cut using a golden sickle on the sixth day of the moon. It is often associated with thunder, and regarded as a protection against fire and lightning. In Scandinavian mythology, Balder the Beautiful was killed from an arrow made of mistletoe and wielded by the blind god Hoder. Shakespeare, in *Titus Andronicus II* calls it 'the baleful mistletoe'.

It is interesting to note that mistletoe was excluded from church decorations, probably due to its connection with the Druids and pagan and magickal associations. This ancient ban on mistletoe is still widely observed.

Yule for Kids



When I was a kid, winter seemed interminable to me. I was never much of a snow-bunny and would pine for a return of warmth and light. Now, as most children, I did love Christmas and the ensuing hubbub but other than that and my birthday at the end of January, I couldn't wait for winter be over. Yule is the celebration of the Winter Solstice, or the longest night of the year. The very next day, light begins to grow again as the days begin to lengthen! It's the return of the Sun! It made winter much more bearable for me.

Now, my kids are much more comfortable in the snow than I was or am and they seem to love this time of year. One of our favourite activities for this time of year is feeding the wildlife. We decorate our indoor Yule tree so why not decorate the trees

outside as well? Use whole apples and cover them in peanut butter and then roll them in birdseed. Hang them from the tree branches and watch the birds and squirrels feast! We also make popcorn and cranberry strands. These take time and patience and good quality popcorn! Depending upon the age of the child, use a short length of thread. It takes longer than expected to finish a strand and kids can get bored when they don't seem to be making visible progress. We make some for indoors and some for outdoors but we always transfer the ones we use inside after the holidays are over.

On the evening of Yule, we generally have a nice meal and then we bake cookies and have cocoa. It is a very simple, very heart-felt family time. We also exchange gifts on this night. The rest of the season is so fraught with activity that it's nice to just relax with the family. Sometimes we get so caught up in the rat race and what I call "mandatory fun time" that we forget the joys of just talking. Everyone has a turn to express their opinions and ideas, or to tell a story or joke. Generally, we end up recalling funny memories about when the kids were little or certain things they have done in the past year.

I love to tell the story of the Sun's rebirth, too. You can ask your child what the Sun does; why is it so important to us; why do we need the warmth and light. Believe me, throughout the years, we have gotten some hilarious, as well as thoughtful, responses! One year, Spike told us that the Sun was important because "Mama had to tan her boobies." And Scout, in her usual perceptive way told us once that the Sun caused the Earth to "have babies". Explain that Solstice is the longest night of the year but tomorrow, the days will start growing again!

We still celebrate Christmas with our Christian families and we struggled long and hard to find a way to reconcile this with our beliefs. Granted, much of the symbolism is overtly Pagan and this has made it easier. We have begun to celebrate the Yule Season, kicking off with Solstice. Scout's birthday is December 23rd, and then we spend Christmas Eve with my family. New Years Day is the culmination of our festivities. This way, Yule is the official night of celebration and all the other celebrations are merely extensions of our Solstice night.

IMBOLC



Imbolc (pronounced 'im'olk' also known as Oimelc) comes from an Irish word that was originally thought to mean 'in the belly' although many people translate it as 'ewe's milk' (oimelc).

Imbolc was one of the cornerstones of the Celtic calendar. For them the success of the new farming season was of great importance. As winter stores of food were getting low Imbolc rituals were performed to harness divine energy that would ensure a steady supply of food until the harvest six months later. This is the time of year when goats, sheep, horses, deer and cows are heavy with pregnancy and begin to lactate, in order to nurture their soon-to-be-born young. And so the seeds, much like the growing embryos, lay safely tucked away in Mother Earth's womb, awaiting the birth of Spring. It may not feel like it but Spring is just around the

corner! Beneath the layers of snow, life is beginning to stir. Soon, the Earth will be teeming with abundance. Imbolc is also the Feast of Brighid (see article below), Celtic Triple Goddess of the Hearth and Home, Fire, poets, and mothers. Generally, Sabbats are observed on the eve of the holiday, beginning at sunset, until the following sunset.

Like many Celtic festivals, the Imbolc celebrations centred around the lighting of fires. Fire was perhaps more important for this festival than others as it was also the holy day of Brighid (also known as Bride, Brigit, Brid), the Goddess of fire, healing and fertility. The lighting of fires celebrated the increasing power of the Sun over the coming months. For the Christian calendar, this holiday was reformed and renamed 'Candlemas' when candles are lit to remember the purification of the Virgin Mary.

To fully grasp the significance of Imbolc it is necessary to understand the life-and-death struggle represented by Winter in any agrarian society. In a world lit only by fire the snow, cold and ice of this season literally holds you in its grip, only relaxed with the arrival of Spring. Although the Equinox does not arrive until later and Spring is celebrated with Ostara and Beltane, Imbolc is the harbinger and the indication that better times are coming.

During the cold months, certain issues become pressing. Is there enough food for both humans and animals? Will illness decimate the tribe, especially in the case of the young, the old and nursing mothers? And what of the animals whose lives are so crucial to our own? One of the most burning questions would be with the pregnant cows and ewes since their milk is used for drink, for cheese and curds which might mean the difference between life and death.

By Imbolc these animals will have birthed their young and their milk would be flowing. Milk, to the Celts, was sacred food, equivalent to the Christian communion. It was an ideal form of food due to its purity and nourishment. Mother's milk was especially valuable, having curative powers. The cow was symbolic of the sacredness of motherhood, the life-force sustained and nourished.

This was not a passive cow giving milk but an active mother fighting for the well-being of her children.

Imbolc divides Winter in half; the Crone months of Winter are departing and the promise of the Spring Maiden is around the corner. This holiday eventually became modern day Candlemas with Saint Brigid's Day and the Feast of the Purification of Mary being celebrated during this period of time. This celebration was definitely a feminine festival. Women would gather to welcome the maiden aspect of the Goddess as embodied by Brighid. Corn cakes made from the first and last of the harvest were made and distributed and this practice remains a part of Her celebration. During these festivities, She was commonly represented by a doll, dressed in white, with a crystal upon Her chest.

This doll, usually a Corn Dolly, was carried in procession by maidens also dressed in white. Gifts of food were presented to the Goddess with a special feast given by and for the maidens. Young men were invited to this feast for the purpose of ritual mating to insure that new souls would be brought in to replace those lost during the cold times.

Imbolc is still a special time for Pagans. As people who are deeply aware of what is going on in the natural world we recognise that there is strength in cold as well as heat, death as well as life. The Horned God reigns over the Autumn and Winter and although the light and warmth of the world may be weak he is still in his power. Many feel that human actions are best when they reflect the actions of nature, so as the world slowly springs back into action it is time for the small tasks that are neglected through the busy year. Rituals and activities might include the making of candles, planting spring flowers, reading poetry and telling stories

Imbolc for Kids

We generally prepare for Imbolc by making candles, which we then burn at sunset in every room of the house, to welcome the strengthening Sun. If the Sabbat falls on a week end, we may also spend some time making candles but it is a time consuming task and we find we don't have time during the week. Candle making can be as simple or as complex as you want it to be. There are kits in any craft store or toy aisle or you can use the following recipe. Candles that you have created will be far more potent than the store-bought kind.

Candle Making with Kids

Supplies:

- Plain Paraffin Wax or Beeswax(about 1/2 a pound), which can be found at craft stores.
- Double Boiler or you can do as I do and use a large coffee can for melting the wax in, inserted in a saucepan, filled 1/3 of the way with water. Wax MUST be melted this way and never directly on the heat source because it is a serious fire hazard.
- Wooden Spoon
- Bowls of cold water
- Candy thermometer
- Wicks, which are available in most craft stores.
- Wax Colour, which comes in several forms, also available at craft stores.
- Essential Oil (Fragrance) - It's always a good idea to start small. You can always add more fragrance but it is tough to remove it! Keep a written record

- of the amounts you use and the outcome of the final product so you can adjust next time. Favourite blends can be saved to your grimoire.
- Herbs, depending upon your intent for the candle.

Directions:

Cut the wax into small pieces so it melts more readily.

Heat the water to boiling in the boiler or set the coffee can in the water. Use medium heat. be patient and do NOT turn up the heat. Stir the wax until it is completely melted and it reaches a temperature of 160° F or 71° Celsius. Test with the thermometer. Reduce the heat at this point making sure the water stays hot enough to keep the wax liquid.

Add the colour, a little at a time. As it dries, it will lighten up. To test for colour, place a small amount on a pie plate. Allow to cool. Check the results. Make your adjustments and be sure the colour is blended evenly throughout the wax.

Add the fragranced oil now, stirring well for a uniform scent when the candle is burning. If you are using herbs, also add them at this point. Decide on the length of candle you want and then cut the wick at double this length plus three inches. For example, if you are making 12" tapers, then cut the wick 27" long. You will be making two tapers at once and need the extra three inches for holding the wick as you dip.

Hold the wick in the middle and dip into the hot wax for a few seconds. It may float the first few dips because the wick is lighter than the wax. Have patience. You want to be relaxed and focused because your emotions and feelings affect your intent. The wax needs to dry for a minute between each dipping.

Make sure the candles don't touch each other!

At this point, you can also pour the hot wax into moulds, if you want. There are many interesting candle moulds available at local craft stores. Yellow, sun-shaped candles would be perfect for Imbolc! You'll need to double the amount of wax if your intent is to use moulds.

After several dippings, you can speed up the process by plunging the candles into cold water between dippings. Keep dipping until candles reach desired thickness. While wax is still somewhat pliable but not too soft, roll on wax paper to smooth out any irregularities. Trim the bottoms until they are flat and hang to dry.

I love it when the kids help me in the kitchen, there are some common sense rules that should be strictly adhered to.

Don't ever leave a child unattended with melting wax. Not only is there the danger of scalding, but if it gets too hot, wax can flame up unexpectedly.

Use an ABC fire extinguisher to put out the fire. Never use water.

Always have an adult handle the hot wax (stirring, dipping). The kids love to add the colour and the fragrance.

The kids also enjoy making Brighid's Crowns on Imbolc, to wear during our family feast. Eggs are an appropriate meal at this time because they symbolize pregnancy and a return of fertility. Any dairy product is a good choice. Scout is an

aficionado of good cheeses and we generally begin our meal with Brie on crackers and Gouda or Colby slices.

A Greek salad, topped with Feta cheese, is a great accompaniment to a spinach quiche. We always finish our dinner with a pudding, in honour of "oimelc". If you are lactose intolerant, as I am, then you might consider using goat's milk for the pudding. It is much easier to digest. I trade tarot readings to a neighbour in return for goat's milk. You can also find it at Wal-Mart, in the dairy case. I'm very excited because in the Spring, we're going to purchase two dairy goats of our own!

Brigid's Crown

(I know I found this idea online somewhere but I cannot remember where. I've adapted it to my own use but would love to give credit to the original source so if you know, please email me!)

Supplies:

- Construction paper in 4 colours, two of which are red and yellow
- Crayons
- Scissors
- Glue

Directions:

Cut a two inch strip of paper, long enough to wrap around your child's head, plus two inches. Your child can decide what colour to make his/her crown.

Cut out 6-10 thin rectangles for the candles. 8 works well but it depends upon the size of the candles.

Using yellow construction paper, cut out as many flames as you need to top the candles. We then use the red construction paper and cut out a smaller flame to fit inside of the yellow. This is a matter of choice.

Glue the flames to the candles and then glue the candles around the headband. Scout is very thorough and neat about her work and her crowns are generally very symmetrical. Spike uses some creative license but it is his creation, after all!

OSTARA



Ostara is the Vernal (or Spring) Equinox which this year falls on 20 March at precisely 12:33 p.m. (Universal or GMT) (7:34 a.m. EST). Why so precise? Well the equinox occurs when the Sun crosses directly over the Earth's equator. This moment is known as the vernal equinox in the Northern Hemisphere. For the Southern Hemisphere, this is the moment of the autumnal equinox. Translated literally, equinox means "equal night." Because the sun is positioned above the equator, day and night are about equal in length all over the world during the equinoxes.

These brief but monumental moments owe their significance to the 23.4 degree tilt of the Earth's axis. Because of the tilt, we receive the Sun's rays most directly in the summer. In the winter, when we are tilted away from the Sun, the rays pass through the atmosphere at a greater slant, bringing lower temperatures. If the Earth rotated on an axis perpendicular to the plane of the Earth's orbit around the Sun, there would be no variation in day lengths or temperatures throughout the year, and we would not have seasons. One interesting snippet about the Vernal Equinox is that early Egyptians built the Great Sphinx so that it points directly toward the rising Sun on the day of the vernal equinox

Christianised as Easter (the date of which incidentally is set as the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Vernal Equinox). It is a time when Cernnunos, Lord of the animal world, and the Green Man, Lord of the forests, are honoured and a time when the plans made during the dark winter begin to hatch. The Babylonian pagans celebrated their new year at the Vernal equinox and gave eggs, painted red to symbolise life, as gifts and blessings.

The fertility symbolism of Spring is found in the Easter eggs which are a custom in many parts of the world at this time. These were originally the symbols of the German Goddess Ostara or Eostre, who in Germanic -based languages gave her name to Easter.

As mentioned above, the Equinox is when the hours of daylight and darkness are equal. The two weeks before and after both the Vernal and Autumn equinoxes are often times of stress and great tension. This is because all elements of life are being brought into new balance, physically, as day and night attain equal length. At the Vernal equinox, light is gaining, for future days will now be longer than the nights. So a new tide of life begins. But first the old ways must be broken down. Times of transition are, potentially, both stressful and chaotic. Out of this chaos, new ways arise. It isn't always easy to believe it at the time, but from a breaking-up, new life comes.

The main Ostara symbol is the egg which symbolises fertility in nature. It also shows how plans that were being hatched on the inner levels during the winter may now be put into practice in our lives. We may take the first steps towards doing something we have only dreamt about. Eggs, hard boiled and hand-painted for decoration, should be on the altar. They show the emergence of life from

darkness, of ideas from inner levels. They are the Goddess fertile, rich with promise and potential life.

A traditional Vernal Equinox pastime is to go for a walk and randomly collect flowers. Rather than picking them, note what type of flowers they are. When you get home, divine their magical meaning by use of books, your own intuition, a pendulum or any other means. The flowers you have chosen reveal your inner thoughts and emotions. It is important at this time of renewed life to plan a walk through gardens, a park, woodlands, forest and other green places. This is not simply an exercise, and you should be on no other mission. It isn't even an appreciation of nature. Make your walk celebratory, a ritual for nature itself. Other traditional activities include planting seeds, working on magical gardens and practising all forms of herb work - magical, medicinal, cosmetic, culinary and artistic.

Foods in tune with this day include those made of seeds, such as sunflower, pumpkin and sesame seeds, as well as pine nuts. Sprouts are equally appropriate, as are leafy, green vegetables. Flower dishes such as stuffed nasturtiums or carnation cupcakes also find their place here. Find a book of flower cooking or simply make spice cupcakes.

As soon as the soil began to warm up and be workable, roughly about the time of the Vernal Equinox, seed corn and barely would have been laboriously sown by hand. Among it would be the special ears of corn saved as the corm dolly or kern king, a symbol of potency of the Sun God, sacrificed at harvest-tide.

Easter, again named after the Goddess of Spring, is the only one of the Christian festivals which is decided by the phases of the moon, which is why it moves about. Easter Sunday is the first Sunday after the full moon on or after the vernal equinox, which is when the Sun enters Aries. It is at the same time as the Jewish Feast of Pesach, or 'Passing Over', when a lamb is slaughtered and eaten in haste, with bitter herbs and cups of red wine. Many European countries derive their name from this festival from 'Pasques' in French, 'Pask' in Dutch or 'Pasche' in Latin, most of these being taken to mean 'Passion', and relate to the Crucifixion. Once again, the symbols linked with the Easter Festival contain many pre-Christian ones. The decorated eggs stand for the rebirth of nature; the chocolate rabbit is the Goddess's scared hare in disguise. The Easter bonnets represent the new set of clothes worn for the first time as spring unfolds her golden daffodils, and the tufts of pussy willow fur the branches in the hedges.

Spring celebrates the coming together of the male and female, Goddess and God. It is a time of seed-sowing and fertility, when day and night, light and dark, are equal and there is a dynamic and creative tension between the polarities of opposites. Pagan Spring Equinox rites often celebrate the emergence of the young God in the world and his mating with the Goddess.

Isis of nature awaiteth the coming of Her Lord the Sun She calls Him She draws Him from the place of the dead, The Kingdom of Amenti, where all things are forgotten. And he comes to Her in his boat called Millions of Years And the Earth grows green with the springing grain

At Ostara, the God has become the warrior, the Champion of the Goddess, and like such heroes as Hercules or King Arthur, he has twelve tasks to perform, each linked with one of the signs of the zodiac. Dancing around the circle, he shows off, in the person of the local hero, or a lad chosen by lot to play the part. He is armed with the Spear of the Sun and the Arrows of Passion, and when he played

his part, wooed the Goddess and, with her permission, bedded her, he fires arrows into the setting sun and departs on his great journey.

The God is at his most 'Pan-ish'. At spring he is Lord of the Greenwood and lusting free, he is the Shepherd of Goats and probably ruts everything that moves! He is a symbol of youth, a symbol of instinct in tune with nature. At this stage of his development, he is in tune with animals and is himself at his most animalistic. The image of Pan, with horns but human trunk and goat legs, captures this. He is free, careless of responsibility, the adolescent coming into maturity, roaming the forests and heath lands.

At the Spring equinox, the light equals darkness and this can be taken as both a representation of the Goddess meeting the God, but also as an emblem of the God's evolution. He is at the equipoise between unconscious animalism and growing conscious awareness. It is at this festival that he impregnates the Goddess but, although coupling with Her, he does not stay with Her. He continues roaming the greenwood, as the Horned Hunter.

Ostara Incense

2 parts Frankincense
1 part Benzoin
1 part Dragon's Blood
1/2 part Nutmeg
1/2 part Violet flowers (or a few drops Violet oil)
1/2 part Orange peel
1/2 part Rose petals

("The Complete Book of Incense, Oils & Brews", page 83, Llewellyn Publications, 1992 by Scott Cunningham)

Ostara for Kids

Spring! Is there any other word that evokes such feelings of hope, renewal and pure joy? Traditionally, Ostara celebrates the first day of Spring; though, for me, Ostara is Mid-Spring. I begin to feel these currents around Imbolc but still, there is that electricity in the air! We are beginning to see the signs of life about us that we only felt stirring at Imbolc.

Early flowers are starting to bloom, the birds are once again singing outside our windows, and the days are noticeably longer! In fact, day and night, at the Vernal Equinox, are in perfect balance. After that, the light begins to grow longer than the dark. This is the time to get outside and allow yourself to experience the sweeping changes of Mother Nature.

Spring, like Autumn, can never be fully appreciated while indoors. Many local parks have wonderful walking trails but pay attention to the world right outside your front door, as well. Perhaps a robin has built a nest in the little tree in your yard. Watch the squirrels frolic, and count the tightly closed buds sprouting up from last year's flower garden.

This is the perfect time for spring cleaning, literally and figuratively. At this time of year, after the booty of Christmas and Yule has been collected, the kids go through their toy boxes and decide what they want to keep, swap, give away or, as in the sad, sad case of the invalid Mr. Potato Head, what they want to throw away.

I once read a book called "The Messies Guide to a Clean House" or something like that and it was chock full of good ideas for organizing your home. One of the ideas I still use to this day. When you are attempting to clean out closets, dressers or cabinets, take three boxes with you. One is for stuff you plan to keep, one is for garbage, and one is for things to give away. Of course, the trick is to actually give the stuff away afterwards! Everyone pitches in at this time of year, inside and out. I can't say housework is ever fun but there's a certain satisfaction in knowing your home is neat and organized. This also allows the positive energies to flow, unblocked, throughout your home. For however brief a time!

Also fun is the house blessing that follows. Be creative as you think of ways to spiritually cleanse, protect and bless your home. Sage smudges and incense are great ways to purify and cleanse your house. After all the cleaning, you can hang Witch Balls or amulets and talismans that the kids have made in the windows, for good luck, protection or abundance for the coming year.

You don't have to wait for Easter to dye eggs. Ostara is a great time to celebrate the return of the birds, as they are so busily building their nests. It isn't hard to see the correlation of coloured eggs lying in a basket (nest).

We make hard-boiled eggs and also blown eggs. With a pin, poke holes in both ends of the egg and blow into one of them. The yolk and white of the egg will come out the other end. Obviously, these are much more fragile than the hard-boiled kind. Then you can colour them as you would regularly, except these eggs tend to float and collect coloured water in the shell. They need to drain after you are finished colouring them. Or if you prefer, colour them raw and blow them out later.

They look gorgeous in a basket on the table or hung from the windows and even the trees and bushes outside, however, if put outside, remember they are fragile and may easily break if blown off or wind damaged.

If you write on the egg with either crayon or white candle wax, then you'll have patterns on the eggs after they are coloured because the dye will not stick to the wax. We did this one year, with hard-boiled eggs. Everyone drew a rune or symbol on their "wish egg" symbolizing something they wanted or needed and then we colour the eggs. We then peeled the eggs and ate them, effectively taking the wish inside our own bodies to manifest outwards. The shells of both kind go into the compost heap when we are finished.

Egg-shaped Basket Balloons

- Liquid Starch (available in the laundry aisle)
- Yarn or heavy string in Spring colours

This is a VERY messy project! It is a lot of fun, though. Make sure the area is easy to clean and is covered with newspaper.

Blow up the balloon and tie it off.

Pour some of the starch into a shallow bowl or pie pan and soak the yarn or string in it.

Begin wrapping the balloon with the string until it is thoroughly covered.

Allow it to dry, usually a few days.

If the balloon has not shrunk, then pop it and then cut the now hardened string in half and decorate the ragged edge with lace and fill with your blown eggs, jelly beans, or other Ostara candy.

This is also when we begin our garden preparation. The beds get turned over and the compost is added. Indoors, we begin certain types of seedlings, to be transplanted later in the season. I read somewhere, and can't remember where, about ritually planting a flower seed, visualizing the seed as your wish or intention and then planting it in a container. You need to nourish it as it grows and flowers along with your wish. Kids love to grow things and watch them pop out of the earth! A few days before Ostara, plant some alfalfa sprouts, or radish seeds (generally available in any garden or produce department). Harvest them on Ostara and eat them in a salad.

BELTANE

The origin of the word "Beltane" is unclear, but it is fairly certain that the "-tane" part comes from the Celtic word for fire. Several of the Solar festivals are associated with fire, but the fire of Beltane has a particular significance. In ancient times, the art of making fire was known only to a few. Hunters and travellers would know it, but, in the villages the secret was carefully preserved by just a few privileged men. These men, who might well have been the priests, tended the fire, called the Need Fire, that burned perpetually in the village's main hall; from which all the other fires in all the dwellings of the village would be lit. Once a year, on the eve of Beltane, all the fires in the village would be extinguished, including the Need Fire. The keepers of the flame would go to the woods in the darkness of the night to collect the nine sacred woods to make a new Need Fire, which through their art would blaze up afresh the following morning, and from which everyone in the village would ultimately derive their own source of light and heat.

At this time of year, people could also burn their winter bedding and floor coverings, ready for them to be replaced afresh. Referred to as a Gaelic ceremony, it has been celebrated for thousands of years throughout the United Kingdom and Europe. In Ireland, it supposedly marks the arrival of the Gaels on to Irish shores.

Celtic festivals often tied in with the needs of the community. In spring time, at the beginning of the farming calendar, everybody would be hoping for a fruitful year for their families and fields. Beltane rituals would often include courting, for example, young men and women collecting blossoms in the woods and lighting fires in the evening. These rituals would often lead to matches and marriages, either immediately in the coming summer or autumn.

Early accounts of Beltane celebrations have been passed down by Julius Caesar, whose description of the Scottish Celts celebrations of the festival must be seen as biased. Supposedly, animal sacrifices would be made each Beltane to ensure the fertility of their crops, however, every five years the Highland Celts would sacrifice humans, the numbers being made up of convicted criminals and prisoners of war. They would be sacrificed by the Druids, though the manner of their death would vary. Many were supposedly shot with arrows, but descriptions of Gaulish Celt ceremonies have them being burnt alive in huge wicker men.

Apart from this, there is little evidence to suggest the use of the wicker man but many Iron Age 'bog bodies' have been found preserved in peat in the British Isles and Northern Europe. These show signs of having been ritually murdered in a variety of ways (strangulation, blows to the head, throat cutting and a combination of each). While we do not know if they were sacrificed on Beltane, it does give a glimpse into the savage part of ancient religion.

Fires were lit on hilltops at Beltane as late as the 1700s, and Beltane is still a major ceremonial date in the Wiccan and Pagan year, although today these don't include sacrifices! Later accounts of Beltane festivities refer to a Beltane Cake, baked with eggs. A special piece of this referred to as the Beltane Carline spelt symbolic doom to whoever was unlucky enough to receive it. Once identified, the person with the Beltane Carline would be set upon by some of the others who would attempt to throw them on the fire. This would be prevented by the rest of the festival-goers. The unlucky person would then be considered a symbolic sacrifice and referred to as being dead for the rest of the evening.

In nature, the seeds planted last November at Samhain (Sow-an) and moved on their own for the first time in February at Imbolc, are now up and growing (think on the symbolism of this). So for the Celts, this was a time of fertility. The May Pole's phallic shape is but a mild hint at the kind of spring revels that went on during this day and night sacred to the Sun God Bel. The idea of the Sun being masculine is actually a relatively new idea - no more than four or five thousand years old. Originally in the British Isles (as was also the case in most of this Earth of ours), the Sun was a Goddess.

*Greetings to you, Sun of the seasons,
As you travel the skies on high,
With your strong step on the wing of the heights.
You are the happy mother of the stars.*

*You sink down into the perilous ocean
Without harm and without hurt.
You rise on the quiet wave
Like a young queen in flower.*

- Traditional Gaelic Prayer

So at Beltane there is the crowning of the Queen of the May and her King. In their honour, the people dance around the May Pole. Bel supplanted Bride in the British Isles. He was part of the patriarchal takeover of Europe. In Ireland, Bilé, the God of the underworld, is the father of Miled. The sons of Mil (read: Miled), or the Milesians, were the Goidelic Celts who took over Ireland from the Partholarians. They came from Spain, the Gaelic land of the dead. Bel was honoured at Beltane not only as a god of death, but also as a god of life as well, and was depicted as a solar deity. He gained victory over the powers of darkness by bringing the people to within sight of another harvest. At Beltane, all fires were extinguished, and Bel's fire was created from the sacred rays of the Sun, "the sacred fires of Bel." This Fire was then carried to all the hearths of the land.

Beltane is a double Fire Festival, and Fire is a wonderful tool for looking into the past. The cycle is well up and needs fertilization for the next rush of growth, but here is a moment to remember the roots, where this cycle began. How many times have you sat around a camp fire or stared at the burning logs in a fire place and ruminated on the past? As one looks at the glowing embers at the base of the fire, the burning wood takes on all kinds of shapes and meanings - reflections of the past. Beltane is that time for one last look back, one final deep fertilizing breath before the time of massive growth in summer. Fire energizes that growth and fruitfulness, just as the heat of the returning Sun warms the Earth and nourishes the growing seedlings.

Other festivities involved fire which was thought to cleanse, purify and increase fertility. Cattle were often passed between two fires and the properties of the flame and the smoke were seen to ensure the fertility of the herd. Today it is seen to have purifying qualities which cleanse and revitalise. People, leap over the Beltane fire to bring good fortune, fertility (of mind, body and spirit) and happiness through the coming year. But be warned, some say that if you leap sky-clad with your loved one over the Beltane Fire, it insures that you will have a baby in the coming year.

At Beltane the God (to whom the Goddess gave birth at the Winter Solstice) achieves the strength and maturity to court and become lover to the Goddess. So although what happens in the fields has lost its significance for most Pagans today, the creation of fertility is still an important issue.

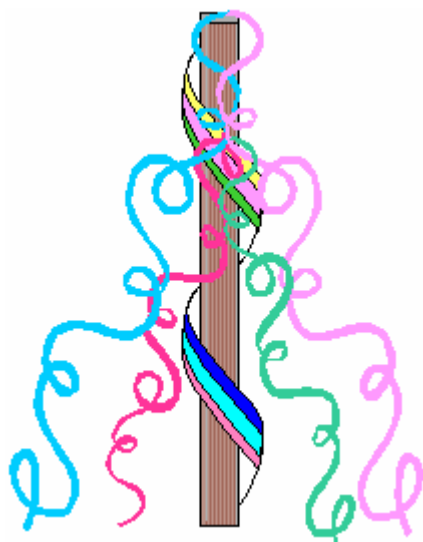
The Goddess manifests herself in three ways. At Imbolc we see her as the Virgin Bride. Here at Beltane, and again at Lughnasad in early August, the manifestation of the Goddess we see is the Mother - she becomes this, many times, as a result of Beltane lovemaking. She is woman in her prime. Lover. Fully aware. In her power. At Samhain around the first of November, we shall see her in the final phase of this trinity, the wise old woman or the Crone.



Although Beltane is the most overtly sexual festival, Pagans rarely use sex in their rituals although rituals often imply sex and fertility. The tradition of dancing round the maypole contains sexual imagery and is still very popular with modern Pagans. But the maypole is not only a phallic symbol; it is, rather, a symbol of the flames of the new Need Fire for the year to come soaring up to the heavens.

Beltane is also a feast of fertility. The fields are sown, the crops are growing, and in the cycle of the farming year, although there is always some work to be done, there is now a little time to relax and enjoy things for a while before the next surge of activity at harvest time. It may also be a time of charity, when those who have a little left over from their winter store can share with those who are less fortunate than themselves.

Beltane for Kids



Our blessed Mother Earth is now teeming with life and we rush to honour Her reawakening. Given the symbolism of the phallic maypole, this Sabbat is overtly sexual in nature but there are still many ways to celebrate with children.

A favourite tradition on Beltane is to bathe your face in the first drops of dew. Being practical kitchen witches, Scout and I set out washcloths in a bowl and then use that to wipe our faces. This ensures beauty and youthful appearance!

So do my Mary Kay products but every little bit helps, doesn't it?

Weaving May baskets and wearing flower garlands is another way to celebrate. Perhaps you could pin a small corsage to your shirt for the day if you are too shy to wear fresh flowers in your hair. In the past, the children and I have made brightly coloured wreaths out of paper plates and tissue paper. Or you could use a variation of Brighid's Crown (from Imbolc article) and instead of adding candles, add tissue paper blooms! Also try cutting long strips of construction paper and weaving them together to create a basket and then fill it with either live or tissue flowers. Try creating a "goodwill" basket filled with flowers, cookies and teas to give to a grandparent or elderly neighbour.

My favourite activity is dancing around the Maypole! Any sort of pole will work, including lampposts, street signs, trees, tether ball poles. Use your imagination! In the past, we have used a sapling in the front of the house. We used crepe paper streamers found at any drugstore or supermarket. Don't buy the cheapest brand because even the more expensive stuff rips and tears. This year, I've decided to create my own reusable, more durable (and more Earth-friendly) Maypole streamers with old sheets and fabric dye! Simply cut the sheets into strips, sew a seam to prevent tearing and then dye any colours you'd like.

LITHA

Litha (taken from Saxon tradition, the opposite of Yule) is celebrated on the Summer Solstice, the longest day of the year. It is also known as Midsummer Nights Eve, Alban Heruin (Druidic). On this Sabbat light and life are at their most abundant. Many Ancient monuments are aligned with the Sun at this point in the Wheel of the Year, the most famous being Stonehenge in England, though there are many more all over the world.



At Litha the Sun God has reached the moment of his greatest strength. Seated on his greenwood throne he is lord of the forests and his face can be seen in church architecture peering from countless foliate masks. In many Wiccan celebrations this is the time when the Holly King, God of the Waning Year, encounters the Oak King, God of the waxing Year, on Midsummer night. The Holly king fights the Oak King for his throne, and takes over the ruling of the year, a position he holds until the Oak King wins it back at Yule. This encounter is often re-enacted energetically at Midsummer rituals. The Oak King is not forgotten, though; in Celtic mythology, he withdraws now to the Corona Borealis, the Caer Arianrhod or 'silver wheel'. As the outer strength of the Sun wanes, its inner strength grows.

The Holly King and the Oak King are actually one; the Holly King is the growing youth while the Oak King is the mature man. In other traditions it's not until Samhain that the Holly King triumphs, (as the year moves into the dark half), he may also be seen as the Stag King, in his prime with full antlers, not yet ready for his symbolic sacrifice at Harvest Time.

This Sabbat also celebrates the Goddess in some traditions. She can be seen now as heavy with child, as nature is heavy with the bounty of the coming harvest, though in some Traditions although she is already pregnant (with the God) her 'time' is not yet ready, as she will not give birth to the God until Yule.

Litha is a Fire Festival, and the fire of Midsummer is traditionally kindled from the friction of two sacred woods, fir and oak. Nine different types of herbs are thrown upon the Midsummer fire. These consist of Mistletoe, Vervain, St. John's Wort, Heartsease, Lavender, and a choice of four others chosen from local herbs typical of this season. In agricultural societies, herds of cattle were driven through the embers of Midsummer fire to purge them of disease and illness. Many Litha

customs involve the turning or rolling downhill of flaming wheels, to symbolize the power of the Sun.

Litha is a time to give thanks for whatever is bringing fulfilment into our lives, and also a time to try and understand our passions, the wildest and most fervent aspects of our inner selves, within us which are often at their most evident in the height of the summer. The fire which we celebrate at Litha is a symbol of change and creativity, and this is a perfect time to put our passions to good use in bringing about changes in our lives.

This is considered to be a time when energies abound, and is a good time for magic and purification rites. Midsummer Night's Eve is also special for adherents of the Faerie faith. The alternative fixed calendar date of June 25 (Old Litha) is sometimes employed by Covens. The Christian religion converted this day of Jack-in-the-Green to the Feast of St. John the Baptist, often portraying him in rustic attire sometimes with horns and cloven feet (like the Greek God Pan and similar in aspect to the Celtic Cerunnos).

Technically, a solstice is an astronomical point and, due to the procession to the equinox, the date may vary by a few days depending on the year. The summer solstice occurs when the sun reaches the Tropic of Cancer, and we experience the longest day and the shortest night of the year. Astrologers know this as the date on which the sun enters the sign of Cancer.

However, since most European peasants were not accomplished at reading an ephemeris or did not live close enough to Salisbury Plain to trot over to Stonehenge and sight down its main avenue, they celebrated the event on a fixed calendar date, June 24th. The slight forward displacement of the traditional date is the result of multitudinous calendrical changes down through the ages. It is analogous to the winter solstice celebration, which is astronomically on or about December 21st, but is celebrated on the traditional date of December 25th, Yule, later adopted by the Christians.

Again, it must be remembered that the Celts reckoned their days from sundown to sundown, so the June 24th festivities actually begin on the previous sundown (our June 23rd). This was Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Eve. Which brings up another point: our modern calendars are quite misguided in suggesting that 'summer begins' on the solstice. According to the old folk calendar, summer BEGINS on May Day and ends on Lughnasadh (August 1st), with the summer solstice, midway between the two, marking MID-summer. This makes more logical sense than suggesting that summer begins on the day when the sun's power begins to wane and the days grow shorter.

Just as the Pagan mid-winter celebration of Yule was adopted by Christians as Christmas (December 25th), so too the Pagan mid-summer celebration was adopted by them as the feast of John the Baptist (June 24th). Occurring 180 degrees apart on the wheel of the year, the mid-winter celebration commemorates the birth of Jesus, while the mid-summer celebration commemorates the birth of John, the prophet who was born six months before Jesus in order to announce his arrival .

Litha for Kids

Litha is a time of magic and faeries. Also known as Midsummer, to many it seems strange to celebrate the halfway point when school vacations and warm weather have just begun! Today is the longest day of the year and the Sun is at the height

of its power but it's a bittersweet joy as the days begin to shorten again, starting tomorrow.



This is a great time of year to harvest herbs for all of your magical workings. It's also a good time to allow your child to begin his/her own witchy cupboard. When harvesting herbs, remember to leave about 1/3 of the plant behind to propagate itself. This ensures a continual harvest throughout the growing season. Also, thank the spirit of the plant for its sacrifice and leave a small offering. Taking a page from Native American custom, a bit of tobacco is a good thank-you to the spirits of your garden but you could also sprinkle a bit of dried herb from a previous harvest. Allow your child to help you bundle the herbs together and tie at the stems with twine or thread. Hang upside down in a cool, dark place until dry and then store them in pretty containers or even plastic baggies. Make sure all

containers are labelled clearly as dried herbs tend to look a lot alike! I'll never forget the time when Scout's father, my ex-husband, was making chilli and reached into the spice cabinet for something. He proceeded to add a generous sprinkling of Scout's "dragon scales" (see Kiddy Craft section) to the pot because she had recycled my old herb jars! How he could have mistaken glittery pine cone shingles for cumin is beyond me but he did! We still laugh about that to this day but it wasn't very funny at the time.

One of our favourite activities at Midsummer is building a faery shelter for the little sprites to party and rest. Scout hunts for sticks, which she pokes into the ground and then lays large leaves over the top to form the roof. She decorates with flowers, bird feathers and smaller leaves. We leave out milk mixed with honey and bread and butter, cut into small pieces. She's always very excited to find the containers emptied and the faery house turned upside down from their wild dancing. A friend of mine recently gave me a wonderful idea and that is to leave a small gift for your child as a thank-you from the faeries. You could leave shells from the sea, a small trinket that had been "lost" around the house (everyone knows they faeries love to play tricks!), a small bouquet of wild flowers, a pretty rock or anything you feel is worthwhile. The idea is to keep it natural and simple and then explain to your child why the faeries felt it was an appropriate gift.

LUGHNASADH



Lughnasadh (Loo-nahs-ah) occurs a quarter of a year after Beltane. Its true astrological point is 15 degrees Leo, but tradition has set August 1st as the day it is typically celebrated. Since the Ancients Celts passed their days from sundown to sundown, the celebration would usually begin the night before on July 31st.

Lughnasadh marks the time of the first harvest, and takes its name from the Celtic Sun God Lugh. The word translates from the Gaelic to mean 'Mourning for Lugh', reflecting the shortening of days that is starting to become evident at this time of year

In Old Irish the word "Lunasa" (a variant spelling) means "August". Other names for the Sabbat are First Harvest, August Eve, and Lammas. Lammas, probably the most popular version used, is an

Anglo-Saxon word meaning "loaf-mass" arguably with Christian connotations.

The Goddess manifests as Demeter, Ceres, Corn Mother, and other agricultural Goddesses. The God manifests as Lugh, John Barleycorn, and vegetation Gods. Colours are Golden Yellow, Orange, Green, and Light Brown. It is a festival of plenty and prosperity. It is time to reap those things you have sown and celebrate the fruits of the mystery of Nature.

According to one of his many legends, Lugh was the last great leader of the Tuatha de Dannan. In one of the Tuatha's victories, Lugh spared the life of Bres, a defeated enemy captain, in exchange for advice on ploughing, sowing, and reaping. He was seen as a multi-talented deity, being capable and quite good at all he undertook. The myths of Lugh include the prevalence of his many skills and the wedding of these skills to the potential or unrealised abundance of the land. According to the writing of Caesar, he was also regarded as the patron of all the arts, travelling, and influence in money and commerce. To the Romans, Lugh was seen as a counterpart to Mercury. Lugh is the son of Arianrhod, who is associated with sacred kingship and Three-fold Death. His wife's name is Blodeuwedd, also known as the Flower Maiden.

This Sabbat is also known as the celebration of bread. As bread was one of the main staples of our ancestors, the ripening of the grain was the cause for great celebration. The reaping, threshing and preparation of these breads spawned great ritual and ceremony to ensure bounty for the following year.

Much lore surrounds the last grain to be cut from each field. Most Pagan cultures required that the last grain be left standing as an offering for the fae or other nature spirits.

Sacrifice of the first fruit or grain cut is another old Lughnasadh tradition. Almost universally the first cut of the harvest was buried, burned, left in the field, or placed at a ritual site for the harvest deities to enjoy while the rest of the field was harvested.

Traditionally, on this day, couples could embark on trial marriages, which could be dissolved after a year and a day by the couple returning to the place of their marriage and walking away from each other to the North and South (Wiccan handfastings reflect this tradition). Lughnasadh was the traditional time for tribal gatherings, which combined horse racing, athletics, fencing and fire building competitions (which led to the name 'Kindling Night') with rituals to ensure a good harvest. These festivities would take place for 15 days either side of Lughnasadh itself. In some areas, a flaming wheel was rolled down a hillside on Lughnasadh night, to represent the descent of the year towards Winter. Traditionally, on the day following Lughnasadh, bilberries were collected, and their abundance (or otherwise) was thought to be a sign from the Gods indicating the success of the previous night's ritual, and hence predicting the success of the harvest.

Native Americans celebrate early August as a grain festival in honour of the Corn Grandmother and call it the Festival of Green Corn. The ancient Romans also honoured their grain goddess, Ceres, at their annual August Ceresalia. The birth of the Egyptian sun goddess, Isis, was celebrated near the time of this Sabbat, as was a Roman festival in honour of Vulcan, god of the forge and guardian of its fire. In ancient Phoenicia this Sabbat honoured the grain god, Dagon, and a substantial portion of the harvest was sacrificed to him.

Another version of corn personified is seen in the grain mother and grain maiden images of Ceres, Demeter and Persephone. In ancient Greece these grain goddesses were focused into the body of a bull (a male symbol that made them a complete fertility image) that was burned as a living sacrifice each August Eve.

With the grain and corn harvest so prevalent at Lughnasadh, we see the theme of the sacrificed god emerge. His death is necessary for rebirth of the land to take place. Called by many names, "Green Man," "Wicker Man," "Corn Man" or just the "Spirit of Vegetation," his essence begins to merge with the harvested crops, a sacrifice that will be realised with the new growth in the spring.

At Lughnasadh, the Goddess mates with the God of the Waning year (as she did with the God of the Waxing Year at Beltane). The God, who is now the Corn King, is then sacrificed to fertilize the land, leaving the Goddess alone, but with the knowledge that his seed is in her and he will be reborn. Vivianne Crowley gives the following excerpt from a Lughnasadh ritual.....

"Behold I was tall and straight in my pride And was cut down Behold I died willingly for my people And found rest Behold I answered the call of the Goddess And was reborn."

Having been cut down, the God rises again, not to return to his old life, but to journey to the realm of the Gods, where he becomes the Dark Lord. This is a time to sacrifice material success and open oneself to the Unconscious, to face the demons within. The God is sacrificed, willingly, at the time of greatest material abundance - the beginning of the harvest. Willing sacrifice is often the most difficult, but it is often necessary to give something up in order to develop. Lughnasadh represents the phase of life where we must turn from the material world, which obscures our vision, and walk the lonely path of our own minds in order to experience joy on a higher level.

Reflecting this, Lughnasadh was the traditional time for the King to be sacrificed to the land. This originates from the belief that the king, like the God whose earthy vessel he was, must periodically die and spill his blood on the earth in order for human life to continue. Beginning in the early Middle Ages, many

Western cultures began using scapegoats for this sacrifice, such as a minor prince whose blood had been mingled with the king's in a special ceremony. Later sacrifices were wholly symbolic with wine being used as a substitute for blood.

In old times, it was the duty of the King to sacrifice himself for the land, an idea that has been seen in the many legends of cultures both new and old, throughout recorded history. The gathering of the first crops of the year is also used to symbolise the success and extent of the power raised from the Beltane rites when the Sacred Marriage of the Lord and Lady took place. The theme of sexuality and reproduction is carried over into Lughnasadh as well to ensure the remainder of a good harvest.

Today, it is common practice to hold back a small portion of the corn harvest to make the Imbolg Corn Dolly. Other grains can be used, and the Dolly's exact name varies with each tradition, but corn is the most prevalent.

Traditional Lughnasadh symbols include wheat stalks, loaves of bread, corn dollies, spears and scythes. Foods for this festival include grain breads, oatmeal, early corn, strawberries, poultry and dandelion wines, and flowers for a Lughnasadh altar would include cornflowers (to represent the Corn King), poppies (the red symbolizing the blood of the God's sacrifice), marigolds, dandelions and sunflowers (to represent the setting sun). This time of year is appropriate for consideration of what you would like to 'harvest' in your life, and ritual purification from the obstacles which you fear may be standing in the way of this harvest

Some ideas for celebration: Have a magical picnic and break bread with friends. Do a meditation in which you visualise yourself completing a project you have already begun. Sacrifice bad habits and unwanted things from your life by throwing symbols of them into the Sabbat fire. Make a corn dolly charm out of the first grain you harvest or acquire. Bake a scared loaf in the shape of a man and sacrifice him in your ritual, but save a piece to offer the gods or Mother Earth with a prayer of appreciation. Make prayers for a good harvest season. Do prosperity magic. Harvest herbs in a sacred way for use in charms and rituals. Kindle a Lammast fire with sacred wood and dried herbs. If you live in or near a farming region, attend a public harvest festival, such as a corn or apple festival. Gather the tools of your trade and bless them in order to bring a richer harvest next year. Share your harvest with others who are less fortunate.

And so the wheel of the year turns.....

Lughnasadh for Kids

The Harvest Festivals have always been my favourites! Lughnasadh is traditionally known as the first fruits harvest, as our fields and gardens burst with the bounty of Mother Earth. Most gardens are at the peak of production, stimulated to produce even more because of constant harvesting. I love to be able to walk to the kitchen garden and pick a tomato fresh from the vine or help myself to peppers or sugar snap peas, knowing there is more to come. Typically, this is a time to share with others. I am always giving away excess produce around this time. If you don't have a garden of your own, then definitely try local farmer's markets. The produce is always much fresher and less expensive plus you have the satisfaction of knowing you are supporting local farmers. The supermarkets get enough of our money! Your kids will have a great time helping you choose what to purchase and honestly, half the fun is taking it home and

washing the dirt off of it! Green beans are very easy to blanch and freeze, as well, so buy a big lot, get some freezer bags, turn on favourite music or just sit and talk with your children as you work. There's a real sense of history and tradition in this activity. To blanch the beans, snap off the ends and then add to boiling, lightly salted water for 3-5 minutes. Immediately run cold water over them to stop the cooking process and allow to cool thoroughly. Then just pop them into freezer bags and store for up to 6 months. Every time you have them for dinner, remind your child how much they helped.

Lughnasadh is also known as Lammas, which means "loaf mass", as it is also considered the grain harvest. I prefer not to use Lammas, as it is the Christianised name of this celebration but I do agree that celebrating the grain harvest is appropriate for the time of year. Remembering that the Sun is now declining and days are getting shorter, the traditional bread baking of this time of year symbolizes hope and rebirth for as the light begins to wane we know it will surely rise again. Bake a



loaf of bread, either from scratch or from a boxed kit. Who cares, so long as the children gather around and help you knead the dough. Tell them to put lots of loving thoughts into the dough as they work it. When the bread is finished, stand in a circle and break off a piece. Put a small piece in the mouth of the person next to you and say "May you never go hungry" and then pass them the bread so they can bless their neighbour in the same way. If any of the smaller piece is left over, scatter it outside as an offering to Mother Earth for her generous gifts.

Explain to your child that the God is the God of the grain and is sacrificing himself so that we might have a bountiful harvest. The tradition of the Wicker Man is symbolic of the God's sacrifice. For a safe and easy child-friendly version of the Wicker Man, draw a rough human outline on paper. You can always find rolls of rattan at craft stores or use pieces of straw. Allow your child to glue the pieces to the figure. Give the Wicker Man a place of honour on your altar or mantle or even refrigerator for a few days. You could even form a parade, holding him high in the air and marching around. Under very careful supervision, burn the Wicker Man on the eve of Lughnasadh, explaining to your child that even as the Sun is waning and the fields are being harvested, the Light will be reborn at Yule, returning to the Earth to ensure a bountiful harvest for next year.

This is the time of year for enjoying the good things and for being thankful for the blessings in our lives. Have impromptu picnics or catch lightning bugs and revel in the simple joy of being together. It's also a time to share with others as the earth has shared with us. If you go berry picking or pick up fruits such as blackberries, strawberries, raspberries or peaches at the farmer's market, make freezer jams and give away as gifts, along with a few mini loaves of bread. You could put these into a basket along with bunches of dried herbs, such as chamomile, lemon balm or basil, and the excess tomatoes or peppers you most likely have lying around! Add a starter for Amish Friendship Bread, too.

MABON



Mabon is a time where day and night are of equal length, after which the dark will become dominant as we descend towards winter. While the Spring Equinox represents initiation and preparation for action, the Autumn Equinox is a time for rest after labour. The harvest has been gathered, but the Sun is still with us - there is still a week until Michaelmas, where we must bid him farewell. At this time of balance, of suspended activity, the veil between the worlds is thin - Doreen Valiente remarks that the Equinoxes are the times where recurrent hauntings are most often reported. This Sabbat is symbolised by the double spiral, a going-in and a returning, to remind us, as we begin the journey inwards towards the darkest point of the year, that death is always followed by rebirth, just as winter is always followed by summer. "Whatsoever rises must also set, and whatsoever sets must also rise" The Goddess is pregnant with the new God, who will be born at Yule, the longest night. Even as she prepares to bid the old God farewell, she knows that the seed of the new God is already within her.

Mabon marks the middle of harvest, falling between the grain harvest of Lughnasadh and the white harvest when the animals were slaughtered at Samhain. Likewise, in our own lives it is a time of personal harvest; to reap what we have sown and look back over the past year to see if projects that we began have borne fruit. It is also a time finishing up old projects and plans and planting the seeds for new enterprises or a change in lifestyle. Stop and relax and enjoy the fruits of your personal harvests, whether they be from toiling in your gardens, working at your jobs, raising your families, or just coping with everyday life. Take time out to look at your life and reassess where you are going, what you have so far achieved and what it is that you are still seeking. In this way, Mabon will truly be a time of celebration and balance.

The passing of Mabon is inevitable and The Sun God should be mourned. We too, must remember that all things must come to an end. So the Sun God journeys into the lands of winter and into the Goddess' loving arms, but endings are a good time to celebrate our successes, thank our selves and those who helped us, and take part in the balance of life

Until Mabon, the hours of daylight have been greater than the hours from dusk to dawn. But from now on, the reverse holds true. Astrologers know this as the date on which the sun enters the sign of Libra, the Balance (an appropriate symbol of a balanced day and night). However, since most European peasants were not accomplished at calculating the exact date of the equinox, they celebrated the event on a fixed calendar date, September 25th, a holiday the medieval Church Christianised under the name of "Michaelmas", the feast of the Archangel Michael.

Mabon is also known as the Feast of Avalon and the festival of the Wine Harvest. To the Celts, Avalon is the mysterious place for the land of the dead. and literally means the "land of apples". Thus as well as being a celebration for the bounty of the harvest it also represents the desire for the living to be reunited with their deceased loved ones.

But the holiday is also named for the Welsh God Mabon. Mabon means the "great son". He was the son of Modred, kidnapped at the age of 3 and later rescued by King Arthur. His life represents the innocence of youth, the strength of survival and the growing wisdom of the elderly. Perhaps it is this view of the cycle of life that brings Mabon to his most popular role, the King of the Otherworld and the God of Darkness.

His myths overlap with other Gods such as the Welsh God Gwyn Ap Nuad, which means "white son of darkness". He is seen as the God of war and death, the patron God of fallen warriors. Once again this is a representation or connection to the Land of Avalon.

Mythically, this is the day of the year when the god of light is defeated by his twin and alter-ego, the god of darkness. It is the time of the year when night conquers day. The Druids call this celebration, Mea'n Fo'mhair, and honour the Green Man, the God of the Forest, by offering libations to trees. Offerings of ciders, wines, herbs and fertilizer are appropriate at this time. Wiccans also celebrate the aging Goddess as she passes from Mother to Crone, and her consort the God as he prepares for death and re-birth. The word Mabon is Welsh for 'Son', and refers to the Welsh God of youth, the Divine Child who the Druids believe is within us all. He is a child of the otherworld, born of earthly parents and stolen when he was three nights old.

The full moon closest to the Autumn Equinox is known as the "Harvest Moon" (which is shining through the window as I write this) since farmers would also harvest their crops during the night with the light of the full moon to aid them. With the waning sun still observed in the sky and crops continuing to be gathered for the coming bleakness of winter, the farmer's life was harried and rough. The struggle to reap the crops and store everything for the oncoming months of cold dominated his daily life. In those days, people lived by the harvest, which was quite literally life itself. Folks were also deeply concerned with the slaughtering of herd animals and gathering of other provisions.

Wherever you are and whatever you do, we hope you have a wonderful Mabon and that your harvest will be fruitful.

Mabon for Kids

The three Harvest festivals are by far my favourite Sabbats! Mabon epitomizes the nature of the bountiful harvest and is indeed sometimes called the Witch's Thanksgiving. Not only are we celebrating the event of the Autumnal Equinox, when day and night are in perfect balance, but we are also celebrating the bounty of Mother Earth. There's a definite chill in the air which was missing during the more playful time of the First Harvest at Lughnasad. Mabon's deeper meaning is one of hard work and readying ourselves for the coming winter. Only after the harvest is safely in and preserved, can we begin to rest and reflect on the year that has passed. Stories like "The Ant and the Grasshopper" would be a great Mabon lesson to share with your child.

Of course, if you keep a garden then it's easy for your child to witness this cycle. Even if you don't, you can pay a visit to a local orchard where many allow you to pick your own apples for a small fee. This is the time to begin the "putting up" of your harvest by canning and preserving. I know not everyone has a garden or is interested in canning food. That's understandable. But you could still make it a Sabbat activity with your child by using the apples you have obtained (at the

orchard, a farmer's market or even good old WalMart, in a pinch) and making an apple pie, applesauce or apple butter.

Allow your child to snip and bundle some of the herbs you have grown, as well. Tie them up with a pretty ribbon and hang from the ceiling of the kitchen for decoration or in a cool dry place if you plan to use them later. He or she might also enjoy giving the herbs as gifts, either bundled or in sachets.

I love the book *Circle Round: Raising Children In Goddess Traditions* by Starhawk, Diane Baker and Anne Hill. It is a must have for every parent attempting to raise a Pagan child. One craft that I absolutely love and that is in the Mabon chapter is called Cinanimals. You will need:

- 1 cup of applesauce, smooth variety
- 1 ½ cups of cinnamon
- rolling pin
- wax paper or parchment cookie sheet
- tooth picks
- miniature animal-shaped cookie cutters

Mix the applesauce with one cup of the cinnamon (slowly to prevent clouds of cinnamon!) and then add more cinnamon, a teaspoon at a time until the mixture has a firm consistency, easy to roll out but not to dry. Dust the wax paper with cinnamon and then roll the dough into kiwi-sized balls and flatten out to about ¼ inch thickness. Cut out the shapes and use the toothpick to make a hole near the top if you plan to hang them up. Let them dry in the sun or for 2 hours in the oven at the lowest temperature.

These animals will last indefinitely and you can always re-use them at the Winter Solstice to hang on your Yule tree. Just spruce them up by sprinkling some fresh cinnamon over them.

A time-honoured Autumn activity is the collecting of fallen leaves, either to pile up and jump into, or to paste onto paper and carefully preserve. I came across the following activity years ago, via an e-list I belonged to called Mystic Moms and Dads. It seems completely appropriate to do it at Mabon.

You will need: fall leaves wax paper iron towel picture frame

Directions: Collect as many different coloured and size fall leaves as possible! Cut two pieces of wax paper slightly larger than your picture frame. Lay one piece of the wax paper on the towel, and arrange the leaves in a pleasing design. Lay the other piece of wax paper over the leaves, and press the two together using a hot iron and moving quickly but firmly. Tape the "stained glass" to the picture frame and cut off the excess Hang in a window for best results.

I love the story of the Celtic God, Mabon, who was stolen from his mother, Modron, when he was only three days old and imprisoned in the Underworld. He was freed years later but because of this false imprisonment, he has become the God of freedom which makes Mabon (named in His honor, after all) the perfect time to discuss freedom of beliefs and religion with your children. Look up information on the lives of Nelson Mandela, Ghandi, Martin Luther King Jr. and even our own beloved Starhawk (to name but a handful) for examples of people who have been persecuted, imprisoned and even murdered for their personal beliefs.

THE HOLLY KING AND THE OAK KING

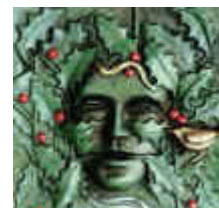
The Wiccan God is the Lord of the Greenwood, consort to the Lady of the Greenwood. Known also as Cernunnos, the Green Man, Herne the Hunter, and Lord of the Wild Hunt, he is a god of fertility, growth, death, and rebirth.

Two God-themes figure predominantly in Wiccan Sabbats: the Sun-God theme and that of the Holly King and Oak King.



The Sun-God rules the seasons. At Yule, he is the new babe, the embodiment of innocence and joy. He represents the infancy of the returning light. At Imbolc, his growth is celebrated, as the days are growing longer and light stronger. At Ostara, he is a green, flourishing youth whose eye is taken by the Maiden Goddess. On Beltane, he is the young man in love who takes the Goddess as his bride. Their consummated marriage is celebrated with maypoles and bonfires. At Midsummer, he consummates his marriage in a union so complete that it becomes a death. He is mourned at Lammas, and at Mabon, he sleeps in the womb of the Goddess. At Samhain, he waits in the Shining Land to be reborn.

The symbolism of the Horned God is also played out the theme of the Holly King and Oak King. The Horned God is the Holly King and the Oak King, two twin gods seen as one complete entity. Each of the twin gods rule for half of a year, fights for the favour of the Goddess, and dies. But the defeated twin is not truly dead, he merely withdraws for six months, some say to Caer Arianrhod, the Castle of the ever-turning Silver Wheel, which is also known as the Wheel of the Stars. This is the enchanted realm of the Goddess Arianrhod where the god must wait and learn before being born again. Arianrhod means "silver wheel" and the castle is the Aurora Borealis. She is the goddess of the astral skies and there she rules as goddess of reincarnation.



The golden Oak King, who is the light twin, rules from midwinter to midsummer. The darksome Holly King rules the dark half of the year from Midsummer to Midwinter.