Pagan, Neopagan Holiday Descriptions

# Name: Beltane

* Other names include May Eve/May Day

## Pronunciation

* [Bel-tayn](https://youtu.be/P9fWlizi2gw?si=qBOBIz0CB3sQxtyI)

## Meaning

* One of the four ‘greater sabbats’ (a festival, ‘sabbats’ mark a seasonal turning point) in the Wheel of the Year (a commonly observed annual cycle of seasonal festivals based around the year’s solar solstices and equinoxes and the midpoints between them).
* Falls halfway between Ostara (the spring equinox) and Litha (the coming summer solstice).
* Traditional Celtic May Eve/May Day celebration and the opposite point on the cycle to Samhain.
* Celebrates spring at its peak and marks the beginning of summer.
* For many traditions, Beltane is strongly associated with fertility and highlights the power of life in its fullness, the greening of the world, youthfulness, and flourishing.

## When?

* April 30-May 1
* About midway between the spring equinox and summer solstice in the northern hemisphere.
* Please note: Precise celebration dates can vary based on tradition and the related agricultural milestones of the local region. Celebrations may occur on the astrologically precise quarter and cross-quarter days, the nearest full or new moon or the nearest weekend.

## Common Observances/Celebrations:

* As with many annual festivals, observances/celebrations range widely, both across and within specific neopagan traditions.
* Often includes maypole dancing (the twirling of ribbons around the maypole represents fertility and the spiral of life).
* Various fertility rituals are commonly practiced, including the lighting of, dancing around and, for some, jumping over bonfires.
* Celebrated by decorating houses and animals with May flowers, including primrose and gorse. Celebrators also commonly weave flowers into their hair or create floral wreaths to wear on their head.
* Preparation and giving away of “May baskets” to people in need of care.

## What to know as an instructor or supervisor:

* When appropriate, reasonable accommodations should be discussed in advance between students and instructors.

# Name: Imbolc

* Other names include Imbolg, Candlemas and Oimelc

## Pronunciation

* [Im-blk](https://www.howtopronounce.com/imbolc)

## Meaning

* Along with Beltane, Lughnasadh, and Samhain, one of the four cross-quarter days (or ‘fire festivals’) and one of four ‘greater sabbats’ (a festival, ‘sabbats’ mark a seasonal turning point) in the Wheel of the Year (a commonly observed annual cycle of seasonal festivals based around the year’s solar solstices and equinoxes and the midpoints between them).
* Imbolc literally means “in the belly of the mother.”
* Celebrates the coming of spring.
* The halfway point between Yule (the winter solstice) and Ostara (the spring equinox).

## When?

* February 1-2
* Please note: Precise celebration dates can vary based on tradition and the related agricultural milestones of the local region. Celebrations may occur on the astrologically precise quarter and cross-quarter days, the nearest full or new moon or the nearest weekend.

## Common Observances/Celebrations:

* As with many annual festivals, observances/celebrations range widely, both across and within specific neopagan traditions.
* Some modern-day neopagans focus on celebrating Brigid, the Celtic goddess of fire and fertility, by setting up an altar with her symbols, including a corn husk doll, white flowers, a bowl of milk and candles. Groups might gather to cast a circle, light bonfires and recite a prayer to receive Brigid’s blessing.
* Rituals that acknowledge the changing cycles of the season, including house cleansing rituals or chants to drive away winter.
* Broadly connected to ushering in a productive farming season.
* For many contemporary neopagans, Imbolc is understood as a time for personal growth and renewed energy.
* Among Dianic Wiccans, Imbolc is the traditional time for initiations.
* For witches within the Reclaiming tradition, Imbolc signals the traditional time for pledges and rededications for the coming year.
* Other common activities including planting, spring cleaning and the construction of handicrafts.

## What to know as an instructor or supervisor:

* When appropriate, reasonable accommodations should be discussed in advance between students and instructors.

# Name: Litha

* Other names include midsummer, the summer solstice and Alban Hefin (within modern Druid traditions).

## Pronunciation

* [LEE-thuh](https://www.howtopronounce.com/litha)

## Meaning

* One of the four ‘lesser sabbats’ (a festival, ‘sabbats’ mark a seasonal turning point) in the Wheel of the Year(a commonly observed annual cycle of seasonal festivals based around the year’s solar solstices and equinoxes and the midpoints between them).
* The high point of the solar year celebrating the beginning of summer.
* One of the four solar holidays and the turning point at which summer reaches its height and the sun shines longest (the longest day of the year).
* Represents the strength and power of the sun over the summer months and is celebrated as a day of inner power and brightness.

## When?

* Between June 20-21 (the summer solstice being the longest day of the year).
* About midway between the spring equinox and summer solstice in the northern hemisphere.
* Please note: Precise celebration dates can vary based on tradition and the related agricultural milestones of the local region. Celebrations may occur on the astrologically precise quarter and cross-quarter days, the nearest full or new moon or the nearest weekend.

## Common Observances/Celebrations:

* As with many annual festivals, observances/celebrations range widely, both across and within specific neopagan traditions.
* Historic rituals include hilltop bonfires and dancing, with people attempting to jump over the bonfires for good luck. This practice carries over in smaller ways, with controlled bonfires or a small fire in one’s home.
* Broadly, observances celebrate and greet the sun, which is at its greatest strength on Litha.
* For modern Druids and many other groups, Stonehenge is the focal point of the summer solstice celebration (which Druids call Alban Heruin, or ‘light of the shore’).
* Common practices include meditating, outdoor celebrations (especially with children) and fire rituals.
* For some traditions, Litha represents a time for love magic and handfasting, a ceremony that mirrors practices commonly associated with religious and secular marriage/weddings.

## What to know as an instructor or supervisor:

* When appropriate, reasonable accommodations should be discussed in advance between students and instructors.

# Name: Lughnasadh

* Other names include Lammas or Lughnassadh

## Pronunciation

* [Loo-nuh-suh](https://youtu.be/E7es7eh7REY?si=nqiQhR5JoXS-ys8x)

## Meaning

* One of the four ‘greater sabbats’ (a festival, ‘sabbats’ mark a seasonal turning point) in the Wheel of the Year (a commonly observed annual cycle of seasonal festivals based around the year’s solar solstices and equinoxes and the midpoints between them).
* The first of the year’s harvest festivals, along with Mabon and Samhain.
* Celebrates the grain harvest. The name *Lammas* (contraction of ‘loaf mass’) highlights this sabbat as an agrarian-based festival and feast of thanksgiving for grain and bread, which symbolize the first fruits of the harvest.

## When?

* Beginning of August, commonly August 1st.
* About halfway between Litha (the summer solstice) and Mabon (the fall equinox).
* Please note: Precise celebration dates can vary based on tradition and the related agricultural milestones of the local region. Celebrations may occur on the astrologically precise quarter and cross-quarter days, the nearest full or new moon or the nearest weekend.

## Common Observances/Celebrations:

* As with many annual festivals, observances/celebrations range widely, both across and within specific neopagan traditions.
* Wicca/neopagan observance of the first harvest of the year involve agricultural festivals and prosperity magic.
* In some Celtic-derived traditions, Lughnasadh honors the Celtic god of craftsmanship, Lugh.
* Celtic neopagans mark the festival by making corn dollies.
* Common practices include harvest rituals and baking to celebrate the grain harvest.
* Rituals typically include decorating altars with harvest symbols, including corn, grapes, scythes, and other crops specific to locations and cultures, casting a circle to give thanks to the earth and collectively eating bread and sharing wine.
* Wiccans mark the holiday by baking a figure of the god in bread and eating it to symbolize the sanctity and importance of the harvest.

## What to know as an instructor or supervisor:

* When appropriate, reasonable accommodations should be discussed in advance between students and instructors.

# Name: Mabon

* Other names include the autumnal equinox, September equinox, Harvest Home, Second Harvest, the Feast of the Ingathering, Meán Fómhair, An Clabhsúr and Alban Elfed Alban Hefin (within modern Druid traditions).

## Pronunciation

* [May-bn](https://youtu.be/tEAEhKrpyzg?si=T6oxtA4S66tSuE0N)

## Meaning

* Opposite point to the spring equinox (Ostara) and one of the four ‘lesser sabbats’ (a festival, ‘sabbats’ mark a seasonal turning point) in the Wheel of the Year(a commonly observed annual cycle of seasonal festivals based around the year’s solar solstices and equinoxes and the midpoints between them).
* Celebrates the autumnal equinox and represents a harvest festival time.
* The mid-harvest festival, representing the second of the Wheel of the Year’s three harvest festivals.
* The name, Mabon, derives from the Welsh god and son of the Earth Mother Goddess.
* Ritual of thanksgiving for the fruits of the earth and a recognition of the need to share them to secure the blessings of the gods during the coming winter months.
* It aligns broadly with traditional European harvest festivals which give thanksgiving and historically celebrate a successful harvest and the filling of food stores for the winter.

## When?

* Between September 21-29 in the northern hemisphere.
* Observance of the autumnal equinox when day and night are of equal length.
* Please note: Precise celebration dates can vary based on tradition and the related agricultural milestones of the local region. Celebrations may occur on the astrologically precise quarter and cross-quarter days, the nearest full or new moon or the nearest weekend.

## Common Observances/Celebrations:

* As with many annual festivals, observances/celebrations range widely, both across and within specific neopagan traditions.
* Harvest rituals are common and often incorporate symbols of the season to give thanks for a bountiful harvest.
* The construction of altars with symbols of the season, specifically apples, grapes and grains.
* Often understood as a time to give thanks for the vitality of crops and well-being of animals and livestock. Feasts are common as a result.

## What to know as an instructor or supervisor:

* When appropriate, reasonable accommodations should be discussed in advance between students and instructors.

# Name: Ostara

* Other names include the Spring Equinox, March Equinox and Alban Eilir (within modern Druid traditions).

## Pronunciation

* [Ow-staa-ruh](https://youtu.be/BLxKtBXsAek?si=Q16j0VRjtEPtgMt1)

## Meaning

* One of the four ‘lesser sabbats’ (a festival, ‘sabbats’ mark a seasonal turning point) in the Wheel of the Year (a commonly observed annual cycle of seasonal festivals based around the year’s solar solstices and equinoxes and the midpoints between them).
* Signals the welcoming and celebrating of spring and marks the beginning of the agricultural cycle.
* The name, Ostara, derives from the goddess Eostre, who represents fertility, spring and new beginnings.
* Second of three spring celebrations (the midpoint between Imbolc and Beltane).
* Marks the vernal equinox in some modern neopagan traditions.
* A time of new beginnings and of life emerging from the grips of winter.

## When?

* Celebrated around March 20th when the day has roughly an equal amount of sun and darkness.
* Please note: Precise celebration dates can vary based on tradition and the related agricultural milestones of the local region. Celebrations may occur on the astrologically precise quarter and cross-quarter days, the nearest full or new moon or the nearest weekend.

## Common Observances/Celebrations:

* As with many annual festivals, observances/celebrations range widely, both across and within specific neopagan traditions.
* Rooted in medieval European customs, common symbols involve rabbits, who emerge in the spring to mate.
* Outdoor meditation, planting of seeds and simple rituals to welcome the spring are common.
* Eggs, typically painted, symbolize new life. Many families also incorporate seasonal candy, such as peeps and chocolate rabbits.
* Some modern neopagans celebrate the festival by choosing a man and a woman to play the roles of the god and goddess.

## What to know as an instructor or supervisor:

* When appropriate, reasonable accommodations should be discussed in advance between students and instructors.

# Name: Samhain

* Other names include Hallows and Hallowe’en (specifically by Gerald Gardner and Wicca)

## Pronunciation

* [Saa-wn](https://youtu.be/pdeiG9GnUYE?si=NCBiPuoaKxI9RIOu)

## Meaning

* One of the four ‘greater sabbats’ (a festival, ‘sabbats’ mark a seasonal turning point) in the Wheel of the Year (a commonly observed annual cycle of seasonal festivals based around the year’s solar solstices and equinoxes and the midpoints between them).
* First observed by Celtic Pagans, Samhain marked the Celtic New Year and the end of the harvest season.
* A harvest festival marking the return of winter and a thinning of the veil between this world and the next, allowing spirits of the dead to visit the living.
* Celebration of endings and beginnings.
* A time for remembering the dead.

## When?

## Sunset October 31st to sunset November 1st.

* Please note: Precise celebration dates can vary based on tradition and the related agricultural milestones of the local region. Celebrations may occur on the astrologically precise quarter and cross-quarter days, the nearest full or new moon or the nearest weekend.

## Common Observances/Celebrations:

* As with many annual festivals, observances/celebrations range widely, both across and within specific neopagan traditions.
* Time to celebrate the lives of those who have passed on, and often involves paying respect to ancestors, family members, elders, friends, pets and other loved ones who have passed away. Revering of elders is also observed.
* Common practices include dancing, feasting, communing with nature, often through nature walks and building altars to honor one’s ancestors. Divination is also practiced within some traditions.
* Some Wiccan traditions cast a circle and share stories of their ancestors.

## What to know as an instructor or supervisor:

* When appropriate, reasonable accommodations should be discussed in advance between students and instructors.

# Name: Yule

* Other names include winter solstice, midwinter and Alban Arthan (within modern Druid traditions).

## Pronunciation

* [Yool](https://youtu.be/4heHDN3z8Es?si=j4lz76oT9w5A0ODd)

## Meaning

* One of the four ‘lesser sabbats’ (a festival, ‘sabbats’ mark a seasonal turning point) in the Wheel of the Year (a commonly observed annual cycle of seasonal festivals based around the year’s solar solstices and equinoxes and the midpoints between them).
* First of the eight sections of the Wheel of the Year and celebrates the changing of seasons.
* Symbolized by the rebirth of the sun and foretells the return of fertile seasons.

## When?

* Celebrated on the shortest day of the year, between December 19-23.
* Occurs on the winter solstice (shortest day and longest night).
* Please note: Precise celebration dates can vary based on tradition and the related agricultural milestones of the local region. Celebrations may occur on the astrologically precise quarter and cross-quarter days, the nearest full or new moon or the nearest weekend.

## Common Observances/Celebrations:

* As with many annual festivals, observances/celebrations range widely, both across and within specific neopagan traditions.
* Practices vary, but sacrificial offerings (in the form of herbs, grains, milk, wines, incense, baked goods, and stones/minerals), tree decorating, decorating the home with sprigs and wreaths (of holly, ivy, mistletoe, yew, and pine), sharing a feast and gift giving are common.
* Meditating in the darkness, lighting candles and singing songs to welcome the “birth” of the sun.
* Burning of a Yule log with a small portion saved for next year’s fire.
* Donations to help the earth’s vitality and broader needs of humanity.
* Some traditions venerate Newgrange, a grand megalithic monument and ancient resting place of kings in Ireland.

## What to know as an instructor or supervisor:

* When appropriate, reasonable accommodations should be discussed in advance between students and instructors.