

Texas Local Council Covenant of the Goddess

Wiccan Holy Days ~ also known as Sabbats

Despite competition from twentieth century "life in the fast lane", the awesome spectacle repeated in the pattern of the changing seasons still touches our lives. In the ages when people worked more closely with nature just to survive, the numinous power of this pattern had supreme recognition. Rituals and festivals evolved to channel these transformations for the good of the community toward a good sowing and harvest and bountiful herds and hunting.

One result of this process is our image of the "Wheel of the Year" with its eight spokes -- the four major agricultural and pastoral festivals and the four minor solar festivals of the solstices and equinoxes.

October 31 -- November Eve -- Samhain

The night lengthens and we work with the positive aspects of darkness in the increasing star- and moonlight. Many Craft traditions, following the ancient Celts, consider this the eve of the New Year (as day begins with sundown, so the year begins with the first day of Winter). It is one night when the barriers between the worlds of life and death are uncertain, allowing the ancestors to walk among the living, welcomed and feasted by their kin, bestowing the Otherworld's blessings. We may focus within ourselves to look "through the glass darkly", developing our divination and psychic skills.

December 19 - 21* -- Winter Solstice -- Yule

The sun is at its nadir, the year's longest night. We internalize and synthesize the outward-directed activities of the previous summer months. Some covens hold a Festival of Light to commemorate the Goddess as Mother giving birth to the Sun God. Others celebrate the victory of the Lord of Light over the Lord of Darkness as the turning point from which the days will lengthen. The name "Yule" derives from the Norse word for "wheel", and many of our customs (like those of the Christian holiday) derive from Norse and Celtic Pagan practices (the Yule log, the tree, the custom of Wassailing, etc..)

February 2 -- Imbolc (Oimelc) or Brigid

As the days' lengthening becomes perceptible, many candles are lit to hasten the warming of the earth and emphasize the reviving of life. "Imbolc" is from Old Irish, and may mean "in the belly", and Oimelc, "ewe's milk", as this is the lambing time. It is the holiday of the Celtic Fire Goddess Brigid, whose threefold nature rules smithcraft, poetry/inspiration, and healing. Brigid's fire is a symbolic transformation offering healing, visions, and tempering. Februum is a Latin word meaning purification -- naming the month of cleansing. The thaw releases waters (Brigid is also a goddess of holy wells) -- all that was hindered is let flow at this season.

March 19 - 21* -- Vernal Equinox -- Ostara

Day and night are equal as Spring begins to enliven the environment with new growth and more newborn animals. Many people feel "reborn" after the long nights and coldness of winter. The Germanic Goddess Ostara (Goddess of the Dawn), after whom Easter is named, is the tutelary deity of this holiday, or for some the Anglo-Saxon goddess Eostre. It is she, as herald of the sun, who announces the triumphal return of life to the earth. Witches in the Greek tradition celebrate the return from Hades of Demeter's daughter Persephone; Witches in the Celtic tradition see in the blossoms the passing of Olwen, in whose footprints flowers bloom. The enigmatic egg, laid by the regenerating snake or the heavenly bird, is a powerful symbol of the emergence of life out of apparent death or absence of life.

May 1 -- Beltaine

As the weather heats up and the plant world burgeons, an exuberant mood prevails. Folk dance around the Maypole, emblem of fertility (the name "May" comes from a Norse word meaning "to shoot out new growth"). May 1st was the midpoint of a five-day Roman festival to Flora, Goddess of Flowers. The name "Beltaine" means "Bel's Fires"; in Celtic lands, cattle were driven between bonfires to bless them, and people leaped the fires for luck. The association in Germany of May Eve with Witches' gatherings is a memory of pre-Christian tradition. "Wild" water (dew, flowing streams or ocean water) is collected as a basis for healing drinks and potions for the year to come.

June 19 - 21* -- Summer Solstice -- Litha or Midsummer

On this day, the noon of the year and the longest day, light and life are abundant. We focus outward, experiencing the joys of plenty, tasting the first fruits of the season. In some traditions the sacred marriage of the Goddess and God is celebrated (in others, this is attributed to the springtime holidays). Rhea, the Mountain Mother of Crete, has breathed out all creation. It is also the festival of the Chinese Goddess of Light, Li and is often thought to be when the fae or faerie folk are most close and accessible.

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August 1 -- Lughnasadh or Lammas

This festival has two aspects. First, it is one of the Celtic fire festivals, honoring the Celtic culture-bringer and Solar God Lugh (Lleu to the Welsh, Lugus to the Gauls). In Ireland, races and games were held in his name and that of his mother, Tailtiu (these may have been funeral games). The second aspect is Lammas, the Saxon Feast of Bread, at which the first of the grain harvest is consumed in ritual loaves. These aspects are not too dissimilar, as the shamanic death and transformation of Lleu can be compared to that of the Barley God, known from the folksong "John Barleycorn". This time is also sacred to the Greek Goddess of the Moon and the Hunt, Artemis.

September 19 - 21* -- Autumnal Equinox -- Mabon or Harvest Home

This day sees light and dark in balance again, before the descent to the dark times. A harvest festival is held, thanking the Goddess for giving us enough sustenance to feed us through the winter. Harvest festivals of many types still occur today in farming country, and Thanksgiving is an echo of these.

In this way the Wheel turns, bringing us back to Samhain where we began our cycle. Many of the festival days coincide with holidays of the Jewish and Christian calendars. This is no accident; these points in the year were important community celebrations, and were kept largely intact although they were rededicated to the Christian God or a saint. The names may have changed, but the old Pagan practices still show through.

* The exact date for Solstices and Equinoxes changes each year.