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## **SAMHAIN** (Pronounced *Sow'en*) OCTOBER 31 -- NOVEMBER 1

Known as the Witches New Year, Samhain is the night in which the veil between the Worlds is thinnest or even lifted and normal laws are suspended. As the barrier between worlds fade, it is the perfect time to remember and praise your ancestors and departed loved ones, either through communication, ritual, or a simple prayer. It is a time to honor all those who have gone before us, a time for startling revelations and reflection within our own lives.

This magical Sabbat is also referred to as the Last or Final Harvest. An offering of food is often made to the spirits, during this time of plenty and abundance. Crops were often cleared, except for what was left as an offering to the Nature Spirits and livestock slaughtered stored for the coming winter. This is also the reason Samhain is referred to as the "Feast of the Dead".

Most people wear black on this Sabbat, in tribute to the Dark Mother and Father and the other Dark Mysteries. Some would also wear costumes or clothing of the opposite sex as a means of tricking the spirits as well. Many of Halloween's traditions stem from Samhain, even jack-o-lanterns. Turnips were hallowed and carved to scare the spirits away, while the candlelight was used to trick other spirits. The phrase "Trick or Treat" may come to mind.

Symbols of Samhain include black and orange candles, black stones such as obsidian and foods like apples, pomegranate, and of course, pumpkins. Surrounding yourself with these items for the Sabbat and filling the air with your own incense creation, with such aromas as sandalwood, rose, vervain or nutmeg can be a magical step towards celebration.

## **YULE** (Pronounced *EWE-elle*) DECEMBER 21

The Winter Solstice, December 21st is the longest night of the year. It is a time to celebrate the rebirth of the Sun and the Sun God. The Lord of Light is reborn of the Goddess and most Wiccans light fires and candles to welcome the returning light of the Sun. As the sun reaches its weakest point, we experience the shortest day and longest night of the year. In praising the survival or rebirth of the sun, it is important to remember that darkness does not equate to evil or emptiness, but is the boundless potential of which light comes to be. The Full Moon after Yule is known to be the most powerful of the entire year.

The Yule log is one of the most prominent symbols of this Sabbat. Traditionally, the log would be from the landowner's crop or harvest or given as a gift, but should not be bought for themselves. Then, it is lit with a log from last year's holiday that was put aside specifically for this ceremony.

Holly, mistletoe, boughs and wreaths are also symbols of Yule, as they have often been used to celebrate Christmas. Bright colors such as red, yellow/gold, green, and white remind us of the light within this darkest evening. During Yule, frankincense and myrrh can hover over the warm brewing cider, cookies and prepared feast. Garnet and Ruby are beautiful red gems and stones to wear or carry with you, helping to balance and align, drawing happiness and renewing the physical and spiritual body.

### **IMBOLC** (Pronounced *IM-bulk*) FEBRUARY 2

The word Imbolc means "In milk", signifying the time when sheep, goats and cows are lactating to nourish their offspring with the milk of their existence. It is a time to acknowledge growth, the life that grows within and the growth that surrounds us. In preparing for warmer months to come, seeds may be planted both in the ground and in our spirits, as we attempt to fill our gardens with flowers and our lives with unfolding hopes and dreams.

On this day, we take the time to praise the sacred Goddess Brigid, the goddess of sacred wells, healing, inspiration and metalwork. She is known both as a midwife, reminding us to rejoice in the experience of birth in all forms, and a muse, shining light on the creativity of poets and artist. This makes Imbolc a wonderful time to release creative juices and allow them to flow through a poem, sculpture or painting, perhaps something signifying an aspect of nature that is most sacred to you.

During this time of growth and renewal, some rituals or activities you may want to take part in include nature walks to view the first buds of spring, even if snow is beneath your feet. Lighting a bon fire or candle to symbolize the fire aspect of Brigid is another way to celebrate. Yellow, orange and red are all luminous colors that should surround you at this time, either in your home, clothing, or general surroundings. Pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds or any other seed that tickles your taste buds are the perfect snack for Imbolc. Dairy products are an obvious food for this Sabbat, either in a glass of milk to accompany your Poppyseed cake or muffin, or for those with less of a sweet tooth, in cheeses.

### **OSTARA** (Pronounced *O-STAR-ah*) AROUND MARCH 21

This day signifies the arrival of Spring where we celebrate the balance of the seasons and the journey from night into day. In complete balance, both the day and night are of the same length during the Spring Equinox. It is a time of new growth and great fertility as light grows stronger, embracing all of Nature with its energy.

Eostre, the Goddess of fertility, is celebrated on this wonderful Sabbat. Signified by symbols like the egg (representing creation) and the rabbit (representing fertility and reproduction), Ostara may seem familiar to another holiday at this time of year. The Christian religion often refers to this

day as Easter. Both holidays represent rebirth and rejuvenation, making it the perfect time to renew ourselves. During this time of reflection, we may consider renewing our dreams, our relationships and devotion to our own personal growth.

Any rituals you perform during this time are best outdoors, enjoying the natural inspiration of Spring! However, it is also the perfect occasion to do some Spring cleaning in your home or office, and within yourself and the relationships in your life. In ridding yourself of clutter, both literally and figuratively, you are making room for the new.

Pastels and other Spring colors like yellow, green, blue and purple all represent Ostara. Fresh flowers, such as lilies, add great energy to your surroundings, so now would be a great time to get your garden in order or bring some of your garden into your home. Floral fragrances such as orange peels, rose or strawberry oils can also be used permeate the air with the wonderful smell of Spring.

### **BELTANE** (Pronounced *Beal-teinne*) APRIL 30-MAY 1

Also known as May Day, this Sabbat represents fertility, vitality and passion as we celebrate the union of the Goddess and God. As the Sun God shines bright and warm onto the land, it becomes ripe and fertile, producing Summer's first blossoms. Their intercourse ensures the fertility of the land and of nature.

We take this day to celebrate the passion, desire, and pleasures of love. This is a holiday of togetherness and is to be celebrated in groups. In old Celtic times, the young folk, either married or single, would disperse into the woods and celebrate this holiday through physical intimacy. This would proceed through the night, and end in the morning as the group gathered to dance around the Maypole.

The Maypole can be made from a small tree or straight branch, usually stripped of other small branches or flowers, giving it a phallic depiction as an offering to the Goddess and a gift of love and luck to all that dance around it. The Maypole is often painted and decorated with garlands and ribbons. Those who participate in the ritual usually bring ribbons to attach to the Maypole, and women may wear ribbons and flowers in their hair and dress. Men also decorate themselves in celebration.

Sexuality, love and fertility all combine on this glorious Sabbat. For this union of the Goddess and God, we offer a feast of sweets, such as cakes and cookies to celebrate. This matrimonial feast can also include dairy, grains, and breads. The most important representation of Beltane is those you love and the display of love and affection you have towards them. Enjoy the outdoors today and enjoy each other!

### **LITHA** JUNE 20-22 (usually 21st)

The Summer Solstice is the longest day of the year, when the sun is strongest and light is abundant. Marking the middle of the year and the Summer, Litha celebrates abundance and the beauty and bounty of Nature. It is a good time for empowerment, for strong magick dedicated to a goal in need of nourishment.

This is yet another Sabbat to be celebrated outdoors. Take this day to lie on the earth's ground and absorb the energy of the Sun God.

Surround yourself with the fruits and vegetables of the season. Flowers of the season, especially roses and daisies should also fill your altar. Since many celebrate Litha with fire, oak is recommended as the kindling for this special celebration. Be sure to surround yourself with bright colors, both in dress and environment. This is a Sabbat of light, be sure to illustrate its beauty!

### **LUGHNASADH** (Pronounced *loo-na-sa*) AUGUST 1

The day becomes shorter as the sun rises further south and the nights grow longer during this harvest time. This Sabbat is known as the first grain harvest. Grain is of great importance as it signifies aspects of the cycle of life and death and symbolism through the ripening corn. Celebrations during Lughnasadh include many grains, fresh breads, corn, and fruits such as apples and berries as an offering to the Goddess to ensure a plentiful harvest season. This is important for upcoming winter months as crops greatly decrease their productivity. Again, this is a Sabbat that is best celebrated outdoors in Great Mother Earth's creations. It is also important to acknowledge Lugh, the God of corn, also known as the God of Light or the waning Sun God who is honored in this name of this festival.

Some celebrate Lughnasadh by dancing in a circle to music, raising the energy and directing to the corn. This is also a festival of games, like races and other childhood favorites like Duck, Duck, Goose. Another activity you can perform to celebrate, is by taking the seeds from the feast you consume on this day and planting them. As they sprout, nourish it with love as an offering to the Goddess and Gods.

### **MABON** (Pronounced *MAH-bawn*) SEPTEMBER 21

Mabon is the Sabbat of the Great Harvest, the second of the harvest Sabbats, and the Autumn Equinox. During this time, day and night are equal and balanced in length. It is the time to gather and store the crops of the year in preparation for winter months. In picking your own vegetables and fruits, be sure to fill your bucket with grapes. This is a great time for pressing and crushing grapes for wine, which is often affiliated with the God and a favorite among Wiccans.

The Harvest Moon during this time, allowed farmers to harvest during the night as well, reiterating just how splendid this great harvest can be, since the diminishing sunlight made the moon that much more necessary. It is a time to fill the altar high with corn, fruits and vegetables, decorating

it with many of Autumn's beautiful flowers and leaves. It is a time to gather together in reflection of the year passing, and celebrate the year to come. Mabon can almost be compared to modern day's New Year's Eve. Take this time to enjoy and celebrate, and then remember to unwind in preparation for all that is ahead in the New Year.

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