



**SPECIAL  
POINTS OF  
INTEREST:**

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BELTANE 2009

## May Day

May Day is a name for various holidays celebrated on May 1 (or in the beginning of May), the most famous one being Labour Day. May Day is exactly a half-year from November 1, All Saints' Day. Marking the end of the uncomfortable winter half of the year in the Northern hemisphere, it has always been an occasion for popular and often raucous celebrations, regardless of the political or religious establishment. May Day was also originally the Celtic holiday 'Beltane' or 'Beltaine', the "Return of the Sun". It is the third and last of the spring festivals. We can see traces of Beltaine when dancing around the maypole or sending a basket of flowers to your neighbor's door. May Day is a time to celebrate the onset of May, the month that sees the Earth reaching itself ready to burgeon to its maximum capacity. Since the ancient days in England there prevailed a custom of "bringing in the May" on MayDay. This was why people would go to the woods in the early dawn. There they picked flowers and lopped off tender branches to bring them in and decorate the houses.

### May Day and Flowers :

May Day has always been strongly associated with flowers. Partly may be because of their availability in abundance. But that is not all. There are other reasons as well. For instance, the May Garland and beggar girls. Making garland is one of those ancient May Day customs that has survived still today. May garlands, is meant for the coming of summer. May garlands were also used while begging by the kids from door to door. At other times of the year begging would have been an offence. But if it was done at May time with a garland. This is why groups of small girls, crowned with leaves and flowers, went from door to door singing and begging.

### Maypole Dance :

Maypole dancing is a traditional form of folk dance from western Europe, especially England, Sweden and Germany. Dancers dance in a circle each holding a coloured ribbon attached to a central pole, known as the maypole. By the movements of the dancers the ribbons are intertwined and plaited either on to the pole itself or into a web around the pole. The dancers may then retrace their steps exactly in order to unravel the ribbons. Maypole dancing is extremely ancient and is thought to have Germanic pagan fertility symbolism. It is traditionally performed in the spring around the festival of May Day, but in Sweden it is during the midsummer festivities. It was revived in the early twentieth century in a more genteel form.

The maypole is a tall wooden pole (traditionally of hawthorn or birch), sometimes erected with several long colored ribbons suspended from the top, festooned with flowers, draped in greenery and strapped with large circular wreaths, depending on local and regional variances. With roots in Germanic paganism, the maypole tradition-

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ally appears in most Germanic countries and Germanic country-bordering, most popularly in Austria, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Finland (including the Åland islands) and Sweden in modern times for Spring, May Day, Beltane and Midsummer festivities and rites. On the first day of May, English villagers woke up at daybreak to roam the countryside gathering blossoming flowers and branches. A towering maypole was set up on the village green. This pole, usually made of the trunk of a tall birch tree, was decorated with bright field flowers. The villagers then danced and sang around the maypole, accompanied by a piper. The Maypole is often considered a phallic symbol, coinciding with the worship of Germanic phallic figures such as that of Freyr. Potential other meanings include symbolism relating to the Yggdrasil, a symbolic axis linking the underworld, the world of the living, the heavens and numerous other realms. Also likely related, reverence for sacred trees can be found in surviving accounts of Germanic tribes, for example, Thor's Oak, Adam of Bremen's account of Sacred groves and the Irminsul. The present day tradition of maypoles coincides geographically with the area of influence of the Germanic mythos.

May Queen :

Also part of the celebration was the crowning of a May Queen. When the sun rose, the maypole was decked with leaves, flowers and ribbons while dancing and singing went on around it. The Queen was chosen from the pretty girls of the village to reign over the May Day festivities. Crowned on a flower-covered throne, she was drawn in a decorated cart by young men or her maids of honor to the village green. She would be crowned there right on the green spot. She was set in an arbor of flowers and often the dancing was performed around her, rather than around the Maypole.

The May Queen is also known as The Maiden, the goddess of spring, flower bride, queen of the faeries, and the lady of the flowers. The May Queen is a symbol of the stillness of nature around which everything revolves. She embodies purity, strength and the potential for growth, as the plants grow in May. She is one of many personifications of the energy of the earth. She was once also known as Maid Marian in the medieval plays of Robin Hood and of the May Games - she is the young village girl, crowned with blossom, attended by children with garlands and white dresses. Some folklorists have drawn parallels between her and Maia, the Roman Goddess of Springtime, of Growth and Increase whose very name may be the root of "May". The May Queen is a girl (usually a teenage girl from a specific school year) who is selected to ride at the front of a parade for May Day celebrations. She wears a gown and usually a tiara or crown. Her duty is to begin the May Day celebrations. May Queen is also the name of a ketch-rigged barge built in 1876 at Franklin, Tasmania. She is the oldest boat of her type afloat in the world and is on the International Register of Significant Ships.

Morris Dance :

A Morris dance is a form of folk dance. Another colorful feature of the this celebration was the energetic Morris dance. Groups of men dance together in costumes of traditional characters, often animal-men, in ceremonial folk dances. The central figure of the dances, usually an animal-man, varies considerably in importance. The name Morris is also associated with the horn dance held each year at Abbots Bromley, Staffordshire, England. This dance-procession includes six animal-men bearing deer antlers, three white and three black sets; a man-woman, or Maid Marian, and a fool. These dances are still performed in England. And also survive in various parts of Europe, Asia, and, America. One such comparable surviving animal custom is the May Day procession of a man-horse, notably at Padstow, Cornwall. There, the central figure, "Oss Oss," is a witch doctor disguised as a horse and wearing a medicine mask. The dancers are attendants who sing the May Day song, beat drums, and in turn act the horse or dance in attendance. The name 'Morris' is also associated with groups of mummers who act, rather than dance, the death-and-survival rite at the turn of the year. Throughout history, the Morris seems to have been common. It was imported from village festivities into popular entertainment after the invention of the court masque by Henry VIII. The word Morris apparently derived from "morisco", meaning "Moorish". Cecil Sharp, whose collecting of Morris dances preserved many from extinction, suggested that it might have

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arisen from the dancers' blacking their faces as part of the necessary ritual disguise. The name Morris dance is sometimes loosely applied to sword dances in which a group of men weave their swords into intricate patterns.

There are English records mentioning the Morris Dance dating back to 1448, which is also the year of the first known morris dance performance in England, and dances with similar names and some similar features are mentioned in Renaissance documents in France, Italy, and Spain. The origins of the term are uncertain, but one of the most widely accepted theories is that the term was "moorish dance" and "Moresco", which was gradually corrupted to "Morris Dance". Another is that it derives from the Romanian "morisca", which means "little mill". Another, perhaps simpler, explanation is that "Morris" comes from the Latin "Mores", meaning "a custom". This is consistent with the word (with various archaic spellings) sometimes being used to describe some other folk customs such as folk plays. In the modern day, it is commonly thought of as a uniquely English activity, although there are around 150 Morris teams in the United States. Expatriates form a larger part of the morris tradition in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and Hong Kong. The dance is also practised in Barcelona, Spain, where it is performed by girls or women, and there are isolated groups in other countries, for example that in Utrecht, Netherlands. The traditional Calusari dance of Romania resembles morris in many ways. Today, there are three predominant styles of Morris Dancing, and different traditions within each style named after their region of origin. Traditions differ in the form of their steps and capers.

\* Cotswold Morris: dances from the English Cotswolds, normally danced with handkerchiefs or sticks to embellish the hand movements

\* North West Morris: more military in style and often processional. Clogs are a characteristic feature of this style of dance

\* Border Morris from the English-Welsh border: a simpler, looser more vigorous, style, normally danced with blackened faces (or sometimes otherwise coloured, given the negative connotations for some of a blackface).

Lionel Bacon records morris traditions, most of which are in the Cotswold style, from these villages: Abingdon, Adderbury, Badby, Bampton, Bidford, Bledington, Brackley, Brimfield, Bromsberrow Heath, Bucknell, Evesham, Eynsham, Headington Quarry, Ilmington, Kirtlington, Leafield ("Field Town"), Leominster, Lichfield, Longborough, Much Wenlock, Oddington, Pershore, Sherbourne, Stanton Harcourt, Steeple Claydon, Upton-on-Severn, Upton Snodsbury, Wheatley, White Ladies Aston, Winster, Ascot-under-Wychwood, Hinton-in-the-Hedges, Ducklington. There are a number of traditions which have been invented in the later twentieth century, though few have been widely adopted. Examples are Broadwood, Duns Tew and Ousington-under-Wash in the Cotswold style, and Upper and Lower Penn in the Border style. Sometimes regarded as a type of Morris, although by many of the performers themselves as a traditional dance form in its own right, is the sword dance tradition, which includes both Rapper Sword and Long Sword traditions. The English mummers play occasionally involves morris or sword dances either incorporated as part of the play or performed at the same event. Other forms include Molly dance from Cambridgeshire. Molly dance, which is associated with Plough Monday, is a parodic form danced in work boots and with at least one Molly man dressed as a woman. There is also Hoodening which comes from East Kent, and the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance. Hoberdidance or Hobbididance was the name of a bad sprite associated with the Morris dance. Its name is from Hob, an old name for the Devil.

Facewashing in May Dew :

Washing the face with May dew was yet another custom. There was a belief among the women in Great Britain and other parts of Europe those days that May Day dew has the power to restore beauty. This why in the Ozark Mountains, a cradle of American folklore, girls used to nurture a belief that having their faces washed with the early dawn dews on the May Day would help to be married to the man of her choice.

## Beltane Ritual

Needed: White ribbon, Red ribbon, Crown of flowers

Place the ribbons and crown on the altar pentacle. Cast the circle. Ring the bell seven times. Say:

"Today all life celebrates spring at its fullest.  
The gate swings back and forth and all may freely pass through.  
The God has awakened and fertilized the land.  
The Goddess has completed her journey;  
Flowers now abound from her footsteps.  
This is a time for joy and a time for sharing.  
The richness of the soil accepts the seed,  
And now is the time for seeds to be spilled.  
Togetherness brings joy and abundance fills the earth."

Pick up the ribbons. Hold them between your fingers so that the white ribbon crosses over the red one.  
Say:

"Now the Lord and Lady unite.  
Through Their joy, may all be joyful,  
Through Their fruitfulness, may all be fruitful.  
May the Lord and Lady bless these ribbons,  
Bringing new beginnings with opportunities to grow and blossom."

Begin plaiting the ribbons together. This is a simplified and solitary version of the traditional maypole.  
While you are doing this, say:

"All life in all the world springs from the union of the God and the Goddess.  
Blessed are they, the creators, the Ancient ones!"

When done, ring the bell three times. Stand in the God position, head bowed. Say:

"The Lord, with the Lady at his side,  
Has brought the world through the darkness to the light.  
It was a long journey that was not easy.  
Yet the gods showed strength  
And through Them, all has grown and prospered.  
May They both continue.  
May the Lady, with the Lord at her side,  
Move on down the path,  
Continuing to spread the light to all."

Pick up the crown of flowers and place it on your head. Assume the Goddess position. Say:

"I am she who turns the wheel,  
Bringing new life into the world  
And beckoning those who pass along the ways.  
In the coolness of the breeze, you hear my sighs;  
My heart is in the rushing of the wind.  
When you thirst, let my tears fall upon you as gentle rain;  
When you tire, pause to rest upon the earth that is my breast."

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## Beltane Recipes

### Sunrise Chicken

#### Ingredients

4 skinless, boneless chicken breast halves  
 1 Tbs. canola oil  
 salt and fresh-ground pepper to taste  
 2 tsp. fresh grated ginger  
 1 cup orange juice  
 1/2 cup dry white wine  
 1 tsp. lime juice  
 1/2 tsp. Dijon mustard  
 1 tsp. maple syrup  
 1/2 tsp. thyme  
 1/4 tsp. coriander  
 1 can (15 oz.) sweet potatoes, drained  
 1/3 cup slivered almonds  
 1 cup dates

#### Method

- 1) Heat oil in large skillet over moderate heat.
- 2) Season chicken with salt and fresh-ground pepper.
- 3) When oil is hot, add chicken, cooking till light brown on both sides.
- 4) Add the ginger, orange juice, wine, lime juice, mustard, maple syrup, thyme, and coriander. Stir, blending.
- 5) Add sweet potatoes.
- 6) Simmer for 10 minutes.
- 7) Remove from heat and add almonds and dates.

Serves with boiled rice, pasta, new potatoes or just fresh crusty bread. Should serve 4.

### Fried Honeycakes

From Wisteria's Faery Recipes

1/2 cup sweet white wine  
 2 tablespoons sugar  
 1 egg  
 1 cup honey  
 2/3 cup flour  
 1/8 teaspoon nutmeg  
 1/8 teaspoon cinnamon  
 Oil for frying

1/8 teaspoon salt

Beat the wine & egg in a medium bowl. Combine the flour, cinnamon, salt & sugar in a small bowl. Stir into the egg mixture. Let stand 30 minutes. Combine the honey & nutmeg in a small bowl. Heat 1/2-inch of the oil in a frying pan until hot, but not smoking. Drop the batter into the oil 1 tablespoon at a time; fry until golden brown. Drain on paper towels. Dip into the honey.

Yield: 1 1/2 Dozen.

### Strawberry Crisp

1 c Uncooked Oatmeal  
 1 c All purpose Flour  
 1 c Brown Sugar  
 1/4 c Chopped Walnuts  
 1/2 c Butter or margarine  
 1/2 c Sugar  
 3 c Sliced fresh or frozen Strawberry

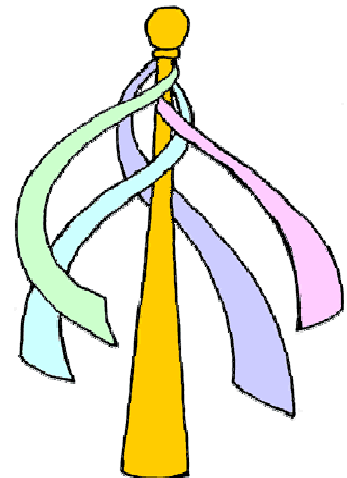
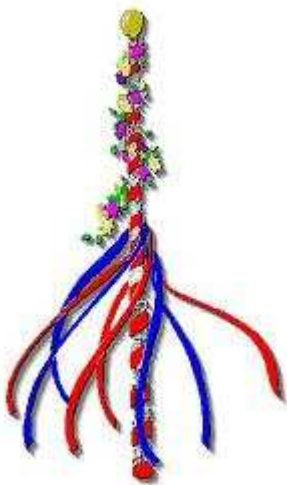
Mix together oatmeal, flour and brown sugar. Add nuts. Cut in butter or margarine until crumbly. In another bowl, mix strawberries and white sugar together. Grease an 8" square pan. Spread half the crumb mixture on bottom. Cover with strawberries. Spread remaining crumb mixture over top. Bake at 350 deg F oven for 45 minutes. Serve warm or cold with whipped cream or topping.



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Warmth and comfort I give you  
And ask for nothing in return,  
Save that you love all things even as yourself.  
Know that love is the spark of life.  
It is always there, always with you if you but see it.  
Yet you need not seek far, for love is the inner spark;  
The light that burns without flicker;  
The amber glow within.  
Love is the beginning and the end of all things;  
And I am love."

Ring the bell three times. Cakes and ale. Close the circle.



## Beltane images and pictures



## Suggested Reading List

***Beltane*** by Erin O'Riordan

***The Silver Bough***, Vol. 2 by F. Marian McNeill

***Celebrating the Seasons of Life: Beltane to Mabon: Lore, Rituals, Activities, And Symbols*** by Ashleen O'Gaea

## Pagan Chants

### Beltane Blessing Chant

Oak and May,  
On This Day,  
Will both Heed  
Those in Need.  
Goddess Bright,  
God of Sun,  
Bless your Children  
'Till our days are done.

### Bulb Planting Earth Chant

by Eileen

breath of the stone is strange to me  
i know it lives as i can't see  
force of the earth is strong and free  
sustenance and beauty be  
born of the stars and sprang from the ground  
Mother, Goddess all around  
Wheel must turn as the seasons show  
what lies dead shall surely grow

## Newsletter Submission Due Dates

Imbolc Issue—January 2nd  
Ostara Issue—February 22nd  
Beltane Issue—April 2nd  
Midsummer Issue—May 20th  
Lammas Issue—July 2nd  
Mabon Issue—August 21st  
Samhain Issue—October 2nd  
Yule Issue—November 21st

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