



**SPECIAL
POINTS OF
INTEREST:**

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O S T A R A 2 0 0 9

Ostara

from tryskelion

Ostara (Eostre) circa March 21, also known as the Spring or Vernal Equinox, is one of two dates where day and night are equal; a point of balance, after which the forces of light gain power and preeminence over the powers of darkness until it reaches its ultimate at Midsummer.

Deities honored during this festival are those of the maiden goddess and the youthful, warrior god. The sabbat takes its name from Eostrā (Ostara), the Goddess of the Dawn, the Saxon Goddess who heralds the triumphant rebirth of the Sun and the return of the greening season. Hellenic traditions celebrate the return of Persephone, Demeter's daughter, from Hades. Some sects see this as the time of courtship between the God and the Goddess, whose relationship will then be consummated at the following sabbat of Beltaine.

When the Catholic Church preempted this rite, as with so many others, it kept the essence of the sabbat, but appropriated its essential properties for Christ. Ostara has always been a rite celebrating the resurrection and restoration of the Sun. The Holy Roman Church simply ascribed the resurrection to Christ, also known as the Son, who is also described in biblical terms as "the Light." Even the way in which "Easter" is arrived at is Pagan in origin, calculated from the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Equinox. That is, of course, unless a full moon falls on that date; at which time, the Easter sabbat falls on the following Sunday. While they were forced by an unchangeable astronomical event into keeping the essential date of the original Pagan Sabbat, it seems that having the Holy Easter Sabbath on a full moon was simply too much for the Church to abide!

Ostara is the beginning of the fertility festivals. Buds begin to push their way through the earth to reach the strengthening sun's light; animals in the wild feel the ancient instinct to breed; the energies of Nature shift subtly from the torpor of Winter to the exuberant activity of Spring. It is a time of new beginnings, of action, of saying good-bye to the old and making room for the new. We can see this urge reflected in our lives even today. We talk of "Spring cleaning" and "In Spring, a young man's fancy turns to..."; the desire to run the greening fields (or, in our world, walk the parks, fish, and other outdoor activities) vies urgently with the obligation of our workday routines, often resulting in "sick leave days" and spur-of-the-moment "personal days" where the real excuse is "Spring Fever."

Symbols of this holiday include eggs, rabbits, and flowers of all kinds. Modern secular activities such as the dying of Easter Eggs are remnants of ancient Pagan traditions. The Anglo-Saxons painted eggs with their hopes and dreams and presented them as

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a gift to Eostre. These eggs were then buried in the Earth, so that the Earth-Mother would know dreams of her children, in hopes that She would see fit to help them realize their desires. This practice predates Christianity by approximately 1000 years.

Rabbits (hares) were the companions of Eostre, and she is still often pictured with a hare by Her side. Because of their well-acknowledged reproductive ability, they are the perfect compliments to the start of a fertility-based season.

In many cultures, the Goddess was known not only as the Goddess of Fertility, but also as the Goddess of Grain. Therefore, special cakes and breads were baked and given to Her in offering. This tradition remained, long after the original reasons were lost, and we still see people baking special Easter breads and cakes today.

Other foods traditional to this season include those made of seeds, as well as pine nuts. Also, green leafy vegetables and sprouts are equally appropriate. Some groups create special dishes made of flowers, such as stuffed nasturtiums or carnation cupcakes.

Activities appropriate to celebrate the day include those listed above, as well as randomly collecting wild-flowers on a walk through the woods, or buying a mixed bouquet from a florist. The flowers you choose will often reveal your inner thoughts and emotions, and their meanings to you can be divined through books, pendulum, and your intuition.

Some groups set the seeds they'll soon be planting within the sacred Circle of their Ostara rituals. In this way, either a special charging ritual can be done for the seeds, or the seeds can simply absorb the energy of the Circle. They can then be planted safely after the next full moon.

Ritual cleaning is often done, though usually in the secular vein today. It seems people are driven by the need to throw open the windows to our homes and force out all the stale, winter air. Many of us clean the house from top to bottom; sweeping every nook and cranny from ceiling to floor; cleaning out cabinets and drawers, and scrubbing them, too. Often, many choose this time of year to change the liners in drawers, or to put away the winter bedding in favor of the lighter-weight summer linen. Heavy winter clothes are washed, folded, and put away and the lighter weight spring and summer clothes find their way into our closets.

This same mundane ritual of household cleaning can be applied to our inner selves, as well. Use Ostara to clean out all the mental cobwebs and to throw away all the old, negative modes of thought. Throw open the doors to your mind, heart, and soul and let the gentle breezes of Ostara breathe new hope and the vigor of youth into your newly awakening life.

Spring Equinox (Alban Eilir)

Alban Eilir is considered the light of spring. This is the turning point within the season of Embolic (spring).

Midwinter Gathering: (Calan) Calends of summer, winter, spring and fall.

Honor spirits of darkness now behind this culture, the sacred land and the welcome of the spirit is of the new cycle. The lessons of the darkness are spoken of, or the beauty and power of winter. The seeds of spring are sewed into the land.

The internal is a mirror for the external, and the external is a mirror for the internal. So, by making an offering to the spirit's of winter, people are also honoring own dark inner world(s), all that lurks and

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hides within the cracks, possibly unaccepted by one's own consciousness and rarely, if ever, expressed. Honoring inner strength and stoutness that brings one through harsh times is essential.

Common seeds that people plant are barley and wheat, which will sprout and grow ripe in time for harvest. Other seeds such as sunflower, beans, sweet peas, or annual grass are also used. It is important that when choosing a seed to plant that an easily grown plant will avoid stress and heartache. This is the time when fertility is awakening. The culture turns their foes to the point of balance.

Creativity, emotion, and desires of the new growing season are seed thoughts of which plans are expressed during painting of eggs. If one takes the time to listen, leaning up against a tree, it is possible to feel the energy of that extraordinary flow - the sap rising. As the warmth of the sun's light warms the earth, people are inspired to stretch - reaching for the skies - growing and learning, finding freedom in new directions.

The Spring Equinox is celebrated between March 20 and March 23, on the day when the day is the same length as the night. It is also known by the name Alban Eilir (sometimes written Eiler) Eilir is Welsh for "regeneration" or "spring". Poetically Alban Eilir is expressed as "Light of the Earth".

The spring equinox, being a time of new life is a celebration of childhood, where games are abundantly played. The symbolism of the egg is prominent. It is a festival filled with laughter and anticipation. It is a festival of excitement for balance with tipping the year toward lightness and growth.

The darkness is behind us and we begin our journey into the light part of the year. Similar to the autumn equinox many, who are attune to the energy of the cycle, feel a balance over the few weeks before and after the event.

At the Spring Equinox, energy is increasing. The tides are high and the moon is high and bright.

The core of Alban Eilir lies in honoring the seeds that will become the year's harvest. They might be sown in pots and cared for on windowsills or in greenhouses, protected from the frosts. These seeds are a part of a Druid's ritual work of caring for the land. They are consecrated with the elemental forces of flowing air, of sun warmth, of moisture (rain) and of earth (soil).

The Spring Equinox, and the Return of Ostara

by Anne Baird

The Winter Solstice was about the rebirth of the sun. The Spring Equinox is about the rebirth of the earth. The signs of this massive stirring are everywhere!

Soaking rains shift to brilliant sunshine, and back again. Soil softens. Snowdrops creep out. Shoots of tulips, daffodils and crocuses push, green, through drooping winter pansies. Birds return. Hibernating animals wake up. Days lengthen. Nights shorten.

Slowly but surely, Earth is turning toward March 21st, the Spring Equinox, when day and night will be in perfect balance. The time of Ostara, Anglo-Saxon Goddess of Spring, who has lent her name to this Sabbat, is at hand.

What bliss, after the harsh winter so many have experienced, to sense the advance of this beautiful young goddess! She heralds the return of life and fertility to the world.

Her counterpart, in Greek mythology, is Persephone, the Maiden. Persephone is restored to her mother, Demeter, after spending the winter in the underworld, with her abductor and lord, Hades. When she re-

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Solitary Ostara Ritual

Preparations

For decorations use dyed eggs and pink and green streamers. Include a soil-filled cauldron, sword (or athame) a small shovel (trowel), a small pot, a few of your favorite seeds and all your altar tools.

Ritual

Cast the circle.

After casting the circle, say:

"Here I am on this day, Ostara, Lady day, Rite of Easter, The Vernal Equinox, and the first day of the planting season. I am here to understand life, death, and rebirth, and to give reverence to those who have endured each."

Bow your head to think about how Ostara fits into the three groups above and how it fits into the wheel of the year. Say:

"I stand at the gate between the living and the dead on this night where both light and dark are equal. I am here to witness the union of the Goddess, Mother Earth, the Waning Lady of the Moon, Of My God, Green Man, the Waxing Lord of the Sun. Conception...a necessary transition on the wheel of the year."

Unite the blade of the Athame with the depth of the cauldron. Symbolizing the Great Rite. Leave the Athame Standing. Hold the God candle and let the flame become on with the Goddess candle's flame. Replace these on the altar and set them closer than they were before. Say:

"Elder Gods wish to bestow upon us the gift of knowledge. Thus they shall speak."

Use the small shovel to transfer soil from the cauldron to the small pot. As you are planting the seeds, you should be thinking about your goals as though they were the seeds. You can now conclude the ritual. Say:

"May these newly planted seeds material spiritual, and symbolic bring me plentiful fruits and bounties."

Close the circle and serve eggs and apple juice in your simple feast. Leave the cauldron and athame at the altar until Beltane to remind you of the seeds sewn on this day.



Ostara Recipes

Ostara Egg Salad with Salad Burnet

Serve this salad with assorted breads and crackers if desired.

12 eggs
 1/2 cup mayonnaise
 1/4 cup plain yogurt
 2 tablespoons fresh salad burnet - chopped fine
 1/2 teaspoon salt
 1/4 teaspoon black pepper

Place the eggs in a large pan, fill the pan with water and place it on the stove on high heat.

When the water comes to a boil turn the heat down to medium and cook the eggs for an additional 12 minutes.

Remove the pan from the stove, drain the water and run cold water over the eggs until they have cooled down.

Remove the shells from the eggs and chop the eggs up and place them in a large bowl.

Add the remaining ingredients and mix well.

Cream of Carrot Soup- Karri Ann Allrich

2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
 2 medium sized leeks, white and light green parts only, chopped
 3 cups carrots, peeled, chopped
 2 tsp sugar
 5 cups vegetable or chicken stock
 1/8 cup dry sherry
 1 cup milk
 2 tbsp fresh chopped parsley
 2 tbsp fresh chopped dill
 Salt
 Pepper
 Nutmeg

In a heavy soup pot, heat the olive oil over medium heat and sauté the leeks for 3-4 minutes. Add the carrots and sugar and stir together. Add in the broth and sherry and bring to a boil. Cover and reduce the heat. Simmer for 15 minutes or so, until the carrots are tender.

Ladle the soup into a blender, in small batches, and cover. Puree for 2-3 minutes, until smooth. Another alternative is to use a hand blender and blend the mixture in the pot until smooth. Return the puree to

the soup pot and stir in the milk and fresh herbs. Add the salt, pepper, and pinch of nutmeg and heat through gently. Do not boil.

Almond-Ginger-Pear Scones (Kindered Culinary Kreation)

2 cups all-purpose flour
 1 cup sugar
 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
 1 teaspoon baking powder
 1 teaspoon ground ginger
 1/2 teaspoon salt
 1/2 cup butter, cut into 8 or 10 chunks
 3/4 cup dried pears, diced
 1/2 cup slivered almonds, toasted [see note]
 1/3 cup candied ginger, chopped
 2/3 cup buttermilk
 1 egg, beaten, for tops additional sugar, for tops

Heat oven to 425 degrees F.

In large bowl mix flour, sugar, baking powder, ground ginger, baking soda and salt. Cut in butter with pastry blender or two knives until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Add the pears, 1/3 cup of the almonds and the candied ginger; toss. Mix in buttermilk just to blend.

Gather into a ball and gently knead 3 or 4 times on a lightly floured surface. Pat or roll out 3/4 inch thick. Cut out circles with 2 1/2- to 3-inch round cutter, re-rolling scraps as needed. Place on baking sheet, spacing apart.

Brush tops with egg, sprinkle with remaining almonds, dividing equally, and sprinkle with sugar.

Bake in center of oven 12 to 15 minutes until springy to the touch and lightly browned. Remove to rack to cool. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Note: To toast almonds, spread in an ungreased baking pan. Place in 350-degree F oven and bake 5 to 10 minutes or until almonds are light brown; stir once or twice to assure even browning. Note that almonds will continue to brown slightly after removing from oven.

Makes 12 scones

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turns, Demeter lifts the long, grieving winter that has punished Earth during her daughter's absence, and spring bursts forth.

Ostara and Persephone are both filled with vitality and joy when they return to the world they love. This may be especially true for Ostara, who isn't burdened with Persephone's dark memories of kidnapping, rape, and forced marriage ~ and the knowledge that she must return to the underworld ~ and Hades ~ at summer's end.

The symbols that surround Ostara include eggs, rabbits and spring flowers ~ all of which speak of the fertility and new life she brings. The egg, especially, has always been a sacred sign of fecundity. Long before it was understood that women became pregnant when the males with whom they lay fertilized the eggs they carried hidden within their bodies, many people believed that the Earth itself was hatched from an egg.

Mama Donna Henes, the Urban Shaman, tells us that, "The myths of the peoples of Polynesia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Greece, Phoenicia, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Central and parts of South America and Africa all describe an original cosmic egg from which the universe is born. The Latin proverb, *Omne vivum ex ovo*, proclaims, 'All life comes from an egg.'

It is only natural... to assign the birth of the world to a Great Mother Goddess who laid the egg of life. All of nature... is a constant cyclical reminder of just such a fertile female force.... All life does, indeed, come from an egg,"

Our Pagan ancestors often painted their eggs red at the time of Spring Solstice, and the return of Ostara. The decoration they added symbolized the rays of the Sun, and their prayer that the Sun would warm the egg, and from it create new life. Rabbits were also associated with Ostara, since they were known to be incredibly fertile, and because of their long association with the Moon, and the Goddess.

These symbols, and the happy custom of feasting and celebration at the time of the Spring Equinox, were co-opted by Christianity as it gained ascendancy over Paganism. The chocolate Easter eggs, Easter bunnies, Easter baskets, and Easter egg hunts that children enjoy today have their roots in the celebrations and religious practices of their Pagan ancestors.

Today, modern Celtic Pagans have adopted Ostara enthusiastically. The focus is on balance ~ equating the balance between night and day at the Spring Equinox, with the need for balance in one's own life. It is also a time for new beginnings, for the planting of seeds that will bear much fruit, for celebration of the rebirth of the soil, the land, and oneself.



Ostara images and pictures



What books have you read, that you would suggest for the rest of us to read?

A New Beginning by Wendy Pfeffer and Linda Bleck

The Witches Almanac: Spring 2009-Spring 2010 (Issue 28) by Theitic

Spring's Sprung by Lynn Plourde and Greg Couch

Goddess of Spring (Goddess Summoning Series) by P. C. Cast

Pagan Chants

Flowers

(Sung to the tune of "Pop! Goes the Weasel")

All around the forest ground
 There's flowers everywhere.
 There's pink, yellow, and purple too.
 Here's one for you!

Spring Fertility Chant

by: Jennifer Reif

Mother and father of all growing things
 Unto my being your golden love bring
 Bless this seed to fulfill its design
 Of leaf and fruit, of blossom and vine

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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