

**SPECIAL  
POINTS OF  
INTEREST:**

- Samhain
- Samhain Poetry
- Samhain Ritual  
for Solitary
- Samhain Recipes

SAMHAIN 2008

## Samhain

Samhain marks one of the two great doorways of the Celtic year, for the Celts divided the year into two seasons: the light and the dark, at Beltane on May 1st and Samhain on November 1st. Some believe that Samhain was the more important festival, marking the beginning of a whole new cycle, just as the Celtic day began at night. For it was understood that in dark silence comes whisperings of new beginnings, the stirring of the seed below the ground. Whereas Beltane welcomes in the summer with joyous celebrations at dawn, the most magically potent time of this festival is November Eve, the night of October 31st, known today of course, as Halloween.

Samhain (Scots Gaelic: Samhuinn) literally means "summer's end." In Scotland and Ireland, Halloween is known as Oíche Shamhna, while in Wales it is Nos Calan Gaeaf, the eve of the winter's calend, or first. With the rise of Christianity, Samhain was changed to Hallowmas, or All Saints' Day, to commemorate the souls of the blessed dead who had been canonized that year, so the night before became popularly known as Halloween, All Hallows Eve, or Hollantide. November 2nd became All Souls Day, when prayers were to be offered to the souls of all who the departed and those who were waiting in Purgatory for entry into Heaven. Throughout the centuries, pagan and Christian beliefs intertwine in a gallimaufry of celebrations from Oct 31st through November 5th, all of which appear both to challenge the ascendancy of the dark and to revel in its mystery.

In the country year, Samhain marked the first day of winter, when the herders led the cattle and sheep down from their summer hillside pastures to the shelter of stable and byre. The hay that would feed them during the winter must be stored in sturdy thatched ricks, tied down securely against storms. Those destined for the table were slaughtered, after being ritually devoted to the gods in pagan times. All the harvest must be gathered in -- barley, oats, wheat, turnips, and apples -- for come November, the faeries would blast every growing plant with their breath, blighting any nuts and berries remaining on the hedgerows. Peat and wood for winter fires were stacked high by the hearth. It was a joyous time of family reunion, when all members of the household worked together baking, salting meat, and making preserves for the winter feasts to come. The endless horizons of summer gave way to a warm, dim and often smoky room; the symphony of summer sounds was replaced by a counterpoint of voices, young and old, human and animal.

In early Ireland, people gathered at the ritual centers of the tribes, for Samhain was the principal calendar feast of the year. The greatest assembly was the 'Feast of Tara,' focusing on the royal seat of the High King as the heart of the sacred land, the point of conception for the new year. In every household throughout the country, hearth-fires were extinguished. All waited for the Druids to light the new fire of the year -- not at Tara, but at Tlachtga, a hill twelve miles to the north-west. It marked

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the burial-place of Tlachtga, daughter of the great druid Mogh Ruith, who may once have been a goddess in her own right in a former age.

At all the turning points of the Celtic year, the gods drew near to Earth at Samhain, so many sacrifices and gifts were offered up in thanksgiving for the harvest. Personal prayers in the form of objects symbolizing the wishes of supplicants or ailments to be healed were cast into the fire, and at the end of the ceremonies, brands were lit from the great fire of Tara to re-ignite all the home fires of the tribe, as at Beltane. As they received the flame that marked this time of beginnings, people surely felt a sense of the kindling of new dreams, projects and hopes for the year to come.

The Samhain fires continued to blaze down the centuries. In the 1860s the Halloween bonfires were still so popular in Scotland that one traveler reported seeing thirty fires lighting up the hillsides all on one night, each surrounded by rings of dancing figures, a practice which continued up to the first World War. Young people and servants lit brands from the fire and ran around the fields and hedges of house and farm, while community leaders surrounded parish boundaries with a magic circle of light. Afterwards, ashes from the fires were sprinkled over the fields to protect them during the winter months -- and of course, they also improved the soil. The bonfire provided an island of light within the oncoming tide of winter darkness, keeping away cold, discomfort, and evil spirits long before electricity illumined our nights. When the last flame sank down, it was time to run as fast as you could for home, raising the cry, "The black sow without a tail take the hindmost!"

Even today, bonfires light up the skies in many parts of the British Isles and Ireland at this season, although in many areas of Britain their significance has been co-opted by Guy Fawkes Day, which falls on November 5th, and commemorates an unsuccessful attempt to blow up the English Houses of Parliament in the 17th century. In one Devonshire village, the extraordinary sight of both men and women running through the streets with blazing tar barrels on their backs can still be seen! Whatever the reason, there will probably always be a human need to make fires against the winter's dark.

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The following passage is from the chapter called *The Making of Arthur's Crown* by G R Grove, where Gwernin's teacher Talhaearn tells a tale one evening. Here begins the tale; Talhaearn is speaking:

[In order to make the crown] ... we first needed gold from seven British Kings. Now the crowned Kings of Britain in those days were Tudwal Tudclyd of Strathclyde, and Cynwyd of Eidyn, and Cynfarch Oer of Rheged, and Lleenawg of Elmet, and Maelgwn Hir of Gwynedd, and Brochfael Ysgithog of Powys, and Geraint mab Erbin of Dumnonia. And this gathering of gold from them was no easy task; for many considered Arthur to be an upstart, with no good claim to Uthur Pendragon's chair, while others had ambitions themselves to be High King. And in order for our magic to be true and right and potent, we might not get the gold other than by free gift.

So my Master devised a plan, and it was this: no King could risk the dispraise of a pencerdd, a master bard, however strong he felt himself, whether the dispraise was only by silence, the mere omission of his name from a list of Generous Ones, or by the sharper attack of satire. If each King were to believe that all the others in our list had given generous gifts to our endeavor, than each in his turn would give as well, not to be outdone. The difficulty lay in starting the process.

We went, therefore, first to the court of Rheged, which was ruled in those days by Cynfarch Oer, Cynfarch the Cold, who could as well have been called Cynfarch Caled, Cynfarch the Miser. For as my Master said truly, if we could win gold freely given from that skinflint, than no one else would dare to hold back, for fear of dishonor. And we arrived on the eve of Samhain, then as now one of the great festivals of the year, when even Cynfarch would be forced to hold a feast.

Now my Master's name was known in those days the length and breadth of Britain, and not for lack of resource. So in order not to put Cynfarch on his guard, we agreed that I would appear in my own proper

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person, but that he would dress himself in our oldest clothes and pretend to be my servant. And thus we arrived at Cynfarch's hall, where a feast – of sorts – was in progress.

Cold, did I say was Cynfarch's calling? Cold was the hospitality of his hall as well. Few indeed were the torches that lit that hall, and small and feeble the hearth-fire, so it was little enough that could be seen through the drifting haze of smoke. The benches were thronged by such as had no hope of better entertainment elsewhere, but little good did they get by it, for the bowls of broken meats came half-empty to the table, and the drink was small sour beer. It is true that Cynfarch's retinue was served somewhat better – a war-band which is not feasted will soon find another lord – and better yet was the food on Cynfarch's own table, but I swear to you that Arthur's war-band in the field after a three-day's battle ate better than he. Nevertheless, we came into the hall, and I followed close after the porter to be announced, while my Master joined the servants near the door.

Now Cynfarch, though a miser, was no fool; and my own name was not unknown in the land of Britain. Yet like all those who value gear and goods above honor, he could not resist the prospect of getting something for nothing, or nearly nothing: in this case, my songs in exchange for his poor entertainment. It would be a bold bard who satirized him there in his own hall; and if my praise was less than fulsome, why, he could live with that. Indeed, he had been doing so for a long time. So he waved me to a seat at his own table, and presently he bade me sing.

I sang, first, a song in praise of Arthur, calling him Bull of Battle and Bulwark of Britain, Red-Ravager and Gold-Giver. This produced a little applause from Cynfarch, but rather more from his war-band, who like everyone else had heard tales of Arthur's success. Clearly they were now wondering if he might be a more generous provider than Cynfarch. Next I told the tale of Pwyll's winning of Rhiannon, when he comes to her wedding feast dressed as a beggar but carrying a magic bag which cannot be filled, however much is put into it. At this I heard one of the retinue say to another, "Well for him that he came not here!" and laugh, and Cynfarch shifted uneasily in his chair. "Have you no better tales than this?" he asked me. "Give me something new."

"Alas, Lord," I said, "I am weary from traveling and need food and time to rest. Perhaps you would hear a tale from my servant while I eat? He is not without experience."

"Gladly," said Cynfarch. "Let him come up."

My Master came to the front of the hall, still in his disguise. "Good evening to you, Lord," he said. "Would you hear a tale suited to the night, which I learned long ago in Ireland?"

"Gladly," said Cynfarch. "Tell your tale."

My Master then began to tell the most terrifying story I have ever heard, of unquiet spirits and monsters which could not be killed, and murdered men returning from the grave for vengeance, their empty eyes burning with the fires of hell. And as he spoke the hall grew darker, and the torches burned faint and blue, and outside the wind rose and moaned about the court, and there were voices in it. Even the retinue grew quiet and huddled closer together on their benches; and their faces were pale, and their hands moved uneasily now and then to their knife-hilts. Cynfarch's eyes went round and round the hall, as if he saw movement in the shadows, and sweat stood upon his brow; and I myself felt the skin creep on my shoulders, and the hairs on my neck stand up. And still my Master spoke, and the wind rose, and one or two of the torches flickered and went out.

At last Cynfarch could stand no more. "Enough!" he cried. "End your tale now, old man!"

"But how shall I do that," my Master asked, "and the tale not half finished?"

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"I will pay you to end it," said Cynfarch. "In silver, if need be."

"Nay," said my Master, "that would be ill doing. For it would be bad luck to me to end the tale untimely, and silver is not enough to pay for that misfortune."

"Let it be gold, then," said Cynfarch, and he hauled off from his arm the great twisted bracelet of red gold which he wore there, and which no one had ever seen him without, and threw it into my Master's hands. "Take it, and be silent." And my Master bowed, and turned away; and as he did so, the torches burned up again, and the wind died away to nothing.

We did not linger long at the hall of Cynfarch Rheged, but went on with our journey. At all the other Kings' courts we showed the arm-ring, and praised Cynfarch's generosity, and we had no trouble in getting their gold. And so the first of our tasks was accomplished...

### **Samhain ritual for solitary**

Place upon the altar apples, pomegranates, pumpkins, squashes and other late autumn fruits. Autumn flowers such as marigolds and chrysanthemums are fine too. Write on a piece of paper an aspect of your life which you wish to be free of: anger, a baneful habit, misplaced feelings, disease. The cauldron or some similar tool must be present before the altar as well, on a trivet or some other heat-proof surface (if the legs aren't long enough). A small, flat dish marked with an eight-spoked wheel symbol should also be there.

Prior to the ritual, sit quietly and think of friends and loved ones who have passed away. Do not despair. Know that they have gone on to greater things. Keep firmly in mind that the physical isn't the absolute reality, and that souls never die.

Arrange the altar, light the candles and censer, and cast the Circle of Stones..  
Recite the Blessing Chant.  
Invoke the Goddess and God.

Lift one of the pomegranates and, with your freshly-washed white-handled knife, pierce the skin of the fruit. Remove several seeds and place them on the wheel-marked dish. Raise your wand, face the altar and say:

On this night of Samhain I mark your passing,  
O Sun King, through the sunset into the Land of the Young.  
I mark also the passing of all who have gone before,  
and all who will go after. O Gracious Goddess,  
Eternal Mother, You who gives birth to the fallen,  
teach me to know that in the time of the greatest  
darkness there is the greatest light.

Taste the pomegranate seeds; burst them with your teeth and savour their, bittersweet flavour. Look down at the eight-spoked symbol on the plate; the wheel of the year, the cycle of the seasons, the end and beginning of all creation.

Light a fire within the cauldron (a candle is fine). Sit before it holding the piece of paper, gazing at its flames. Say:

Wise One of the Waning Moon,  
Goddess of the starry night,  
I create this fire within your cauldron  
to transform that which is plaguing me.

## Samhain Recipes

### Pumpkin Muffins

1 c Unbleached Flour, Sifted  
 2 t Baking Powder  
 1/4 t Salt  
 1/4 t Ground Cinnamon  
 1/4 c Vegetable Shortening  
 2/3 c Sugar  
 1 ea Large Egg  
 1/2 c Canned, Mashed Pumpkin  
 2 T Milk

Sift together flour, baking powder, salt and cinnamon; set aside. Cream together shortening and sugar in mixing bowl until light and fluffy, using electric mixer at medium speed. Beat in egg. Combine pumpkin and milk in small bowl. Add dry ingredients alternately with pumpkin mixture to creamed mixture, stirring well after each addition. Spoon batter into paper-lined 2 1/2-inch muffin-pan cups, filling 2/3rds full.

Bake in 350 degree F. oven 20 minutes or until golden brown. Serve hot with butter and homemade jam.

### Remembrance Cookies

1 1/2 c. powdered sugar  
 1 c. butter or margarine (softened)  
 1 egg  
 2 t. vanilla  
 1 t. almond extract  
 2 1/2 c. all purpose flour  
 1 t. baking soda  
 1 t. cream of tartar  
 1 1/2 T. chopped rosemary

Heat oven 375 degrees. In a large bowl, beat sugar, butter, egg, vanilla, almond extract, and rosemary until creamy. In a separate bowl, sift flour, baking soda, and

cream of tartar. Fold flour mixture into sugar mixture. Beat until dough forms and refrigerate for three hours. Divide dough into halves. Roll out one portion to 3/16 of an inch on a floured surface. Cut out with gingerbread women or men cutters and place on an ungreased cookie sheet. Repeat rolling and cutting with second portion. Bake for 5-7 minutes.

### Colcannon

4 cups mashed potatoes  
 2 1/2 cups cabbage, cooked and chopped fine  
 1/2 cup butter (avoid corn oil margarine as they will not add the needed body and flavor)  
 1/2 cup evaporated milk or cream  
 3/4 cup onion, chopped very fine and sautéd  
 1/4 teaspoon salt  
 1/8 teaspoon white pepper

Sauté onions (traditionalists sauté in lard or grease, but butter is acceptable.). Boil the potatoes and mash them (do not use artificial potato flakes). In a large pan place all of the ingredients except the cabbage and cook over low heat while blending them together. Turn the heat to medium and add the chopped cabbage. The mixture will take on a pale green cast. Keep stirring occasionally until the mixture is warm enough to eat. Lastly drop in a thimble, button, ring, and coin. Stir well and serve.

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May the energies be reversed:  
From darkness, light!  
From bane, good!  
From death, birth!

Light the paper in the cauldron's flame and drop it inside. As it burns, know that your ill diminishes, lessens and finally leaves you as it is consumed within the universal fires.

If you wish, you may attempt scrying or some other form of divination, for this is a perfect time to look into the past or future. Try to recall past lives too, if you will. But leave the dead in peace. Honour them with your memories but do not call them to you. Release any pain and sense of loss you may feel into the cauldron's flames.

Works of magic, if necessary, may follow.  
Celebrate the Simple Feast.  
The circle is released.

### **Samhain**

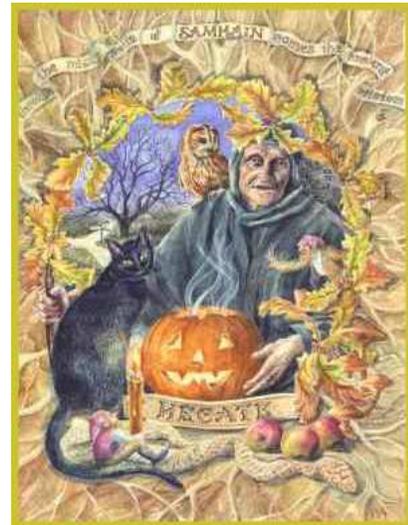
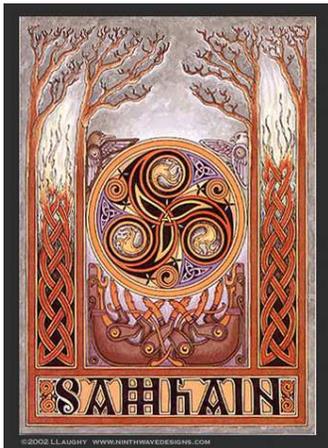
poem by: Yvonne Aburrow

As night draws its veil over the land,  
And autumn draws on her cloak of leaves,  
The other world draws nearer to our own,  
And the dead gather in the place of shadows.

The dark mother stands revealed  
In her terrible naked glory.  
The heartstopping beauty of Autumn  
Is like a spear roaring for blood.

Even as the Sun recedes from us  
To journey over the dark dreaming river  
Into the country of death -  
So we seek within ourselves the seed of life.

The seed of life: Demeter's mystery,  
Kernel within the dark husk,  
The Child of Light turning within the womb,  
Reflected in the burnished gold of autumn leaves.



### **The Veil Is Getting Thin**

poem by: unknown)

As I went out walking this fall afternoon,  
I heard a wisper wispering.  
I heard a wisper wispering,  
Upon this fine fall day...

As I went out walking this fall afternoon,  
I heard a laugh a'laughing.  
I heard a laugh a'laughing,  
Upon this fine fall day...

I heard this wisper and I wondered,  
I heard this laugh and then I knew.  
The time is getting near my friends,  
The time that I hold dear my friends,  
The veil is getting thin my friends,  
And strange things will pass through.

## Samhain images and pictures



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

*Celebrating the Seasons of Life: Samhain to Ostara : Lore, Rituals, Activities, and Symbols* by Ashleen O'Gaea

*Witch's Halloween: A Complete Guide to the Magick, Incantations, Recipes, Spells, and Lore* by Gerina Dunwich

*The Pagan Mysteries of Halloween: Celebrating the Dark Half of the Year* by Jean Markale

## Pagan Chants

Cauldron of Change

Cauldron of Change  
Blossom of Bone  
Arc of Eternity  
Hole in the Stone

Fire red, summer is dead,  
yet shall it return.  
Clear and bright in the night,  
Burn, fire, burn!  
Dance the ring, luck to bring,  
when the year is a turning.  
Chant the rhyme at Hallows time,  
when the fire is burning.

## 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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