



SPECIAL
POINTS OF
INTEREST:

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S U M M E R S O L S T I C E 2 0 0 8

Midsummer (Summer Solstice, Litha) Lore

by Maria Kay Simms

Though Summer Solstice is officially the first day of summer, Wiccan tradition calls it Midsummer. That's likely because by the experience of those who lived in most parts of Europe where holiday festivals celebrated the day, it was definitely "mid-summer." Summer temperatures and the growing season are well established by this time, and the Sun is at maximum power. It is the longest day of the year. The date of the solstice can vary from June 20- 22, depending on what time of day the Sun enters the 0 degree of Cancer.

"Solstice," as was said here at Winter Solstice, comes from the Latin words sol for the Sun and sistere, which means, "to cause to stand still." Since Yule the days have been gradually lengthening. Now Sun seems to "stand still" for about three days, and from this point until next Winter Solstice (the shortest day and longest night), the days will gradually shorten. This description fits the northern hemisphere. In the southern hemisphere, it happens the other way around. When it is Yule in the north, "down under" it is Midsummer. At southern hemisphere Midsummer, we in the north are celebrating Yule.

Myths of the season depict the culmination of light that is also the onset of increasing darkness. A favorite one from the Norse countries is the challenge to the Oak King (God of the waxing year) by the Holly King (God of the waning year). The two battle and of course, the Holly King wins, for it is he will reign until Yule, when he gives way to the rebirth of the Child of Light, the baby Oak King. The two are alternatively called Bright Lord and Dark Lord in similar enactments of the myth of transition from waxing to waning, light to dark. Though often "played" as two separate god images, the two are but aspects of one, and may alternatively be depicted as a transition from naïve youth to the mature Father God, who recognizes his responsibility to his Goddess and his people, even as he celebrates the culmination of his light and power. He is the youth at Beltane, hormones charged in anticipation. Now he faces a new phase of life.

The Goddess, who in her Maiden aspect met the youthful God in sacred marriage at Beltane, has now become Mother, pregnant, just as the Earth is pregnant with the growth that will become the harvest. The Mother reigns as Queen of Summer, and it is through her that her Consort comes to mature realization of his full role, and its ultimate sacrifice. She is the Earth; he is the energy and heat that has gone into the Earth so that together they create new life. His energy will be born within the grains and fruits of the harvest that in the next two turns of the wheel must be reaped and die to feed the people. The God will become a willing sacrifice, falling with the harvest and becoming the seed of his own rebirth as the wheel turns.

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It is in mythologies of this eternal cycle of life, death and life again, that we see the Goddess as the eternal Wheel itself, and the God as the traveler on the wheel, each year repeating his cycle of birth, waxing, culmination, waning, death, leading to rebirth and so and on.

Midsummer rites sometimes include fairy lore, and the association of fairies with this day has been most famously celebrated in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It's said that the little people, the elves and fairies, can be more easily seen at Midsummer, and that this is one of the days when the veil between the worlds is thin. We are forewarned, then, to take care when walking in the forest mists, lest we stumble into in the land of fairie where time is suspended, and we can be lost to the world for longer than we know!

An herb especially associated with Midsummer is St. John's wort. This plant with its bright yellow flower of four spikes like the solar cross is ruled by the Sun. One legend has it that if you should step on a St. John's wort flower on Midsummer's Night, you are magically transported to fairyland. St. John's wort gathered in this season can be hung over your door as an amulet of protection.

Another plant to be gathered at Midsummer as an amulet of protection is mistletoe, sacred to the Druids. Found growing in the top branches of oak trees, the mistletoe was cut at high noon with a golden sickle and never allowed to touch the ground, lest its magick be grounded. Cut it with friends who can catch the falling mistletoe in a white sheet.

In the Nordic countries where the equinoxes and solstices were the primary festivals and where the name Midsummer may have first emerged, the ancients celebrated with bonfires. The fire magic was used for divination, to encourage fertility of couples who would jump the fires together and to generate energy encouraging the Sun's potency through the growing season so that harvest abundance would be assured.

Midsummer by Other Names

Litha, another popular name for Summer Solstice, probably comes from Saxon tradition, though there are no clear sources for it. Raven Grimassi, in his *Encyclopedia of Wicca & Witchcraft* says that the name might be derived from the Anglo-Saxon *lida*, which means, "moon." This name for the summer Sabbat came into use in modern Wicca through works of the 1970s such as Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance*.

In ancient festivals of Gaul, Midsummer celebrations were called Feast of Epona. Epona is sometimes pictured as a Goddess riding a white mare, and sometimes as the white mare itself.

In ancient Rome, Vesta, Goddess of the Hearth, was honored in mid-June. The shrines of Vesta were usually open only to the Vestal Virgins, her priestesses, but during the annual festival of Vestalia, married women were also welcomed.

Medicine Wheels, stone circles built by Native American tribes, have been found to be aligned with the rising Sun at Summer Solstice, indicating the importance they gave this season.

The Christians, after the conversion of Europe to Christianity, attached a new meaning to the Midsummer festival time, just as they had for other pagan holidays. June 24th became the Feast of St. John the Baptist, his day to be celebrated as a day of triumph when just as this saint was the forerunner of Jesus, Summer Solstice is a forecast of the birth that would arrive with Winter Solstice.

Summer Solstice has been marked in many places around the world by stone circles or carved markers or tunneled passages through which light on solstice rising would flow. By this it is clearly shown that ancient people thought the day important enough to make great effort to predict and record its occurrence.

Summer Solstice Ritual

By Gwinevere Rain

You Will Need:

Yellow candle and appropriate holder
 Oil (such as grape seed or olive oil)
 Gold sparkles
 Damp paper towel
 Small solar-themed offering/craft

In advance, create a small solar-themed craft to use within this ritual as an offering. Perhaps you can create a picture, collage, embroidered sachet, mirror with decorations, beaded design/jewelry.

To begin, cast a circle or create sacred space. Make sure you have all your supplies and pre-made craft with you.

Start by verbally recognizing the day and its meaning,
 " Oh great Earth Mother & Father Sun,
 The Wheel of the Year turns once again
 Tis' the Summer Solstice . . .
 A day brimming with power and a night dripping with beauty
 I am here to celebrate you!"

Next, take the yellow candle and rub oil around its length. Sprinkle the gold sparkles over the candle, letting the oil catch them to stick. Place in candle holder. Whip your hands with the damp paper towel.

Say,
 "Below & Above - a peak of energy,
 He shines His rays upon Her womb
 Where warmth begets life,
 Alive!
 The flowers, the trees, the animals,
 Alive!
 Butterflies fluttering,
 Magick is afoot!"

Light the candle and take a few moments to meditate upon the meaning of the day. Reflect upon your journey thus far during this Wheel of the Year. When you are ready, present your offering. Then say,

"I present this gift, a token of love
 And ask that you purify my life . . .
 For this is a time of renewal, good health and blessings!

Please let your ever flowing cauldron of goodness stream over me!
 Earth Mother & Father Sun, I thank you.

And so the Wheel of the Year turns once again. . .
 Forever your daughter/son
 With love and devotion. Blessed be!"

Finally, use the remainder of your time to write in your Book of Shadows. You may want to follow with a "feast" of sunflower seeds and a cool drink. Close up your circle or sacred space in the same fashion you started this ritual.

The Sun and the Moon

Written by Megan Balanck

For thousands of years, the Sun and Moon have filled man with inspiration, admiration and fear.

The Sun, the bringer of Light, Heat and Fire, is one of the most crucial elements needed on Earth for life. Without the Sun, life would perish rapidly. It is therefore unsurprising that many human cultures have worshipped the Sun, and sometimes the Moon, in acknowledgement of their importance, their beauty and their magnificent powers.

Throughout the thousands of religions across the globe, the Sun and the Moon have been said to be a bewildering range of entities, from the eyes of a giant in Chinese mythology to sparks of fire tossed into the air according to the Norse belief. More often, however, the Sun and Moon are personified as gods.

Frequently, the Sun is associated with masculine qualities and the Moon is portrayed as a woman. St. Francis of Assisi wrote a prayer dedicated to "Brother Sun and Sister Moon," while in West Africa, the Fon tribe tell of the male Sun god Lisa and his twin sister, the Moon goddess Mawu. However, there are exceptions; the oldest Japanese religion, Shintoism, tells us that both deities of the Sun and Moon are female; the shy but extraordinarily beautiful Sun goddess Amaterasu, who was later to be associated with the Buddha, and the goddess of the moon, Tsuki-yomi. Both were created from the tears of the higher god, Izanagi.

The ancient Egyptians, renowned for their sun-worship, knew the Sun as their chief god Ra (also known as Re or Amun-Ra), who rides across the sky in a boat called Sektet and is often represented by the falcon. The scarab beetle was thought to be sacred in Egypt, as it was believed that it carried the Sun across the sky on its back legs.

The myth of the Phoenix, the fabulous bird of the Sun and fire, may have been hatched by the Egyptian belief in the Bennu, a magnificent heron which was born within fire. The Phoenix is also found in Oriental beliefs, where it is known as Feng-Huang in China and Houou in Japan, and was thought to be born in the Sun.

Both the Greeks and Romans believed in the Sun god Apollo, who rode across the sky on a fiery chariot drawn by wild horses and is among the most famous of Sun deities in human history. Apollo, also the god of love, hunting and music, was said to be favoured among women for his handsome features and immortal strength. He also had a mortal son, named Phaeton, whose arrogance and audacity lead him to his death by falling from the sun chariot which he tried to control despite his father's warning.

The Greek legends also recount the tale of Prometheus, the skilful giant who created humans from clay. However, Prometheus was too clever for his own good - after outwitting the emperor of all the gods, Zeus (later known to the Romans as Jupiter), mankind was punished by the extinguishing of all fire on Earth. But Prometheus was unwilling to let humanity suffer. He crept up Mount Olympus, the home of the gods, and stole a piece of the burning Sun. Thus, the gift of fire was once more restored to mankind.

Strikingly similar to Apollo is Tsohanoai, the god of the Sun to the Navajo tribe of north America. Tsohanoai is said to carry the sun on his back and hang it on the west wall of his house before unravelling the dark rug of Night. He also has children, two fearless sons named Killer of Enemies and Child of Water, whom he helped to overcome some of the evil spirits which once inhabited the world.

Another Amerindian culture which practised Sun worship were the Incas of pre-Columbia. They said that a couple were sent to bring civilisation to humanity by their father, the Sun god Inti. Inti was honoured in the silverware of the Incas, and depicted as a formidable face surrounded by blazing rays. The Aztecs, a

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Summer Solstice Recipes

ROSE CAKE

1 Tbsp shortening
 2 eggs
 2 egg whites
 1 Cup sugar
 1/2 Cup canola oil or other vegetable oil
 1 teaspoon rose water
 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
 1/4 teaspoon salt
 1 teaspoon baking powder
 1/4 teaspoon soda
 2 1/4 Cups all purpose flour
 1 Cup buttermilk
 8 rose scented geranium leaves

Heat oven to 350 F. Generously grease a 8x12 inch pan with shortening and dust with flour. Lightly pound rose geranium leaves between sheets of wax paper and arrange in the bottom of the pan. In a bowl with an electric mixer or a food processor beat together egg whites and sugar. Continue beating until the sugar dissolves. Beat in the oil, salt, vanilla extract and rose water. Combine the flour, baking powder and baking soda. Add the flour mixture alternately with the buttermilk to the egg and oil mixture. Mix only until no flour is visible. Pour the batter into the prepared pan. Bake for 30 minutes, or until the cake is golden brown on the top and firm to the touch. Cool for 20 minutes. Turn out of pan. Allow to cool completely on wire rack. Peel off leaves when the cake is completely cool. Decorate according to liking.

RASPBERRY SPINACH SALAD

2 Tablespoons raspberry vinegar
 2 Tablespoons raspberry jam
 1/3 C vegetable oil
 8 C spinach, rinsed, stemmed and torn
 3/4 C coarsely chopped nuts
 1 C fresh raspberries
 3 kiwis peeled and sliced

Combine vinegar and jam and blend adding oil in a thin stream. Place spinach in a bowl and add remaining ingredients in layers.

HERBAL LEMON COOKIES

1 cup Butter or margarine
 2 cups Sugar, divided
 2 large Eggs
 1 teaspoon Vanilla extract
 2 1/2 cups Flour
 2 teaspoons Baking powder
 1/4 teaspoon Salt
 1/3 cup Lemon Grass / Lemon Balm / Lemon Basil
 - chopped

Cream the butter and 1-3/4 cups sugar. Add the eggs and vanilla. Beat well. Combine the flour, baking powder, salt, and herbs. Add to the creamed mixture and mix. Drop dough by teaspoonfuls, 3 inches apart, on a greased cookie sheet. Flatten slightly with a fork or cup bottom. Sprinkle lightly with the remaining sugar. Bake at 350 degrees for 8 to 10 minutes or until barely browned. Cool slightly, then remove to a rack.

CUCUMBER SOUP WITH LEMONGRASS AND SPINACH

2 Tablespoons Unsalted Butter
 2 Ribs Celery, strings removed; chopped
 1 small Onion, minced
 2 stalks fresh Lemongrass, tender middle chopped
 2 medium Cucumbers, peeled & seeded - chopped
 2 cups Chicken stock or broth
 1 1/2 cups Spinach leaves
 1/4 cup Fresh Cilantro leaves
 3 Tablespoons Whipping cream
 fresh ground Black Pepper to taste

Melt butter in a large saucepan. Add celery, onion and lemongrass. Cook gently until onion is tender, 15 minutes. Add cucumbers and stock. Heat to a boil; reduce heat, cover and simmer until cucumber is tender, 10 minutes. Strain solids from liquid, reserving both. Puree solids with spinach and cilantro in a blender or food processor. Add reserved liquid, cream, salt and pepper; mix until smooth. Serve warm or chilled. Makes 4 ~ 1 1/2 cup servings

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tribe similar to the Incas in many ways, told that the Sun was home to the great god Quetzalcoatl, and moved in his breath.

In Australian Aboriginal belief, the Sun was discovered by Bamapama, one of the ancestors of man today. Bamapama's people once lived underground, but when the no-good Bamapama went hunting a great kangaroo on the surface, he discovered a new way to live: to hunt during the day, while the Sun shone, and sleep at Night when it passed over.

While the Sun and its various deities are usually attributed with positive forces, such as goodness, love, warmth and joy, the Moon is sometimes believed to exude evil unto the world. One commonly-held superstition was that the Moon could make a person insane: hence the word "lunatic" from "luna," the Latin word for the Moon. Nights of a full moon were supposed to be extremely unlucky, as hellish beasts and demons such as were-wolves drew their sinister powers from its dark energy.

However, there are cultures today who demonstrate great reverence for the Moon. The Inuit peoples create spiritual masks from wood depicting the woman in the Moon whilst the Moon and star make up the symbol of Islam, the world's fastest growing religion.

In order to keep the Gods and Goddesses pleased so the crops would continue to grow and people would be spared from natural hazards, worship had to be offered to the deities of the Sun and Moon. Stonehenge, the world-famous megalithic monument in Wiltshire, England, was perhaps erected in order to honour the Sun. To signal the beginning of summer on May 1st, the Celtic peoples held the Beltana fire ritual. By driving cattle through the smoke of enormous fires, the Celts believed their livestock would be purified and fertile. The Celts also celebrated Lughnasadh on August 1st, which was in honour of the light at its zenith.

Today, most cultures still honour the Sun in some form. The Amazon Indians wear head-dresses made from feathers during special occasions, which aim to represent the Sun's rays. The written religious traditions also honour the light and fire which is brought by the Sun. Christianity speaks of "the Light of God," and candles are lit to represent God's divine presence. Hinduism describes the Fire god Agni and celebrates the Festival of Light, while in Buddhism fire is regarded as a sacred and purifying element.

We may know far more about the Sun and Moon today, but these two celestial bodies do not cease to continue to inspire man with awe, wonder and respect.

Pagan Chants

Selection from <http://www.seeliecourt.net/panpipe/oldchan.html>

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Herne, Hunter Of Souls | Moon Oh Come Into Us |
| Herne, Hunter Of Souls | Moon Oh Come Into Us |
| We Hear Your Horn, | Let You Power Dance |
| We Hear Your Hounds | Waxing, Waning, Shifting |
| Throughout The Starry Woods | Time And Tide Entrance |
| Herne, Hunter Of Souls | Luna By Your Turning |
| In Underworld And Overworld | Spin The Thread We Weave |
| Your Hunt Goes Ever On | Magick We Are Making |
| | As We Circle Dance |

Summer Solstice images and pictures



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

Midsummer Magic: A Garland of Stories, Charms and Recipes
by Ellin Greene

Midsummer: Magical Celebrations of the Summer Solstice by
Anna Franklin

**The Summer Solstice: Celebrating The Journey Of The Sun
From May Day to Harvest** - John Matthews

The Year in Ireland - Kevin Danaher

The Oak King, The Holly King, and the Unicorn - John William-
son

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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