



The Seasons:

Vernal Equinox:

Its history and influence on Easter.

Summer Solstice:

The Summer Solstice and June weddings?

Autumnal Equinox:

The second harvest, Pilgrims, and Thanksgiving.

Winter Solstice:

History, symbols, and the relationship to Christmas.

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Solstice and Equinox

Long before the dawn of any of the modern Judeo-Christian-Islamic faiths, rituals followed a more simplistic path. Guided by the natural cycle of birth-life-death-and-renewal, the ancients marked their seasons by celebrating each phase of the wheel of life. Both male and female principals were honored, God and Goddess, and each was given honor as the sun and moon entwined in their cosmic dance.

The festivals that mark the change of season—winter, spring, summer and fall—have been transposed to our modern world. This site explores their meanings and how the old ways of honoring these times have been assimilated into our rituals of passage today.

What is a Pagan?

The celebration of equinox and solstice are commonly referred to as pagan holidays. Although the term *pagan* is used to describe any number of non-Christian belief systems, the actual term means something far different. The term's origins are from the Latin word *paganus* meaning "country dweller."

Christianity had taken hold in most of the towns and cities of the old Roman Empire but, by no means, was embraced outside of those enclaves. Those whose livelihood depended on the natural cycles of the seasons still followed those ancient beliefs. So the term *paganus* became synonymous with one who not only lived in rural areas—most of ancient Europe and Great Britain—but also one who did not follow the teachings of the Church. In time, and through language changes, the old Latin word became shortened to *pagan* and, while its original meaning became lost in the passage of time, the reference to non-Christian belief systems remained.

Festivals of the Lunar Calendar

For those who follow the Elder Path, eight major festivals, or *sabots*, mark the year. It should also be pointed out that this is a lunar year rather than a solar one. The reason for this is that the lunar cycle closely mirrors the human female cycle and, most certainly, reflects the sacredness of fertility in the natural order.

Candlemas: falls between January 31 and February 2, also known as *Imbolc*, *Brigids's Day* and *February*



The Eves

As with all lunar calendars, the

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Eve. It marks the first indication of spring and may also have been an early basis for Groundhog Day.

Spring Equinox or Ostara: on or around March 21st, the beginning of spring.

Beltane: May 1st, also known as *May Eve*. Denotes the union of God and Goddess and the time when the seeds that have been planted now begin to sprout and grow.

Summer Solstice: on or around June 22nd, also called *Midsummer*, the longest day of the year.

Lammas or Lughnasadh: August 1st. The first harvest festival and the time when the seeds that have been tended with care show the fruit soon to be reaped.

Autumnal Equinox: on or around September 21st, the first day of fall.

Samhain: October 31st, also called *All Hallows Eve* or *Halloween*. This is often viewed as the New Years' Eve for those who follow the *Olde Way*. It marks a time of reflection not only of the past year, but of all that has gone before. The barriers between worlds are flexible this night and those who have gone before can walk among us. The harvest is done and now God and Goddess rest until spring again returns.

Winter Solstice: on or around December 22nd, the first day of winter.

Although celebrations of the solstice and equinox come to us from a far more simplistic time, they are, nevertheless, the foundations for our modern way of life and, in a deeper sense, for the rhythms of our existence. Truly, these celebrations, changed as they may be, are as timeless and eternal as the Great Wheel whose spokes they are.

actual celebration of many of these days begins the previous night. For example, Imbolc begins the night of January 31, Beltane, the night of April 30 and Lammas, the night of July 31.

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