

Beltane¹

Also known as May Eve, May Day, and Walpurgis Night, happens at the beginning of May. It celebrates the height of Spring and the flowering of life. The Goddess manifests as the May Queen and Flora. The God emerges as the May King and Jack in the Green. The danced Maypole represents Their unity, with the pole itself being the God and the ribbons that encompass it, the Goddess. Colors are the Rainbow spectrum. Beltane is a festival of flowers, fertility, sensuality, and delight.

Prepare a May basket by filling it with flowers and goodwill and then give it to someone in need of healing and caring, such as a shut-in or elderly friend. Form a wreath of freshly picked flowers, wear it in your hair, and feel yourself radiating joy and beauty. Dress in bright colors. Dance the Maypole and feel yourself balancing the Divine Female and Male within. On May Eve, bless your garden in the old way by making love with your lover in it. Make a wish as you jump a bonfire or candle flame for good luck. Welcome in the May at dawn with singing and dancing.

Beltane Customs Notes

From a Workshop by Selena Fox presented at 1997 Beltane Festival at Circle Sanctuary from a work in progress © 1997, Selena Fox, PO Box 219, Mt. Horeb, WI 53572 USA

Sacred Time

Going A-Maying & Bringing in the May -- Merry-making and Nature communion. * Midpoint between Spring Equinox and Summer Solstice. * In Pagan Rome, Floralia, from April 27-May 3 was the festival of the Flower Goddess Flora and the flowering of Springtime. On May 1, offerings were made to Bona Dea (as Mother Earth), the Lares (household guardian spirits), and Maia (Goddess of Increase) from whom May gets its name. * Roman Catholic traditions of crowning statues of Mary with flowers on May 1 have Roman Pagan roots. * Marks the second half of the Celtic Year; one of the four Celtic Fire Festivals. Complement to Samhain, it is a time of divination and communion with Fairy Folk/Nature Spirits. * Pastoral tradition of turning sheep, cows, other livestock out to pasture. * In Pagan Scandinavia, mock battles between Winter and Summer were enacted at this time. * Building on older tradition of this time being a holiday for the masses, in the twentieth century, May Day has been a workers' holiday in many places. * Some say that Mother's Day, in the USA, Mexico, and elsewhere has Pagan roots.

Maypole

Forms include pole, tree, bush, cross; communal or household; permanent or annual. * In Germany, Fir tree was cut on May Eve by young unmarried men, branches removed, decorated, put up in village square, & guarded all night until dance occurred on May Day. * In England, permanent Maypoles were erected on village greens * In some villages, there also were smaller Maypoles in the yards of households. * Maypole ribbondances, with two circles interweaving; around decorated bush/tree, clockwise circle dances.

Flowers & Greenwood

Gathering and exchange of Flowers and Greens on May Eve, pre-dawn May Day, Beltane. * Decorating homes, barns, and other buildings with Green budding branches, including Hawthorn. * Making and wearing of garland wreaths of Flowers and/or Greens. * May Baskets were given or placed secretly on doorsteps to friends, shut-ins, lovers, others. * May Bowl was punch (wine or non-alcoholic) made of Sweet Woodruff blossoms.

Beltane Fires

Traditionally, sacred woods kindled by spark from flint or by friction -- in Irish Gaelic, the Beltane Fire has been called teine eigin (fire from rubbing sticks). * Jump over the Beltane Fire, move through it, or dance clockwise around it. * Livestock was driven through it or between two fires for purification and fertility blessings. * In ancient times Druid priests kindled it at sacred places; later times, Christian priests kindled it in fields near the church after performing a Christian church service. * Rowan twigs were carried around the fire three times, then hung over hearths to bless homes. * In the past, Beltane community fire purification customs included symbolic sacrifice of effigy knobs on the Beltane Cake (of barley) to the fire, or, in medieval times, mock sacrifice of Beltane Carline (Hag) who received blackened piece of Beltane Cake; Maypoles in Spain were each topped with a male effigy which was later burned. Contemporary Pagans burn sacred wood and dried herbs as offerings in their Beltane fires.

May Waters

Rolling in May Eve dew or washing face in pre-dawn May Day dew for health, luck, beauty. * Getting head and hair wet in Beltane rain to bless the head. * Blessing springs, ponds, other sacred waters with flowers, garlands, ribbons, other offerings. * Collecting sacred waters and scrying in sacred springs, wells, ponds, other waters.

Sacred Union & Fertility

Union with the Land focus, often with actual mating outside on the Land to bless fields, herds, home. * May Queen (May Bride) as personification of the Earth Goddess and Goddesses of Fertility. * May King (May Groom) as personification of Vegetation God, Jack-in-Green -- often covered in green leaves. * At Circle Sanctuary, in addition to May Queen & May King, is May Spirit Couple, an already bonded pair. * Symbolic Union of Goddess and God in election/selection, crowning, processional, Maypole dance, feast. * Morris Dancers and pageants (with Hag & Jack-in-Green) to awaken the fertility in the Land.

¹ C:\My Documents\SCHOOLofLocalChurch\Lessons\33PaganHolidays\Articles\Beltane1.doc