



Our Holidays

Wiccans celebrate up to 21 holidays each year. There are eight primary days of celebration called *Sabbats*, which are based on the seasonal interplay of the Sun and Earth. We also celebrate the *Esbats*, which are based on Lunar cycles. There are usually thirteen Esbats each calendar year, although this can vary due to variations between the Solar and Lunar cycles and our "modern" calendars.

The Sabbats are often represented by the Wheel of the Year, which shows their relationship to each other. Please note that the Sabbat order and dates listed here are for the Northern Hemisphere. Because the Sabbats are based on seasonal cycles, these cycles occur at opposite times of the year in the Southern Hemisphere.

The approximate dates for the Sabbats are:

Samhain (Halloween)	October 31
Winter Solstice (Yule)	December 22
Imbolc (Candlemas)	February 2
Spring Equinox (Ostara)	March 20
Beltane (May Day)	May 1
Summer Solstice (Litha)	June 20
Lughnasadh (Lammas)	August 1
Autumn Equinox (Mabon)	September 22

The names Samhain, Imbolc, Beltane, and Lughnasadh are thought to be Celtic in origin. There are actually several different spellings (and even words) used to name these dates. These *Greater Sabbats*, as they are often called, occur at roughly the midway points between the Equinoxes and Solstices. They represent key seasonal changes for both plants and animals, and key phases of the lives of our God and Goddess. Key changes and phases are also represented by the Solstices and Equinoxes, but they are often referred to as the *Lesser Sabbats*.

Since the Sabbat dates are based on the natural interplay of the Sun and Earth, and the constellations, there is some variation in the dates. Our modern calendars are not perfectly attuned to these natural cycles, and the dates are often open to interpretation. The dates I have given appear to be the most common, although you will see variations (plus or minus a day) for all but Samhain, which always occurs on October 31st (in the Northern Hemisphere).

I'm sure you will recognize Samhain by its more popular modern name of *Halloween*. It occurs at the mid-point between the Autumn Equinox and Winter Solstice. It was traditionally the last day of harvest, and is both the beginning and ending point of our religious year. It is listed first because it is the Pagan New Year. It is believed to be the point where the veil between the world of the living and the world of the dead is at its thinnest. We also believe that on this night- our God passes from this world to the world of the dead, to be reborn again on Yule.

The Celtic calendar (and other similar early calendars), which was based solely on the moon's cycles, had 13 months of 28 days each. This left one day that was not part of the year ($13 \times 28 = 364$), and this day was Samhain. It is a day outside of time, when both the old year and new year can be seen from an unattached perspective. It is also the day when the veil between worlds (to the afterlife, or Summerland) is the thinnest, so it is the best time to communicate with those who passed from this plane in the previous year. Note that the 364-day year, with a day outside of the year, is the origin of the common "year and a day" timeframe often used to represent time in Wicca. For example, many phases of training last *a year and a day*. Some Wiccan couples will engage in a *trial* handfasting (or marriage) for *a year and a day* before a more permanent legal arrangement is made.

The Winter Solstice, which is often called Yule, represents the day our Goddess gives birth to our God. The Christian holiday of Christmas was based loosely on this date. (Keeping in mind that Wicca's roots pre-date Christianity by several thousand years). While this one is obvious, many other modern holidays, particularly Orthodox ones, can be linked to the Sabbats.

(I will add more detailed descriptions of the other Sabbats at a later date, but I felt these two in particular were worth mentioning.)

The Sabbats are times of celebration for Witches. Magick is usually not practiced on these days, but instead- rituals celebrating the meaning of the Sabbat are performed, followed by a general celebration. More often than not, the Sabbats honor the God- who is represented by the Sun. Each Sabbat represents a stage in his life.

For practical reasons, the Sabbats are often not celebrated on the actual date of their occurrence, but on either the weekend before or after. Because they represent solar cycles, it is most appropriate to celebrate them during the day. They also often involve long and spirited celebrations, which would otherwise conflict with a today's "standard" Monday through Friday work week. While this isn't an ideal situation, it has unfortunately become fairly commonplace.

Most magick is performed on the Esbats, which are generally on the night of the Full Moon. Because the Full Moon has the most power, many rituals are held either just before or just after it. Invoking rituals are best held under a waxing (growing) Full Moon, with banishing rituals under a waning (diminishing) Full Moon. Alternatively, they can be held just before or just after the Dark or New Moon (or at any other time in the Lunar cycle as appropriate), although some see these times as not being as powerful.

When is the next Esbat? This should help:



(This is based on your computer's clock and region settings.)

Obviously, there are times when the Sabbat and Esbats overlap, and occur within a day or two of each other, or even on the same day. In these cases combined celebrations and rituals are often performed to honor both. Days where both a Sabbat and Esbat occur at once are considered very powerful.

Hopefully, this has given you a little bit of an understanding about our holidays. This was meant as an introduction, and I have not covered any of these in nearly the detail they deserve. If you are interested in learning more, please check out the resources in my [Library](#), and on my [Links](#) page. Also, *The Witches Voice* (link on the left side of this page) has a wonderful Sabbat reference. I link to them on my front page for each upcoming Sabat.