

## HOLIDAYS

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At the major seasonal holy days, called sabbats, Wiccans celebrate oneness with life. The myths of the holiday are enacted and dancing, singing, feasting and revelry are all enjoyed. Wiccans visualize the calendar of sabbats as a Wheel of the Year with eight spokes—the four pastoral and agricultural festivals and the four solar festivals of the solstices and equinoxes.

### **SAMHAIN** **OCTOBER 31**

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*Known also as November Eve or Hallows*

The Celtic New Year, where the dead are remembered and divination is performed.

### **YULE** **DECEMBER 21**

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*Known also as Winter Solstice*

The longest night, when some covens commemorate the Goddess as Mother giving birth to the Sun God.

### **IMBOLC** **FEBRUARY 1-2**

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*Known also as February Eve*

Candles are lit to hasten the journey of the sun and celebrate rebirth at this festival of Bridget, the Celtic Fire Goddess.

### **OSTARA** **MARCH 21**

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*Known also as Vernal Equinox*

Day and night are equal. The Goddess Ostara (or Eostre) returns bringing Spring, the eggs of new life, and the fertile rabbit.

### **BELTAINE** **APRIL 30**

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*Known also as May Eve*

The plant world blossoms and folk dances celebrate fertility and pleasure. In some traditions the Maiden Goddess meets Her lover, the Young God.

### **LITHA** **JUNE 21**

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*Known also as Midsummer or Summer Solstice*

On this, the longest day, we honor the union of sun and earth, and for some, the marriage of the Goddess and the God.

### **LUGHNASADH** **JULY 31**

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*Known also as August Eve*

The Celtic Sun God Lugh is honored as His energy is transformed into grain and the days diminish in length; also Lammastide, the Saxon Feast of Bread.

### **MABON** **SEPTEMBER 21**

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*Known also as Harvest Home or Autumnal Equinox*

With light and dark again in equal balance, this harvest festival is held to thank the Goddess for Her abundance.

## SUGGESTED READING

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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To learn more about the Covenant of the Goddess, visit our web page at [www.cog.org](http://www.cog.org) or write to us at the address below.



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The Covenant of the Goddess is a federation of Wiccan covens and solitary elders, founded in 1975, to foster cooperation among Witches and Wiccans; to secure for Witches and covens the legal protection enjoyed by other religions; and sponsor educational outreach.



**WICCA**  
**THE OLD RELIGION**

**A GENERAL INTRODUCTION PRESENTED  
BY THE COVENANT OF THE GODDESS**

## WICCA: THE OLD RELIGION

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Wicca is an Earth religion. In city apartments, in suburban backyards, in country glades, groups of women and men meet on the new and full moons and at festival times to attune themselves with the life force of nature and the energies of the Earth. They create circles of love and trust in which, through creative ritual, they celebrate life, raise magical energy, and honor the old Goddesses and Gods.

The word Wicca is the Anglo-Saxon root of the word Witch. Many contemporary Witches use the term as a less misunderstood term for Witchcraft. Wicca is the most common form of Neo-Paganism, a group of modern Earth religions which borrow and adapt from pre-Christian Pagan religions, sometimes with additions from contemporary religious thinkers.

### BASIC PHILOSOPHY

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As in all Earth religions, Wiccans believe that all life is sacred and interconnected. Wiccans honor nature as the embodiment of divinity. Their practices seek to bring the individual into harmony with the Earth and its natural cycles as sources of spiritual wisdom and union with the divine. Wiccans oppose the idea that the world is a resource to be exploited and subdued.

### BELIEFS

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Wicca is a life-affirming, Earth- and nature oriented religion that reveres the natural world as the embodiment of Divinity and experiences the Divine as feminine as well as masculine— Goddess as well as God. Like the spiritual world view and practices of Native Americans and Shintoists, Wiccan spiritual practices are intended to attune humanity to the cycles of nature as a means of personally experiencing Divinity.

Wicca is not a religion of absolute or revealed truth; there is no Wiccan bible, and there is no single leader or spokesperson. Wicca is not a religion of dogma, but of practices enabling an individual to experience the divine that dwells within and fills the world around us.

For Wiccans, concern for the environment is not merely scientific or utilitarian, but a visceral and profound spiritual reality. Divinity is not believed to exist separately and apart from humanity, or from the Earth, but to imbue every aspect of it. The Earth does not belong to humanity. We belong to the Earth. We are not Her masters with license to exploit and destroy for our own ends. Rather, we are a strand in a vast web of life, one of an uncounted number of species sharing in a greater life that is our planet.

Wiccans consider the Earth, our bodies, and the natural cycles of life to be sacred. Spirit and matter are not two separate things, one holy and one profane. Witchcraft honors nature and the feminine in a way that many religions do not. These values, the Goddess, and the other Gods of Wicca provide a spiritual model for treating all people—all of life—with reverence.

### STRUCTURE & TRADITIONS

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Individual Wiccans may practice their religion alone (as "solitaries"), in their families, or as part of covens. Covens, or circles, are self governing, and the structure of each group depends upon its particular tradition.

Some are conducted by a High Priestess who may be assisted by a High Priest. Some are initiatory, and many require years of study and hard work leading to initiation as a Priestess or Priest. Some groups are self-taught and members share the responsibility of decision making and leadership.

All Wiccan circles are characterized by the active participation by all members, and work that facilitates the direct and personal experience of the divine by each member. In Wicca it is understood that there are many paths to the sacred, and individuals are encouraged to explore and find the one that works best for them.

There are many traditions (denominations) within the Craft. Some reflect the particular practices of pre-Christian religions by certain ethnic groups such as Celtic, Welsh, Greek, Italian, Norse, Finno-Ugric, Lithuanian, etc. Some are part of the initiatory traditions made public by such practitioners as Gerald Gardner and Alex Sanders. Still others practice with the guidance of liturgical works published and taught by contemporary Witches. Some practitioners search within themselves for inspiration and direction, or work creatively in groups in a mutually agreed-upon structure.

Witches and other Pagan groups sometimes join together in regional, national or international organizations such as Circle or the Re-formed Congregation of the Goddess. The Covenant of the Goddess is an international federation of Wiccan covens and solitary elders with local councils in many areas of the United States, as well as members in Canada and overseas.

## MAGIC & RITUAL

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The primary purpose of magic is the transformation of the self to fully develop one's gifts and capacities to live a full, joyful and spiritual life. Magic is also used for practical ends such as healing, divination, purification, and blessing, and raising energy to achieve positive goals, such as fulfilling work.

Magic is an art. It requires careful training and self-discipline to achieve the conscious direction of will toward a desired end. It also requires wisdom and maturity, patience and passion, and an abiding commitment to the sacred. Magic is never used to gain power over anyone, or to manipulate, injure or control another.

Most rituals are performed within a sacred space demarcated by a circle. Magical work may include singing, ritual drama, chanting, dancing, drumming, meditation, visualization, trances, and other techniques. Ritual usually includes the invocation and honoring of the Goddess and/or the God, and when the celebration, teaching or magical work is done, food and drink are blessed and shared by all.

### ETHICS

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Because all of life is sacred, Wiccans subscribe to one fundamental ethical precept known as the Wiccan Rede: "An it harm none, do what ye will." This honors the freedom that each individual has to ascertain truth, to experience the divine directly, and to determine how best to live her or his own life.

With that freedom, however, comes a profound responsibility that none should be harmed by one's actions. For example, it is unethical to work a spell to control or manipulate others. As in many religions, individual Wiccans may reach different conclusions when applying these precepts to such issues as abortion, vegetarianism, or participation in war.