

The Controversial Cauldron

Ostara - The Spring Equinox 2009

Email
Witches



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A Young Hare by Albrecht Durer (1502)

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Ostara

(The Spring Equinox)

*And the Spring arose on the garden fair,
Like the spirit of Love felt everywhere
And each wild flower and herb on Earth's dark breast
Rose from the dreams of its wintry rest.
The snowdrop and then the violet
Arose from the ground with the warm rain wet
And their breath was mixed with sweet odour sent
From the turf, like the voice and the instrument.*

Percy Bysshe Shelley

Ostara, the Spring (or Vernal) Equinox, is one of the Lesser Sabbats of the Witch's annual calendar and today, in the northern hemisphere, is celebrated on the 21st March, although this date may vary by a day or two depending upon the Earth's rotation around the Sun. In the southern hemisphere the equivalent Sabbat is Mabon, the Autumn Equinox. Ostara is the Anglo-Saxon term for Eostre, the Teutonic Goddess of Spring and fertility whose festival of old was celebrated on the day of the Vernal Equinox (the equinoxes are the points in Spring and Autumn at which the Sun's path crosses the celestial equator, at which time the periods of day and night become equal in length).

Ostara is also known by various other names, such as: the Rites of Spring, Lady's Day, Alban Eilir, Festival of the Trees, Eostre's Day. As was to happen with many popular pagan festivals, when Christianity arrived, Ostara was renamed and many of its customs and symbolism incorporated into the Christian holiday of Easter. Easter takes its name from Eostre, the same Goddess of Spring associated with Ostara, and like Ostara, its date is variable, being calculated as the first Sunday after the first Full Moon, after the Vernal Equinox.

In the mythology of the Witch's Sabbats, Ostara celebrates the return of the Goddess from the Underworld. Warmed by the strengthening light of the Sun, she awakes bursting forth from her sleep and blankets the earth with fertility. As the Sun God stretches and grows to maturity, he and the Goddess walk the fields and forests and, delighted with the abundance of life and nature, inspire all living things to grow and reproduce.

Ostara is a time to celebrate the arrival of Spring and the renewal and rebirth of nature after the cold dark days of

Winter. Since the early buds of nature appeared at Imbolc, the Sun has continued to climb and gain in strength until now, at Ostara, daylight and darkness are in equal balance. As days lengthen and overtake night, so too does the earth begin to thaw from the last freezing grip of winter. Now is the time our farmers make ready their ploughs and prepare their oxen to pull them, and seed corn saved from the last harvest is checked to ensure its quality and suitability for planting.

To our ancestors, the success of the planting season and the harvest to follow was of life and death importance, for the bounty to be gained from the new plantings would be needed to sustain them through the hardships of the next winter. Today, while agriculture is still a major contributor to our national economy, many of our winter food needs are subsidized by foreign imports, and given modern farming techniques and the mechanisation of the industry, the hardships of the old days are but a distant memory. Despite this, in some of the more remote parts of the country, the customs and practises of our ancestors are still being used.



"Ostara" (1901) by Johannes Gehrts.

The goddess Eostre/Ostara flies through the heavens surrounded by Roman-inspired putti, beams of light and animals. Germanic peoples look up at the goddess from the realm below.

Fire

Ostara is one of the Fire Festivals observed by our ancestors, who lit bonfires and torches as a focal point of the celebrations. Fire is especially symbolic of the rising Sun, and of old, it was customary to light bonfires on top of nearby hills in his honour. In Germany, Scandinavia and in the Norse traditions of England, wheels made from wood, straw and branches were assembled at the top of nearby hills. There at the appointed time, normally at sunrise, the wheels would be set aflame and rolled down the hill through the fields below; a ritual performed symbolic of the Sun warming and thawing the earth which would later be ploughed and planted. Charred sticks from the Sun-wheels would then be saved and taken home to protect the home against fire and lightning. Likewise, the ashes from the fires would be spread in the fields to protect them against future thunder storms.

Today, more out of health and safety reasons, modern pagans might use a Catherine Wheel attached to the top of a pole to symbolise the old Sun-wheel fires. Likewise, the custom of rolling a flaming wheel down a hill was replaced. Now instead, brightly coloured eggs painted to represent the sunlight of spring are rolled down hillsides at Easter. The egg is a potent symbol of fertility and is one of the sacred symbols associated with the Goddess Ostara.

Fertility

The main focus at Ostara was to honour the Gods and Goddesses whose blessings were invoked to promote fertility during the planting season. One of the fertility animals associated with the Goddess at Ostara is the Snake, which emerges from its winter hibernation to bask in the spring sunshine. Due to the constant shedding of its skin, the snake was seen as a symbol of new life. In many of the world's creation myths, the Goddess in the form of a snake laid the "Egg of Original Beings", better known as the "World Egg" or the "Cosmic Egg of Creation", which was split open by the heat of the Sun God. The inside yolk of the egg represents the Sun God, while the outside shell is seen as the womb of the Goddess. The whole, therefore, is uniquely symbolic of creation, birth and new beginnings.

It was an old custom at Ostara to collect eggs, paint them to match those of the local wild birds and place them in baskets woven from straw, imitable of their nests. Birds were commonly believed to be the messengers of the Gods, so these baskets were given away to friends and neighbours as talismans for good luck and prosperity. Eggs were also ritually eaten at Ostara and the shells buried in the fields to promote fertility.

Another fertility animal associated with the Goddess at Ostara was the Hare, this due to its constant mating activity in spring. Hares mate while they are still very young, and the female can produce several litters each year, from which activity the expression "mad as a March hare" was derived. The hare has often been regarded as a sacred animal of the lunar Goddess, because an image of a hare can often be seen in the full moon. It was from this illusion that Witches were once believed to shape-shift into hares. Today the rabbit is more prolific and active at this time and is now one of the common symbols of Easter.

Food

As with all Sabbat celebrations, food plays an important part in the festivities. If we turn back the clock and look at the conditions our ancestors survived in, by the time of Spring many of their food stocks saved from the previous

years harvest, and meat saved from the last cull and slaughter of their animals, would now be running out. With the arrival of a new Spring and the renewed regeneration of life and nature, many of their fears for survival were over. Ostara to them marked an end to eating cured and salted meat with dried vegetables. As animals came out of hibernation, fresh game became available, and as the Sun climbed higher, herbs and new young plants replaced the old. As such, the Ostara feast was always one to remember.

Ostara correspondences



Animals - Hares, Rabbits and Snakes.

Plants and Herbs - Crocus flowers, Daffodils, Jasmine, Irish Moss, Snowdrops and Ginger.

Incense - Jasmine, Frankincense, Myrrh, Dragon's Blood, Cinnamon, Nutmeg, Aloes wood, Benzoin, Musk, African Violet, Sage, Strawberry, Lotus, Violet flowers, Orange peel or Rose petals.

Stones - Aquamarine, Rose Quartz and Moonstone.

Food - All food in tune with the season, including: eggs of all types, hard-boiled or in a salad, honey cakes, first fruits of the season, fish, cakes, biscuits, cheeses, honey and ham, and whatever game you can hunt.

In conclusion, metaphysically, Ostara - the Spring Equinox is a time of renewal and new beginnings, a time to plant your seeds and plan for future. Change is in the air and if you don't do it

now, the year will creep in and you never will. This is the ideal time to clean your home, to Spring clean, get rid of the old and welcome in the new. It may not be easy, but some simple physical work and mental effort can be focused to rid your life and home of negativity, clear the problems of the past and provide for a brighter future.

"All things began in order, so shall they end, and so shall they begin again; according to the ordainer of order and mystical mathematics of the city of heaven".

(Sir Thomas Browne 1605–82, The Garden of Cyrus (1658) ch. 5).



Gods of Birth and Rebirth

By Ardriana Cahill

We focus on gods of lust, birth, rebirth and resurrection at this time of year. The egg is the singular representation of the earth pregnant with new life and all that has died before returning to life again.

Adonis (Greek) Phoenician/Syrian beautiful youth deity of rebirth and vegetation. His fertility cult belonged to women alone.

Aphrodite, (Greek) Goddess of love and war.

Attis (Phrygian) God adopted by the Greeks, tied to a fertility cult through the virgin birth of his mother.

Bacchus (Roman) Rustic wine god of lust and fertility. **Haumea** (Hawaii) She was identified with her mother Papa.

Dionysus (Greek) God of lust and fertility. His flower festival for opening the new wine called Anthesteria was held in February.

Haumea (Hawaii) She was identified with her mother, Papa, and was said to be continually reborn.

Horus (Egyptian) God of rebirth and resurrection.

Jesus (Hebrew) God of rebirth and resurrection.

Krishna (Hindu) God of rebirth and resurrection.

Eros (Greek) God of lust and sex.

Faunus (Roman) God of the wilds, mountain pastures and fertility, who was also seen as a protector of herdsman and their herds.

Kostroma (Russian) Fertility Goddess and personification of Spring. In Russian mythology she dies at the end of each Spring, only to arise once more at the end of the following Winter.

Mithra/Mithras (Persia) God of birth, rebirth and resurrection.

Mars (Roman) From the Etruscan agricultural god, Maris, he was originally a god of fertility and protector of cattle, fields and boundaries.

Mylitta (Babylonian/Assyrian) Goddess of fertility and childbirth.

Pan or Phaunos (Greek) God of nature, Pan is god of lust and male virility. God of shepherds and flocks.

Venus (Roman) Goddess mostly equivalent to Aphrodite. Venus was the goddess of love, beauty, sexuality, and fertility (but in her earliest age, Venus was also a goddess of war whose attributes were later given to Mars).

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Ostara Ritual

By Crone



Set your altar with a pastel cloth, your usual altar tools, an abundance of spring flowers or potted plants, and a basket of flower petals, small flowers, or green leaves. Place a small statue of the goddess of your choice on the left as you face the altar, and the god of your choice on the right. In the center place a small cauldron with dry wood laid over some easily ignited charcoal. (Good to have this on a metal or ceramic plate or tray.) Wear a pastel dress or shirt, and a wreath of flowers on your head. (Pastel ribbons may be substituted for flowers.) Have matches and paper and pen handy.

Cleansing:

Breathe in the fragrance of spring flowers as you say,

"My eyes are clear to see the beauty of Spring;

My ears are open to hear the songs of the season;

My heart is free to find balance in this space."

Pick up the basket of petals and cast the Circle by scattering them as you walk slowly deosil, repeating these words:

"I walk the earth in friendship, not in dominance.
Mother Goddess and Father God, instill within me
through these flowers a warmth for all living things.
Teach me to revere the Earth and all its treasures.
May I never forget." (Cunningham, Solitary Practitioner)

"The Circle is cast, the ritual begun.
May the ancient powers of Moon and Sun, Bless me and my presence here
Knowing they are always near.
I balance between dark and light
In this moment between day and night."

Invoking the Directions:

Face each direction as you invoke the spirits. If you wish, a small vase of spring flowers in each direction can serve as a focus.

"Spirits of the East, Spirits of Air,
Awaken me with your Spring breeze."

"Spirits of the South, Spirits of Fire,
Warm me with your rising sun."

"Spirits of the West, Spirits of Water,
Wash me with your gentle rain."

"Spirits of the North, Spirits of Earth,
Clothe me in your finery of new growth."

Invoking the Goddess and the God:

"Great Goddess, you move forward
from the icy grasp of winter.
Now is the greening, when the fragrance
of flowers drifts on the breeze.
Now is the Spring with promises of new growth.
This is the beginning. Life renews itself
by your magick."

"Mighty God, stretching and rising,
eager in your youth
and bursting with the promise of Spring,
you now stand shoulder to shoulder with
your mother."

"Goddess and God, female and male, in
balance and harmony, you show the way
for fertility of animals and crops.
Show also the way of balance in my life.
I ask you to be with me in this Circle."

"All is in balance
As I stand between the worlds.
I stand between dark and light.
I stand between day and night.
I stand between joy and sorrow,
As the past fades into tomorrow."

Magickal Working:

Light the fire in your cauldron with
these words:

"As I feel the warmth of sun
I know that Spring is now begun.
There's something I must cast away
That new growth can come forth today."

Gaze into the growing flames and focus
on balance. In this moment when the
days and nights are equal, meditate on
balance in your life. Focus on spiritual,

mental, physical, and emotional balance.
Identify what keeps you off balance—
demands of a job, an unwholesome
relationship, an unmet desire...only you
know what it is. As you become aware,
write it on the paper. Hold it in your
hand for a moment. Then cast it into the
flames in your cauldron. Watch and
chant as the paper is burned and as the
flames grow smaller.

Chant softly gaining in strength and
volume:

"Through balance I become One.
Your hold on me now is undone."

Closing the Circle:

Now dismiss the Directions, again
facing each direction.

"Farewell, Spirits of the North,
I thank you. Now you may go forth."

"Farewell, Spirits of the West,
I thank you. You may go and rest."

"Farewell, Spirits of the South,
May truth be spread by word of mouth."

"Farewell, Spirits of the East,
I thank you. You may go and feast."

"Lady and Lord my thanks to you
For being here, steadfast and true.
I know you hear all that I say
As I am poised 'tween night and day.
To insure that the magick does come
true
I will help it to happen in all that I do.
My thanks for your blessings; my thanks
for your care.
Go now, if you wish. You are
everywhere."

"The light of the Maiden surrounds me.
The love of the Mother enfolds me. The
wisdom of the Crone empowers me.
Wherever I am, the Goddess is
And all is well.
Blessed be."



Animal Wisdom

Rabbits & Hares

by Pari



Time to hop into Spring! And who better to do it with than those adorable long-eared and short fluffy-tailed creatures, the Rabbit and his cousin, the Hare - both of whom are well associated with fertility, Spring, creativity and new beginnings.

The Rabbit and Hare have also long been associated with the Goddess and were the totem of several - the hare to Artemis and Hecate, the sacred rabbit to Aphrodite, to Holda who was accompanied by several torch-bearing hares, to Cerridwen and Freyja who both had hare attendants, and, of course, to Eostre who was said to have taken the shape of a hare at each full moon and whose Anglo-Saxon counterpart, Ostara, was often depicted with a white hare by her side. There are many more goddesses associated with or attended to by both rabbits and hares and, in such, these gentle creatures can assist us in becoming more attuned to the lunar cycle. All rabbits in general are associated with the Moon, magick, luck, love, creativity, success, sensitivity, agility, spontaneity, abundance, rebirth and, of course, fertility.

There is something to be said about the "March Hare" who is typically seen this month darting around at all hours of the day and night when normally they are nocturnal creatures, and there stands reason behind the old saying "mad as a March Hare," for March is the beginning of their mating season. The males will be seen acting strangely and appear quite "mad" in their antics, especially if rebuffed by the female.

Rabbits are also out and about at this time of year, and are there to teach us that fertility has returned to the land and to us too, in all respects. Ostara is the time to rejoice in the return of the Goddess in her maiden form, and in the growth and early maturity of the God who is youthful and now coming into his own. It is a time to awaken and continue welcoming the return of the Sun, as we cast off the cloak of winter and are now ready to begin to put



into play all that we have thought about and mulled over during our own internal musings during the slow, cold months we've been delivered from. And it is a time to give thanks for the resurrection of life, once dormant, but now once again alive and fertile. The Rabbit and Hare are most happy to attend to the season and to welcome it in. And with this Totem, our own lives and endeavors are assured to grow in leaps and bounds.

There are striking differences between rabbits and hares. Newborn rabbits are called kittens, while newborn hares are called leverets. And while baby rabbits are born naked, helpless and blind, baby hares are fully furred at birth and are able to move independently and able to immediately see. Hares can actually live on their own very soon after birth. As each matures, the common Cottontail Rabbit will be smaller than the Hare (who has much larger ears, back legs and overall mass), and will have a year-round lighter brown color fur, whereas hares usually have splotches of black in their coat, and the overall color will change from grayish-brown in summer to white in winter. But even with their slight differences, both will help us leap fortuitously into the newness of Spring.

Since rabbits are often prey for many larger animals, they are usually on guard and can be quite timid or leery of the slightest movement in their surroundings. Their ears are large and will stand straight up when they detect danger. They keep their eyes trained on both land and sky. Luckily, rabbits are also quick thinkers and quick movers. In a protective move, they are known to double back to elude a predator. Those with Rabbit Totem will find themselves more quickly capable of seeing all sides of an issue, having an increase in clairvoyance and especially clairaudience, and becoming much more acutely aware of their surroundings - all making for clearer visions and rapid, auspicious decisions. This Totem teaches us how to never again box ourselves into any corner, and thus frees us from limitation.

While teaching of freedom, Rabbit will also teach us the value of knowing when to speed up, when to slow down, and when to double back to revisit something we may have missed or need to set right. This includes all species of Rabbit, including the Cottontail, Snowshoe Rabbit, Hare, Jackrabbit, and even all varieties of domestic rabbits. In watching this animal, we see that it is not uncommon for it to stand stone-still while, ever on the alert, it assesses its situation. Alternately, we can also see that it knows when to dart away from danger or to run like the wind whenever it needs to. For this, rabbits are often associated with fear. Even in the story *Alice In Wonderland* we see the White Rabbit (white symbolic of the purest essence of one's Self) showing his fear of being late and yet leading Alice into a fantastic world of adventure. Fear has its place in situations of survival, as it attempts to show us how to be careful and mindful as we go after our new goals. But by having this Totem, we will also be reminded to not let fear hinder nor keep us from moving forward toward where we want or need to be. They also teach us that how we think, will often manifest. So we must dispel old fears that are not serving any purpose other than to thwart our movements. But with increased intuition coming into play with this Totem, we are assured of success and for good fortune to follow if we stay mindful and alert during all our new adventures. Like Rabbit, we must rely on finely-tuned senses, agility and wit.



being. These mystical creatures, known throughout the world in legend, lore and literature, are gentle leaders, pushing us toward fertile grounds, physically, mentally and spiritually.

Rabbits are vegetarians, eating soft bark, leaves, herbs and fruit. As a Totem, they will encourage us to start eating more lightly too. Fresh salads with baby greens, new early Spring vegetables, and a lighter menu in general will be most beneficial as we head into the more active time of year. Gone are the heavier and more substantial Winter meals. Rabbit shows it is time to be light on our feet, more active and

more playful.

Rabbits and Hares have long been associated with magick and the ability to walk between the worlds and commune with the faeries. This is because both are most often seen at those magickal 'tween times of dusk and dawn when it is safer for them to be out and about. During the day they stick close to home, which is usually a hidden burrow or, as with the North American Cottontail, in thickets or dense brush. Their ability to dart quickly amidst the shadows as they walk between the earthly realm and the spirit realm, often disappearing and reappearing in the blink of an eye, makes them privy to hidden knowledge and wisdom. It is no wonder rabbits and hares have often been witches' familiars. And it is no wonder that throughout the centuries it has been thought of as lucky to carry a rabbit's foot in one's pocket, for they are a quite magickal Totem.

Even in the stars we can see the mysticism of Rabbit. Across the night sky, the constellation Lepus is the Hare that forever eludes Orion's hunting dogs.

*In the black furror of a field
I saw an old witch-hare this night;
And she cocked a lissome ear,
And she eyed the moon so bright,
And she nibbled of the green;
And I whispered "Whsst! witch-hare,"
Away like a ghostie o'er the field
She fled, and left the moonlight there.*

(19th century children's poem by Walter de la Mare)

Sources:

Animal-Speak by Ted Andrews

<http://www.endicott-studio.com/rdrm/rrRabbits4.html>

Rabbit and Hare, themselves

© Patricia J. Martin, February 27, 2009

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<http://www.peacefulpaths.com>

Crafter's Corner

A Bird Feeding Table

By Wes Sanders

What you will need:

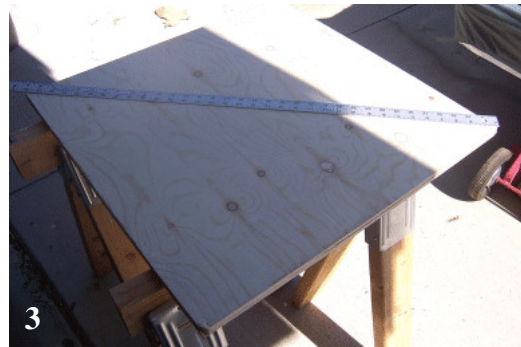
- 1 - 4" x 4" x 5' wooden post
- 1 - 2' x 2' x 3/4" plywood
- 2 - 2" x 2" x 6' wood for borders and supports
- 16 - 2" wood screws
- 8 - 1 5/8" wood screws
- Tape Measure
- Hand Saw
- Screw Driver
- 1 - 5 gal. Bucket (if not using cement)
- Shovel and Cement (optional, if planning to permanently place in the ground)

To start, I needed to decide what type of material I was going to use. I wanted to keep it as simple as possible, so I decided to use just some simple stuff. I had an old 4 by 4, 5 foot long post in the back yard, so I used it as the main column. Then I found a piece of 2 ft. by 2 ft. by 3/4 in. Plywood. Next, I needed to support the Table so I found some 2in. by 2 in. pieces that were lying around. That pretty much rounded out what I needed (Pic 1).

First, I cut 2 by 2's to make a border around the outside edge of the Tabletop, and I attached them with 2 in. wood screws (Pic 2). Then I attached the Tabletop to the 4 by 4 post with four 2 in. long wood screws. To find the center of the Plywood Tabletop, draw lines from corner to corner... where they intersect, is the center (Pic 3).

Next were the supports. I measured in 1 in. from the outside edge of the Tabletop and down from the bottom of the Tabletop 12 ins. I then measured the 2 by 2's and cut them with a handsaw to the angles required. I attached them to the underside of the Tabletop and to the sides of the 4 by 4 with 1 5/8 in. wood screws (Pic 4).

I was going to dig a hole and put it in the hole, but I decided to put it in a 5 gal. Home Depot pot instead. I just had one lying around. I could have used concrete, but I decided that if I ever wanted to move it, it would be much easier to remove the dirt than the concrete. If you wet the dirt as you fill the bucket, it will compact down nicely. I did not paint my bird feeder because I was afraid the birds would eat the paint (Pic 5). There are many ways to build a Feeder... some can be very fancy... mine is really simple, and if I can do it, so can you. It only took a couple of hours and cost nothing, as I already had stuff lying around. BB, Wes





Legacy

Spring's Arrival

by Ardriana Cahill



My family tradition has hidden in the Catholic Church for generations. Not until late in my generation, did we break with the church. My children all attended Catholic schools and not until their decisions to not take Confirmation, did we, as a family, realize that it was time to come out of hiding. Thus, much of this essay will feature how we practiced Easter traditions as they relate to the tradition of Ostara.

Of all the incongruity of Christian holidays borrowing from the pagan traditions, the ones the Church took from Spring fertility holidays are the most ironic. Because nothing says "my god rose from the dead, today" like ruffled bonnets, egg hunts and flower gathering! Like Winterfest, Easter traditions are so pagan that celebrating those Christian holidays, allowed us to practice our traditions while "hiding in plain sight."

My family did not celebrate the equinoxes; so Ostara and Mabon are new terms to us. But we did celebrate Easter in the pagan way. Ostara, the Spring Equinox, is the modern witchcraft interpretation for the spring traditions commonly found at Easter. So our family traditions could be moved to Ostara and be consistent with many traditions. Days before the holiday, we planted spring flowers or bulbs and wrote our desires on small pieces of parchment and buried them under the new plants. Then with the blossoming of these plants, so would our desires blossom. We bring in cut flowers to place around the house or hang silk garlands to herald the season.



Most pagan rituals begin at sunset on the eve of the actual holiday. However, as the sun returns to rule the sky, many traditions hold their rituals at sunrise, including most Christian denominations. Although, just as most pagan traditions, there is a Catholic tradition of holding Easter Vigil which is to say, beginning the ritual the night before at sunset while waiting for the sunrise. Very often the church vigil is candlelit. Thus candles, fire, remained as that perennial element in our solar high holidays, even in the church. Like Winterfest, we light watch candles and place them in the windows, to do the work for us if we can't stay awake all night waiting for the sun.

Another part of the "eve" traditions is, again like Winterfest, getting new pajamas. Opposite of our Winterfest PJs, the children get a set of lightweight, cotton pajamas the night before. In the west, March is usually a false spring with lovely warm days and cool nights, before the end of the month blows cold again. So, sleeping in new clothes is a special blessing that inspires anticipation of the morning. Then, with the sunrise came all the usually Easter surprises. Like Winterfest, we could eat candy before breakfast. Children get small, inexpensive toys and games (Supersoakers, balls, jump ropes, Lego's, jigsaw puzzles) along with candy. We would also get a special token; a lovely charm, a polished stone, a book, something with deeper meaning that lasted beyond the day. Then, of course, we'd have an egg hunt, indoors or out.

As with all sacred and rite-of-passage rituals, a new garment is traditional, so we got new clothes for Easter. Most pagan holidays are "threshold" holidays where we celebrate the transitional moment between an ending and a beginning. These "tween times" are very magickal in our tradition and high points of the year. Pagans celebrate the threshold of the Old/New Year on Samhain when the veil between the worlds is thinnest. We celebrate the "tween" thresholds that mark the beginning of Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall. We celebrate the beginning of the first plantings, the birth of fields and fauna, the ripening, the gathering, the storing of our harvest. Getting new clothes was a repeated tradition of all our family holidays. They were magickal talismans that personified the "newness" that came with each holiday. To traverse these thresholds in worn out clothes would be to drag the dregs of the old into the new. So garments like christening gowns, burial garments, wedding dresses, graduation gowns, prom dresses, tuxedos, (even a business suit to start a new job) have always marked transitions that bless these beginnings with magickal hope for the future.



Going to church was just an excuse to dress up and go out to breakfast afterwards while parading in our new finery. Since mine is a Family Tradition, all our holidays are a bit different than Wiccan traditions, less ritualized, less formal. Our holidays are always a celebration of family, in one way or another. Imbolg celebrates young lovers. (One of my daughters married on Imbolg.) Bealtinne celebrates the living generations, Samhain the deceased generations. Easter (or Ostara) is all about children. It is purely their holiday. It is a celebration of birth and youth and the hope and continuation of the family.

In addition to the new sleepwear and the clothes for church,¹⁰ we also got new casual clothes; a bright, spring-colored shorts or pants set that continued the day's theme of new clothes, except these clothes were dedicated to play. They weren't wrapped but just lay next to our baskets of toys and goodies. After breakfast, we dashed home to change into our new play clothes so we could end up at a family members home for the rest of the day with backyard games, perhaps another egg hunt and a barbeque at sunset.

When evening fell, we would gather around the table and do what we might call ritual. We would meditate with a purpose, pull out our divination tools, channel a lesson or other wisdom, do magick and share family stories and magickal experiences. There was not a lot of divine worshipping in these rituals, but a lot of family bonding and we thanked the divine for each other. In the end, we would drift to some entertainment that continued late into the night.



Small rituals were the celebration throughout the day; planting wishes, lighting candles to the sun, wearing magickal clothes, getting a special charm and playing the whole day...ending with good food and good company and magick.

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Pagan Symbolism

The Three Hares

By George Knowles

As was to happen with many popular pagan festivals, when Christianity arrived, Ostara was renamed and many of its customs and symbolism incorporated into the Christian holiday of Easter. Easter takes its name from Eostre, the same Goddess of Spring associated with Ostara. Like Ostara, the date of Easter is variable, being calculated as the first Sunday after the first Full Moon, after the Vernal Equinox.

In the early days of Christianity and in order to broaden the appeal of the new religion, rather than alienate their new converts, many pagan symbols, and in some cases their practises were simply incorporated into the décor of newly built Christian churches. Today many images associated with the old religion can still be seen carved into the wooden ceilings and stonework of surviving old churches, chapels, abbeys and cathedrals. This image depicted is taken from a cloister window of Paderborn Cathedral in Germany, and dates to around 1500.



Here we have an image of three hares chasing around a circle, joined only by three ears that form a triangle in the centre. However, the illusion is that each hare has two ears!!! Why, is still a mystery that scholars have yet to solve!

This image of the Three Hares is not an unusual one and can be found in countries stretching from England in the UK, all across continental Europe including: France, Germany and Switzerland, and to as far away as China. Indeed the earliest known image of the Three Hares was found in the Mogao caves near Dunhuang, China, which is believed to have been created during the Sui to Tang dynasties (581-907 AD).

Having been found in so many countries with varying cultures and differing religions, over time the original meaning of the Three Hares has been lost and taken on new meanings. One old theory of pagan belief, was that the Ancients believed the hare to be a hermaphrodite, an animal that could procreate without a mate, hence its mystical association with fertility and the pagan goddesses Ostara/Eostre. Later in Christian theology the hare became associated with the Virgin Mary, and as such, the pagan celebration of Ostara was renamed as the Christian holiday of Easter.

Many theories have been put forward as to the meaning of the Three Hares, but none can say sure. In literature the question is often posed as a puzzle, the earliest found to date being in *Le Moyen Age Fantastique* by Jurgis Baltrusaitis, which shows a 1576 Dutch engraving with the puzzle given in Dutch and French around the image:

The secret is not great when one knows it.

But it is something to one who does it.

Turn and turn again and we will also turn,

So that we give pleasure to each of you.

And when we have turned, count our ears,

It is there, without any disguise, you will find a marvel.



On the Rocks

Calcite

by Pari



For Ostara, I've chosen one of the most varied and abundant minerals that Mother Earth loves to create. It is a mineral found on every one of Her continents and in almost every color; a veritable Pagan's basket of decorated Earth "eggs" ~ meet Calcite!

Calcite, CaCO_3 , is a calcium carbonate with a hardness of only 3; it can be scratched with a fingernail. Many varieties are transparent to translucent, and their lusters are vitreous, meaning glassy. This mineral is found in crystal form, usually rhombohedrons, but can also be found in scalenohedrons (a.k.a. "Dogtooth Spar"), hexagonal prism, pinacoidal, fibrous, nodular, stellate, dendritic, granular, or in massive form. In fact, there are well over 300 crystalline forms of Calcite that can produce thousands of variations and in a multitude of colors, indicating a most versatile stone.



Calcite is a Fire stone (although some varieties exhibit a propensity toward Water), and is highly noted for its purifying, cleansing, rejuvenating and revitalizing nature - all befitting this rebirthing time of year. Calcites are superior for assisting us in breaking out of old molds and patterns, burning off what is no longer needed, and moving us courageously into new worlds. But, for as much as it is a courage-producing and invigorating stone, Calcite works with an unmistakable gentleness. Like the soft rains of Spring that nurture the soils which hold the plant seeds that will finally begin to emerge, Calcite brings its own gentle waves of renewal and hope. It is a most refreshing stone.

Calcite gets its name from the Greek word "chalix" meaning "lime", for Calcite is the main component of Limestone. Through additional heat, pressure and time, Limestone then becomes Marble or Chalk through recrystallization. But all are basically composed of the Calcite mineral. Even seashells are composed of a layer of Calcite, as is the common egg. Eggs - the long-revered symbol of Ostara and connected to many a creation tale - are more than 90% calcium carbonate, the

bulk of the shell being made of small Calcite crystals. Calcite is also a primary component of most cave formations and is found in stalactites and stalagmites, revealing this mineral's ability in connecting the Earth realm to the Spirit realm. As the Spring Equinox begins opening the veil between worlds, and which will culminate at Beltane, Calcite can be a great help for peering into the faerie realm and for connecting with the fey, the elementals, our totem animals or spirit guides. It is excellent for use in faerie magick.



There is a deep connection between this stone and that of the plant and animal kingdoms in Nature. Like the plant life that now once again peeks out of the ground and lusts for the sun after the long cold winter, Calcite helps us view the world with new eyes. It can aid in clairvoyance and intuition and often promotes lucid dreaming, but in its Fire capacity it forces us to take an active part in what we are newly seeing. Calcite releases electrical impulses when placed under pressure, and is, in fact, an energy amplifier. Along with its properties of fluorescence, phosphorescence, thermoluminescence, and even triboluminescence - all affording it the ability to take us to new dimensions, and quickly so - this stone also contains a prismatic energy, in which it takes whatever energy is directed inward, separates it and then returns it outward with double the intensity.



Like Spring flowers, Calcite comes in a beautiful array of colors and varieties. The white or clear Calcites are known to bring insight and clarity to any situation. A common form of the clear variety is called Iceland Spar which superbly demonstrates the property of double refraction common in many Calcites, and which was discovered in the stone in 1669 by Erasmus Bartholinus. Double refraction occurs when light that enters the stone is split into two beams which bend at different angles and travel at slightly different speeds. As they do this, they will duplicate whatever is seen through the stone. For this, Calcite is often used in the manufacture of various types of lenses. Witches will commonly use this variety of Calcite in their spellwork, often placing a written spell under the stone in order to give it strength, focus and double the power. This ability to double refract can also be related to the Equinox, when night and day are equally split in two.

There are so many different varieties and colors of Calcite, each with their own unique metaphysical properties and support, that I will only give a brief description here on several of the more common colors, and will end by concentrating mainly on the green crystal mass variety that is so akin to this Sabbat.

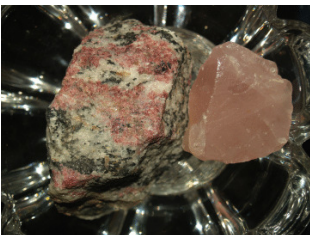


Blue Calcite soothes emotions and brings ease of communication - a must for any writer or artist struggling to put down that first pen or brushstroke. It enhances psychic ability and aids in dream recall.



Orange Calcite brings confidence, creativity and innovation, along with stimulating sexuality. It is known as a "mineral aphrodisiac". Like a warm ray of sunshine,

this color Calcite can help one overcome depression and shake off those winter blues. The honey-colored variety is soothing, but brings persistence and determination, and can literally "teach an old dog new tricks".



Pink Calcite (the opaque kind called "Mangano Calcite") connects the mind to the heart. It aids in bringing compassion and an empathic connection to others, and can help with long

distance healing and enhancing one's well-being. It clears emotions and brings a peaceful, loving energy to its bearer.



Red Calcite is, of course, connected to vitality - the iron rich life-giving "blood" of the Earth. It promotes a willingness to experience life and helps one to welcome new experiences as they

arrive. It also increases the pathways in which life energy (chi, or qi) can flow, but does it calmly and never scatters energy. It quiets any inner chatter.



But for this harbinger of springtime, I am thoroughly attracted to Green Calcite, especially the Emerald Green variety. This stone is like taking a plunge into a crystal clear pool of

fresh spring water. It gives the feeling of renewal of purpose, and urges the heart to embrace whatever the mind can imagine. Stagnation does not stand a chance with this mineral. It cools emotions and soothes irritability, while gently promoting change and encouraging abundance. And where all Calcites are known to physically help assimilate calcium in the body, (something much needed after the "milking" times of Imbolc), and for helping with problems related to the kidneys, pancreas and spleen, it is the green variety that can also help rid the body of infection and/or foreign microorganisms. Green is the color of health and healing. It is the color of the creative forces of Nature. It is the color of growth.

As the light green grasses of the season return and the trees begin to bud, place a piece of Green Calcite near anything you wish to bring fertility, health and abundance to - anything, from your newly-planted garden...to your magick and spellwork...to your relationships...or even just simply to your own state of mind. Let this fantastic stone help you connect more fully with Nature, enter the worlds of the elementals, and may it bring about new life and color to your world as you merrily wander into Springtime. Happy Ostara!

Sources:

Peterson Field Guides: Rocks and Minerals, Frederick H. Pough

The Book of Stones, Robert Simmons & Naisha Ahsian
Calcite, itself.

Photos © Patricia J. Martin

© Patricia J. Martin, February 22, 2009

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<http://www.peacefulpaths.com>

In Worship of Trees

The Alder Tree

The Alder tree (*Alnus glutinosa*) is one of the sacred trees of Wicca/ Witchcraft and was a favoured tree of the ancient Druids. According to the Celtic Tree Calendar (the Beth-Luis-Nion calendar, a reconstruction by Robert “von Ranke” Graves author of *The White Goddess*), the Alder tree is the fourth tree of the year and represents the period 18th March – 14th April. As such, it is associated with Ostara (21st March), one of the Lesser Witch’s Sabbats.

In folklore, the Alder tree is known as the “King of the Waters” and has the “Willow” tree as its Queen. This association is due to their natural habitat near lakes, rivers and streams. The Alder tree is native to the British Isles and continental Europe where it flourishes in temperate and cold climates. The leaves of the Alder are broadly ovate, stalked and usually smooth. It produces catkins (named for their resemblance to cat’s-tail) that are formed in the autumn, the fruiting ones having scales rather like tiny fir cones. The tree’s flowers appear in early spring before the leaves are fully out and its woody, nearly globular, female catkins are its so-called berries.

Alder trees are usually small in stature, but in perfect conditions can reach heights of 70 ft (21 meters). There are four stages of production on the Alder tree at any given time, the old cones of the previous year’s fruiting, the new year’s leaves or leaf-buds, and the new year’s male and female catkins. The tree matures at about 30 years of age at which time it is capable of producing a full crop of seeds. After this, it can live on to reach an age of about 150 years. It is also the only broad-leaved tree to produce cones. To the ancients, the Alder was particularly revered, for it appeared to bleed like humans. When an Alder tree is felled, its inner wood is white, but gradually over time it turns to a reddish-pink.

The wood of the Alder has many



uses. When young it is brittle and very easily worked, while its mature wood is tinted and veined. Due to the Alder’s resistance to water, it was used in the construction of bridges, particularly the long heavy piles driven into the ground or sometimes under water to support it. This quality for long endurance under water also made it valuable for pumps, troughs and sluices for which purposes it is said to have been used in sixteenth-century Venice, as well as France and Holland.

The roots and knots of the Alder furnished good material for cabinet-makers. These were used for making clogs in old Lancashire mill-towns, however, demand exceeded supply and Birch had to be used instead. It was also used for making carts and spinning wheels, bowls, spoons, wooden heels and herring-barrel staves, etc. On the continent it was largely used for making cigar-boxes for which its reddish Cedar-like wood was well suited. After lying in a bog, the wood of the Alder has the colour but not the hardness of Ebony. In the Highlands of Scotland this ‘bog Alder’ was used for making handsome chairs from which it became known as ‘Scottish Mahogany’. The branches of the Alder make a good charcoal, which was a valuable commodity for making gunpowder. Dyers, tanners and leather dressers used its bark commercially and fishermen use it for making nets.

In Celtic folklore, the Alder is associated with the fairies and it was believed that doorways to the fairy realm were concealed within its trunk. The Alder was sacred to the god ‘Bran’ who carried a branch of it with him during the ‘Battle of the Trees’ saga, an old Celtic legend. Bran’s totem animal was the Raven, which also became associated with the Alder. Ritual pipes and whistles were often made from Alder wood, many in the shape of the Raven. A Taliesin riddle once asked the question: “Why is the Alder purple?”, and the answer is because Bran wore purple into battle. In some Norse and Irish legends, the first man was formed from the Alder

while the first women came from the Rowan.

Italian witches used to mix the sap from the Alder tree with that of the madder plant, a Eurasian plant (*Rubia tinctorum* of the family Rubiaceae) to produce red dyes. These were then used to colour ribbons, cords and sashes for use in magick and ritual. Ritual bags made of wool and dyed red have been highly prized by Italian witches since classical times. Also, in Italy, the wood of the Alder was used to light the fires for the spring festival at Ostara.

In dyeing, the Alder's bark is used as a foundation for blacks with the addition of copperas. Alone, it dyes woollens a reddish colour (Aldine Red). The Laplanders chew it and dye leathern garments with their saliva. The young shoots of the Alder dye yellow, and with a little copper a yellowish-grey, which is useful in the half-tints and shadows of flesh in tapestry. The shoots cut in March will dye cinnamon, and if dried and powdered produce a tawny shade. The fresh wood yields a pinkish-fawn dye and the catkins a green dye. The leaves have been used in tanning leather. They are also clammy and, if spread in a room, are said to catch fleas on their sticky glutinous surface.



Magical and Medicinal uses:

Alder acts as both a tonic and astringent. A decoction of the bark is useful to bathe swellings and inflammations especially of the throat and has been known to cure ague. Peasants on the Alps have been reportedly cured of rheumatism by being covered with bags full of the heated leaves. Placing Alder leaves in your shoes will ease weary feet, which is a useful tip for walkers and hikers. Alder leaves, if collected in the morning with the dew still upon them, are sticky and gummy, and if carried around the home will attract fleas and other nasty pests. Horses, cows, sheep and goats eat Alder leaves, which is said to turn their tongues black. Swine, however, refuse to eat it.

The Alder tree is known by the folk names: King of the Woods and Scottish Mahogany. Its deity association is with Bran. Its planetary ruler is Venus, and its associated elements are Fire and Water. The Alder is used to attract the powers needed for Protection, Divination, Oracles, Healing and anything to do with the element Water.



Astrologically, Alder people (i.e. those who were born in the month of March to April) are like the Phoenix—they rebuild after each defeat or set back. Being psychically aware, they tend to be oracles, but they need to be careful not to abuse their gifts. They can be brutal in their frankness, but are also kind. They might sometimes be in need of protection spiritually because others will envy what they have and try to use it or take it from them. As the Alder takes 30 years to mature, so too Alder people can be very immature, often making rash and poorly thought-out decisions for themselves.

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Container Gardens

by Lillian Norman

Winter is slowly and grudgingly loosening its icy grasp on Northeast Ohio. The Wheel of the Year is turning; slowly turning the cold, dark days of Winter into the lighter, brighter, warmer days of Spring. This is the time of year when I search the naked trees for new buds, look in the garden to see the first hint of snowdrops peeking out from under their frosty blanket and check the Navy Astronomy website to see how many more minutes of daylight I will be enjoying today that were shrouded in darkness yesterday. (aa.usno.navy.mil/data/docs/RS_OneDay.php)

At Ostara, the Vernal Equinox, our ancestors in the Northern Hemisphere would be out and about planting for the coming growing season. Here in Northeast Ohio, we won't be ready to plant outside until after Memorial Day. There's too much danger of a killing frost until then. Farther south, planting has already begun. What can I do to give my garden a good start like the people further south? I'll start it inside, in containers.

Your imagination is the only limiting factor in choosing what container to use when container gardening. My container gardens are usually working gardens, that is, they grow food for my family and me, so I go with traditional clay or plastic pots. However, for decorative flowers, herbs, or whatever else your heart fancies, anything goes. I've seen gardens in baskets, old whiskey barrels and old boots. I've seen them in old porcelain fixtures such as sinks, bathtubs, even old commodes, (although the City made that person remove that container



A boot an example of a suitable container, so be creative

garden from the front yard... Seems the neighbors were offended) The bottom line is: If you have a container, some soil and a few seeds, you can plant a garden.

Your Plant Care Professional at your local nursery is a wealth of information. Simply drop in, tell her what you want to grow, and she will steer you in the right direction. She will recommend the correct soil mix, fertilizer or food, and the appropriate container to suit your needs.



Supplies needed to start your container garden: Soil, plastic or clay pots, peat pots, seeds, markers, and this handy stuff I like to call, "Instant Dirt."

I've already done that, so let's proceed with the planting. We will plant my favorite culinary herbs: Cilantro, Basil, Oregano and Dill. We will also plant tomatoes and peppers from seed.

I like starting my seeds in peat pots. This way, when the young plants are ready to go into the garden outside, or ready for a larger container, there is no transplanting required. Just place the peat pot with the baby plant inside, into the ground or into the soil of its new container.



Close up shot of "Instant Dirt"

Another option for starting seeds is what I call, Instant Dirt. These little instant dirt pellets are peat covered with a mesh.

Add warm water to hydrate and expand them and then plant your seeds in the little opening on top. I found an instant dirt kit at a local variety shop that came with a tray and dome to cover the new seeds to keep in warmth and humidity during germination. This little tray houses the herbs I planted.



“Instant Dirt” once it’s been hydrated.

As you can see, after a few days of being in this mini-greenhouse, the herb seeds are already sprouting. For me, this is exciting because we are still having sub-zero temperatures in northeast Ohio, and this affirmation of yet another turn of the wheel of the year, warms my heart and gives me hope.



New shoots from the seeds already sprouting.

There are two more forms of container gardening I wish to show you: Planting from cuttings of parent plants, and plant division. When we plant from a cutting, it is customary to take the cutting and put it rooting end down in water, with or without plant food. Over time, roots develop from the cutting. Once the roots have grown, the cutting is ready for planting. There are also products you can buy at the store to dip your cutting into which enable you to skip the rooting stage and place your cutting directly into soil.



Put the cuttings root end down in water (Pic above). Examples here is an offshoot of a spider plant and leaves from a plant whose folk name is Jesus’ Tears, with the cuttings snug in their new home.

Plant division is the process of taking a root bound plant out of its container and dividing it into parts, depending on the size. In the photos below we see a sad spider plant in dire need of division. As you can see, it is seriously root bound.



Seriously root-bound, or pot-bound spider plant.

When dividing spider plants, you can see where it wants to be divided by how the plant is separated where it comes out of the soil. Take a sharp knife and cut right through the root ball starting where you see the natural divisions. Loosen the surrounding soil and shake out the roots. You are then ready to put the divided plant into its new home pot and soil.



Once the plant is cut into thirds, the roots are loosened and old soil is shaken off to make it ready for its new pot with fresh soil.



A visitor who came in from the cold joins the planting party.

When dividing plants that have no natural divisions, like ferns, just slice through in halves, thirds or quarters, depending on the size of the plant you have and the size of the receiving pots. When dividing in this manner, you will surely shock your plants. Give them food, water and care and they will begin to thrive again with time.



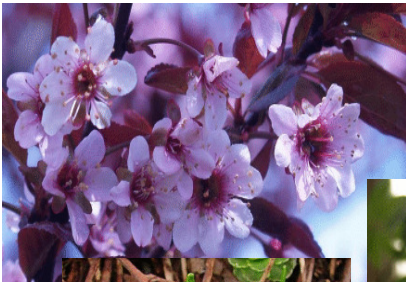
The planting session is complete. The divided plants look droopy, but should perk up as they get over transplant shock and get used to their new homes.

Our ancestors needed to plant and grow food to ensure their survival. These days, some of us plant out of necessity, but many of us plant for our own culinary and magickal purposes. Others of us plant for the pleasure that the beauty of a colorful garden brings, and still others nurture a few small viridescent pots in smoggy asphalt jungles to bring them closer to nature.

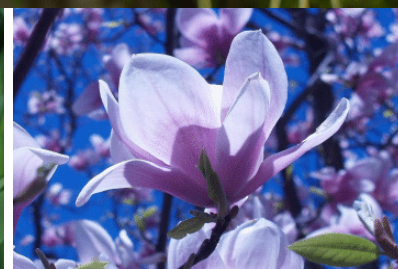
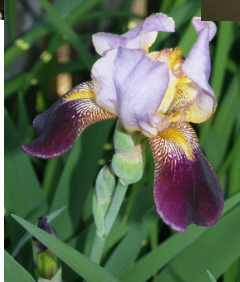
Whatever your reason, roll up your sleeves and delve into a small part of the earth, the Mother, your container garden.

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Lil lives in northeast Ohio and is a solitary pagan witch. She has been a member of EW since 2005.



*Spring Flower Collection
Inhabited by a Fairy*





The Pagan Kitchen *by OwlOak*



MM Folks....Here we are at another "turn of the wheel" and Ostara, the Spring Equinox.

Here in New England the farmers are manuring the fields to ready them for planting, and the home folks are cleaning their yards and gardens of the debris of winter.

The Sun is growing and gaining in strength as evidenced by all the greenery starting to emerge due to the caress of its warm rays. The crocuses and daffodils are starting to bloom while the tulips and day lilies are poking their leaves through the soil testing the warmth above. And when the mulch is removed, the asparagus plants are proudly showing their new tender, green stalks.

In this issue we have a number of recipes which will reflect the foods available to our forefathers at this time of year: fresh produce, fish, nuts, honey, and cured meat. With that in mind let's begin our Ostara feast.

For breakfast is an old stand-by which many find difficult to prepare but is very easy once you know the trick....

Poached Eggs on Toast ~ by OwlOak

Ingredients:

1-2 eggs per person
1 slice of toasted bread,
or 1/2 toasted English
Muffin per egg
butter - as needed
salt - to taste
pepper - to taste
1 teaspoon white vinegar
water - as needed



Directions:

Add 1/2 inch (1.3 cm.) water, and the vinegar, to a suitably sized frying pan.

Bring the water and vinegar mix to a boil and gently break the required number of eggs into it.

Allow the eggs to cook until the whites have almost set, then spoon the boiling water over the top of the eggs to finish them.

Remove each poached egg from the frying pan with a spatula or slotted spoon and place on a piece of generously buttered toasted bread or toasted English Muffin half. Sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste.

Serve with sliced ham, fried bacon, browned breakfast sausage links or patties. Hash browned, or home-fried, potatoes make a great side dish.

For those who will be working and wish to brown bag a meal-in-one, here is another old stand-by.....

Cornish Pasties ~ by OwlOak

Ingredients:

4 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons baking powder
2 cups solid shortening
1 cup water
1 pound thin sliced beef, cubed
1 onion, chopped
2 potatoes, peeled and diced
2 small carrots, diced
1 small rutabaga, diced
3 tablespoons butter
1 1/2 teaspoons salt
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
2 tablespoons milk



Directions:

Sift flour, salt, and baking powder together in a bowl. Add the shortening and blend until crumbly. Make a well in the center of the flour and add enough water, a little at a time, to allow the dough mixture to be worked into a ball. Cover and set aside to rest while the filling is being made.

Place the butter in a large skillet over medium heat. When it has melted add the beef, vegetables, salt and pepper. Cook over medium heat until the vegetables are fork tender. Remove from the heat and set aside to cool.

Divide the dough into 12 portions and roll each one out to about a 5 inch (13 cm) circle, 1/4 inch (0.6 cm) thick using care not to over-stretch the dough or thin spots will

result when baked.

Cover half of each pastry crust with the meat and vegetable mixture, dividing it up equally among them. Moisten the pastry edges and fold the empty half over the filling. Press the edges together by pressing them with a fork, or pinching with your fingers. Carefully place each completed pastie on to an ungreased baking sheet. Brush the tops with milk, and make a small vent in each top to allow steam to escape.

Place the pasties in a preheated 400° F (200° C) oven for 40 minutes, or until the crusts are golden brown.

Remove from the oven and serve warm, or cool to room temperature for a take along meal.

And, what could go better with them than a couple of....

Deviled Eggs ~ by OwlOak

Ingredients:

6 eggs - hard boiled
2-3 tablespoons mayonnaise
1/2 teaspoon prepared mustard
2 teaspoons deviled ham
1/4 teaspoon onion powder
1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
1 teaspoon fresh curly parley leaves - finely chopped
paprika for dusting

Directions:

Cut the eggs in half, lengthwise. Remove the egg yolks and mash them together in a small mixing bowl. Mix in the rest of the ingredients except the paprika.

Spoon the yolk mixture into the hollow in the egg halves

and lightly dust with the paprika.

Allow to cool before serving.

Note: For a variation crumbled bacon, chopped shrimp, crab, or lobster can be added in place of the deviled ham.



For those who are seeking a large main meal, the following admirably fills the bill....

Honey Glazed Ham with Horseradish Sauce ~ by OwlOak

Ingredients:

1 - 5 to 6 pound bone-in ham*
1/4 cup light corn syrup
2 cups honey
2 1/2 sticks butter
whole cloves - as needed
horseradish sauce - see recipe below

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 325° F (165° C).



Place the ham on a wire rack in a 9"x13x2" (23x33x5 cm) baking pan. Add 2 cups of water and score the ham with crosswise cuts through the fat. Stud the ham with the whole cloves.

In the top half of a double boiler, heat the corn syrup, honey and butter. Keep the glaze warm while baking ham.

Brush glaze over ham, cover with a foil tent and bake for 20 minutes/pound (0.5 kg) in the preheated oven. Baste ham every 10 to 15 minutes with the honey glaze. During the last 30 minutes of baking, remove the covering and continue to glaze frequently until the ham is browned.

Remove from the oven, and let sit a few minutes before serving.

*A precooked, canned, or spiral-cut ham can also be used. Just follow the manufacture's cooking instructions.

Horseradish Sauce ~ by OwlOak

Ingredients:

1/2 cup mayonnaise
2-3 tablespoons milk
2-3 generous tablespoons fresh ground horseradish root

Directions:

Combine the ingredients in a suitable bowl, mix well and serve as a condiment for the ham.

To go with the ham these next two recipes will provide the perfect sides....

Scalloped Potatoes ~ by OwlOak

Ingredients:

6 to 8 medium potatoes - thinly sliced
2 tablespoons flour
1 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon pepper
3 tablespoons butter
2 cups milk - scalded
1/2 cup Cheddar cheese - shredded

Directions:

Preheat oven to 375° F (190° C).

Place a layer of the sliced potatoes on the bottom of a buttered 2-quart baking dish.

Combine the flour, salt, and pepper in a separate bowl.

Sprinkle about half of the flour mixture over the potatoes; repeat with another layer of potatoes and the flour mixture and top with remaining potato slices.

Dot with pats of butter then pour the scalded milk over the

potatoes.

Cover and bake in the preheated oven for 45 minutes.

Remove from the oven and uncover.

Sprinkle the shredded cheese over the top.

Return to the oven and bake, uncovered, for an additional 15 minutes, or until scalloped potatoes are tender and the cheese has melted and is a golden brown.



Mashed Rutabagas ~ by OwlOak

Ingredients:

1 large rutabaga - peeled and cut into 1 inch (2.5 cm) pieces
1/2 stick of butter
2 teaspoons granulated white sugar
1 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
1/8 teaspoon allspice



Directions:

Place the rutabaga in a large sauce pan and cover with water. Bring to a boil over medium heat and cook until tender.

Drain and return to the pan.

Add the rest of the ingredients and either mash by hand (preferred) or with an electric mixer.

Transfer to a suitable bowl and serve warm.



For the evening meal, something a bit lighter may be desired in the place of left-overs.....

Orange - Orange Roughy
by OwlOak

Ingredients:

1 pound orange roughy fillets
2 tablespoons olive oil
1/4 cup white wine
1 clove garlic - minced
1/4 cup orange juice - fresh squeezed
2 oranges - sliced into rounds
1 cup water
1 tablespoon fresh parsley - chopped
1 shallot* - finely minced
1/2 stick butter - cut into pats
garlic powder
onion powder
paprika
salt and pepper - to taste

**Directions:**

Preheat oven to 350°F (177°C)

Rinse roughy fillets, pat dry and place on a wire rack inside a suitable baking pan to which 1 cup of water has been added. Sprinkle the fillets with salt, pepper, onion powder, garlic powder, and paprika. Top with the butter pats.

Place in the preheated oven for 15-20 minutes, or until the fillets flake easily with a fork. Add more water as necessary to keep the pan from drying out.

While the fish is baking, combine the olive oil, shallots, and minced garlic in a small saucepan and cook over medium heat until the shallots and garlic are tender. Remove from the heat.

When the fillets are done, remove from the oven and plate them. Drain the pan juices into the sauce pan and add the white wine, orange juice, and fresh chopped parsley. Return the sauce pan to medium heat and boil down until a medium sauce forms.

To serve: Arrange the orange rings on a plate. Put the fillet on the top of the oranges and spoon the sauce over each portion. Garnish with a fresh parsley sprig set on top of the sauce.

*In place of a shallot, the white portion of a medium scallion may be used.



Wild Rice Pilaf ~ by OwlOak



Ingredients:

1 cup wild rice, uncooked
 1/2 cup fresh mushrooms - thinly sliced lengthwise
 2 small onions - minced
 2 stalks celery - thinly sliced crosswise
 3 cups vegetable, or chicken, broth
 3 cloves garlic, minced
 1-2 carrots - chopped (optional)

Directions:

Rinse wild rice well.

Combine the broth, wild rice, butter, mushrooms, onion, celery, (carrots), and garlic in a 3 quart casserole dish.

Cover and bake at 350° F (177°C) for 90 minutes, or until the rice and vegetables are tender.

Remove from the oven and fluff up before serving.



Garlic Roasted Asparagus ~ by OwlOak

Ingredients:

2 lb. (1 kg.) asparagus
 1/4 cup olive oil
 2 cloves garlic - finely minced
 1 tsp. salt
 1 lemon - juiced

Directions:

Preheat oven to 425° F (218° C)

Combine the olive oil, salt, and minced garlic and set aside while preparing the asparagus.

Clean and prepare the asparagus by rinsing it under running water and cutting off the white bottom part of the stalk. Pat dry.

Place the asparagus, in a single layer, on a heavy baking pan and coat with the garlic and olive oil.

Roast in the preheated oven for 5-10 minutes, or until asparagus is tender and begins to brown.





Realizing that no meal is complete without dessert, the next recipes will be bound to satisfy your sweet tooth.....

Punky's Scrumptious Raisin-Oatmeal Cookies
By ~ PunkyRabit

Ingredients:

½ cup (1 stick) salted butter, softened
 ½ cup natural peanut butter
 1 cup firmly packed brown sugar
 ½ cup granulated white sugar
 2 eggs
 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
 1 ½ cups wheat flour
 1 teaspoon baking soda
 1 teaspoon cinnamon
 dash of ginger
 3 cups of Quaker® Quick Oats
 1 packet of unflavored instant oatmeal
 1 cup raisins

Yields: 4 dozen cookies



Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350° F (177° C).

Beat together the butter and peanut butter, add the brown and white sugars and beat until creamy.

Add the eggs and vanilla extract; beat well.

Combine the flour, baking soda, cinnamon and ginger, and add to the peanut butter mix; stir until mixed well.

Slowly stir in instant oatmeal and Quick Oats until fully incorporated.

Drop by rounded tablespoon onto ungreased, or parchment lined, cookie sheets. *

Bake 10 to 11 minutes or until slightly golden brown.

Allow to cool for 5 minutes on sheet, then remove to a wire rack.

* A piece of parchment paper on the cookie sheet will help prevent the cookies from burning.

Original Art by Jean Corrente
www.jeansamazingcookies.com



Honey Cake ~ by OwlOak**Ingredients:**

1 cup sugar
 1 cup honey
 1/2 cup oil
 4 eggs
 1 tsp. grated lemon peel (or zest)
 1 cup water
 2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice
 2-1/2 cups flour
 3 tsp. baking powder
 1/2 tsp. baking soda
 1/2 tsp. salt
 1 tsp. cinnamon
 1/2 cup finely ground nuts (optional)

**Directions:**

Preheat oven to 325° F (165° C).

Grease and flour a 13"x9"x2" (23x33x5 cm) pan and set aside.

Sift together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and cinnamon.

In large bowl, combine the sugar, honey, oil, eggs, water, lemon juice and zest. Beat until well combined. Slowly stir in the flour mixture until it is fully incorporated. Fold in ground nuts if desired.. Pour the batter into the prepared pan.

Place the pan in the preheated oven and bake for 45-50 minutes, or until top springs back when lightly touched in center and the edges begin to pull away from sides of pan.

Remove from the oven and cool on a wire rack.

Serve by cutting into squares and drizzling with warmed honey, or with a honey-lemon glaze.*

Honey-Lemon Glaze ~ by OwlOak*Ingredients:**

1 1/2 cups honey
 2 tsp lemon juice
 1/2 cup water

Directions:

Combine the honey, lemon juice, and water in a small sauce pan. Bring to a hard boil, stirring constantly. When glaze reaches a thick consistency, remove from heat and drizzle over the cake.

There we have it folks. A day of great eats and good company. Now let's retire to the parlor to enjoy a cup of hot coffee, some friendly chat, and good-natured bantering.

Here's witching you all great health, wealth, love and happiness in the coming weeks and beyond. Until next issue.....

Huggs & B*B ~ OwlOak

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 OwlOak lives in New England, USA and is a Wiccan High Priest.
 He has been an EW member since 2003.



The Herb Garden

Tansy

by Lyric Moonshadow

Here we are, celebrating another turn of the wheel and the Vernal Equinox. Ostara, the fire festival, finds us rejoicing in the coming of spring, the leaf buds beginning to appear on perennial plants and the spring bulbs poking up their heads having been nurtured by Mother Earth all winter long.

Some of the herbs associated with Ostara are: Lavender, Tansy, Marjoram, Orrisroot, Loveage, Tarragon, Thyme and Lily of the Valley. As usual, picking just one to write about was a struggle: I love Orrisroot and have grown it for years, I have planted my Loveage right next to my Ladies Bedstraw so I can remember their names (love bed, hahhhaha), and being a May child I celebrate when the Lily of the Valley begin to pop their heads up! However, the one I chose to write about is Tansy. I was actually compelled to write about Tansy, and at first could not figure out why, but as I got further into the project I learned not only about the herb, but also about myself.



Original Art

"He pipes the dead up from their grave, Whose bones the Tansy hides."

John Albee (1833-1915)

History and Folklore

You might think the word Tansy is a corruption of the word pansy. In fact, the essence of the name Tansy is far more morbid. The pungent odor of the plant has historically been associated with death and immortality. The Romans called Tansy Tanacetum, which means death. This is similar to the Greek word Thanatos which means the land of the dead, or the personification of death – what we know as the Grim Reaper. Eventually the word

was corrupted into the English Tansy, the French tanaïse and the Spanish tanaceto. Throughout Europe it was known as the "death plant".

The Greek derivation of the word Tansy is from the word Athanaton, meaning immortal. It is so named either because the flowers last so long, or more likely because it was used in ancient times to preserve dead bodies. It is said that Ganymede, a handsome Trojan prince, was abducted by Zeus and given a drink that consisted of Tansy flowers to ensure his immortality so he could become the cupbearer to the Gods for all eternity. In early Colonial America, Tansy was used for embalming corpses and in funeral wreaths placed on the head of the dead. It was also hidden in the "winding sheets" to keep flies away while the body lay in state. The first president of Harvard University was buried in a coffin lined with Tansy and wearing a Tansy wreath. In 1846 the Harvard cemetery was relocated and revealed that the Tansy in the coffin still held its shape and fragrance.

In early colonial days Tansy was one of the most essential herbs used for preserving food, in addition to its medicinal uses.

According to Folklore, Tansy has a long history and association with the Easter season. As Mrs. M. Grieve writes in A Modern Herbal:

It (Tansy) is connected with some interesting old customs observed at Easter time, when even archbishops and bishops played handball with men of their congregation, and a Tansy cake was the reward of the victors. These Tansy cakes were made from the young leaves of the plant, mixed with eggs, and were thought to purify the humours of the body after the limited fare of Lent. In time, this custom obtained a kind of symbolism, and Tansies, as these cakes were called, came to be eaten on Easter Day as a remembrance of the bitter herbs eaten by the Jews at the Passover. Coles (1656) says the origin of eating it in the spring is because Tansy is very wholesome after the salt fish consumed during Lent, and counteracts the ill-effects which the 'moist and cold constitution of winter has made on people . . . though many understand it not, and some simple people take it for a matter of superstition to do so.

Characteristics and Growing

Tansy is also known as Tansy ragwort and is a member of the aster family. It is a perennial with fern like leaves on thin stalks. The flowers are golden button-like blooms appearing at the top of the plant. The Tansy spreads by way of underground stems as well as by dropping seeds. It has a high tendency to become invasive. So if you plan on planting this herb, be sure to give it plenty of room or be prepared to continually keep it in check. I would not suggest growing Tansy for its fragrance...it has a pungent, piney smell sometimes described as camphor-like. Some of the older nicknames for Tansy include Stinky Nanny and Mare's Fart – so I wouldn't add it to a summer bouquet if I were you! This may also explain why it is

known to keep away garden pests such as, Japanese beetles, ants, squash bugs and some flying insects. For this reason, it is good to plant as a border around vegetables, roses and berries. A sprig of Tansy in your linen closet or pantry will keep pests away as well.

Some of the less appealing traits of Tansy include its odor and very toxic nature. It can be tremendously harmful to wildlife and farm animals if large amounts are consumed, due to the poisonous leaves, flowers and oils. Tansy should not be grown in areas adjacent to fields housing horses or livestock. The plant's volatile oil is high in thujone, which was found in absinthe, and may cause convulsions and has since been banned by the FDA. The oil may also cause contact dermatitis in those who are sensitive. Tansy is highly toxic to internal parasites and has been used by herbalists to expel worms for centuries. Tansy should never be ingested by pregnant women or children. It is even suggested that the plant should not even be touched by moms and children, so toxic is the oil.

Culinary Uses

That being said, small amounts of young leaves and tops are safe to use in cooking. They should be harvested just before it blooms in late July or early August. It has a taste that has been described as peppery, sharp and bitter and has been used in herb butters, stuffing, scrambled eggs, omelets and puddings. In Yorkshire, England, Tansy and caraway seeds were used in biscuits traditionally served at funerals. Small amounts of the leaves can be shredded and added to salads for a spicy flavor.

Again, from Mrs. Griever's A Modern Herbal comes this classic recipe for Tansy pudding, also known as Walpurgisnacht pudding.

From an old cookery book:

- 'A Tansy-

'Beat seven eggs, yolks and whites separately; add a pint of cream, near the same of spinach-juice, and a little Tansy-juice gained by pounding in a stone mortar; a quarter of a pound of Naples biscuit, sugar to taste, a glass of white wine, and some nutmeg. Set all in a saucepan, just to thicken, over the fire; then put it into a dish, lined with paste, to turn out, and bake it.'

Interestingly, I found a modern version of this recipe on a site called Catholic Culture: living the Catholic life. If you are interested in trying the classic Tansy pudding, the URL is: <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/liturgicalyear/recipes/view.cfm?id=210>

Tansy Pancakes

- 1/2 cup plain flour
- 1 egg
- pinch of salt
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1 tablespoon chopped Tansy leaves
- butter
- fine sugar

- fresh lemon juice (if desired)

Sift flour into a bowl with salt. Beat in the egg followed by the milk. Add chopped Tansy leaves. Stir, then chill in the refrigerator for 2-3 hours.

Melt the butter on a griddle or a thick frying pan. Drop 2/3 tablespoon of batter onto the hot pan. Turn when bubbles rise on the surface of the pancakes. When bubbles rise on the surface of the pancakes, turn them to brown on both sides. When finished, place on a plate, sprinkle with sugar, and roll it up. Serve with fresh sliced lemon for drizzling over the pancakes: <http://www.gardensablaze.com/HerbTansyRec.htm>

Medicinal Uses

From medieval times through the mid 20th century, Tansy has been used to treat inflammations of the eye, sores, ulcers, rheumatism, sciatica, gout and painful joints. A bitter tea is used to help cure colds and ease menstrual cramps. It is said to relieve the pain of bee stings. Due to the potential toxic effects, applications should only be external and administered by a trained professional.

Magical Uses

Tansy's magical properties include: Gender –Female, Planet – Venus, Element –Water, and magical powers include health and longevity, healing and immortality.

According to Paul Beyel's Master Book of Herbalism, due to Tansy's association with death and immortality it is the appropriate herb to use to asperge a funeral site or temple, and the deceased. Due to its association with Venus and Water, Tansy is often used in rituals celebrating womanhood and more specifically motherhood. Tansy has long been associated with Goddess worship and women's mysteries and is said to be the herb of the Mother Goddess and it is often associated with the Virgin Mary.

Tansy is also known for its protection and healing qualities. Place a few leaves in your shoe for safe travels, or sew some into a blue cloth for healing, and hang some over an opening of a home (windows, doors, the hearth), or wear it in a pouch for protection from curses. It can be hung above stable doors to protect the animals against evil spells and illness. Planted around the house it drives away thunder and lightning. Incense made from Tansy was used to smudge children for protection and cleansing.

Because Tansy blooms in late summer, the previous year's harvest is dried and used in Ostara rituals. It is often used in Ostara incense and anointing oils. The following spell is adapted from Marian Singer & Trish MacGregor's - The Only Wiccan Spell Book You'll Ever Need. To maintain health and vitality, take an old knitted glove that you have worn (best to use the glove that coincides with your dominant hand) and stuff it with herbs. You are symbolically stuffing yourself with positive energy. Some good options are Fern, Geranium

petals, Marjoram, Nutmeg and Tansy. Sew up the opening. Take a strand of your hair and tie it around the pointer finger - this will help to remind you of good health and its blessings. Hold the glove in your dominant hand and meditate to empower it with your will and positive energy. Place the glove in your closet with your clothes.

According to Hoo Doo spell work, Tansy is particularly effective as a protective herb in situations dealing with the law. A pinch of Tansy in your shoe will keep the law away – this includes, police, DEA agents and the INS. Washing your clothes and your floor with Tansy tea also helps. Other herbs can be added to heighten the effect, including Asafoetida, Celandine, Devil's Shoe String, Elder, Fennel, Black Mustard Seeds and Oregano.

To sum up this little adventure with Tansy, it has been an eye opening experience for me. I wondered why I was so drawn to this herb. At first I thought it was the name ... thinking it would be a sweet little spring herb, perhaps the herbal cousin to the lovely Pansy. As I delved deeper into the mystery that is Tansy, I realized that I was compelled to explore this herb due to a recent trauma I experienced. A part of my life recently "died" as part of my lifelong work was suddenly taken away from me. I found a great

deal of comfort researching a herb that is not only associated with death, but more importantly preservation, healing and immortality. I hope it has been a journey as equally fulfilling for you, dear reader.

Brightest Blessing, Lyric Moonshadow

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SilkyRose



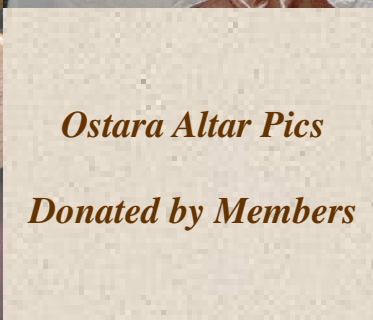
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SilkyRose



Ostara Altar Pics

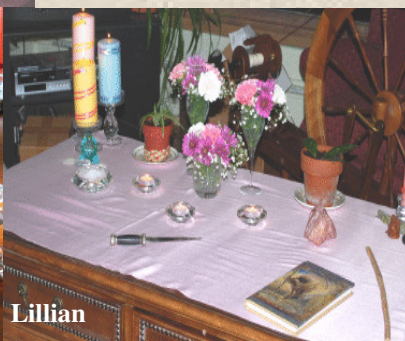
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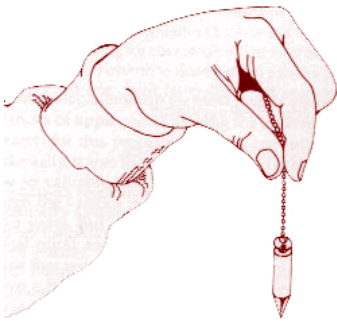


Lillian

Divination Depot

Pendulums

by Ardriana Cahill



Using a pendulum is a form of dousing and has been used as a divination tool for millennia. The ancient Romans used pendulum divination as described by the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus. Nostradamus, and is said to have used the following Roman method. A bowl was used made of a composite of many metals, or electrum, an alloy of gold and silver. A ring was attached by thread to a wand. The ring was probably a band of electrum with occult characters engraved upon it. The twenty-four letters of the Greek alphabet were engraved into the flange of the basin. A laurel branch tripod probably supported the bowl. (Laurel was the substance specified by the Enochian angels for the scrying table of John Dee.)

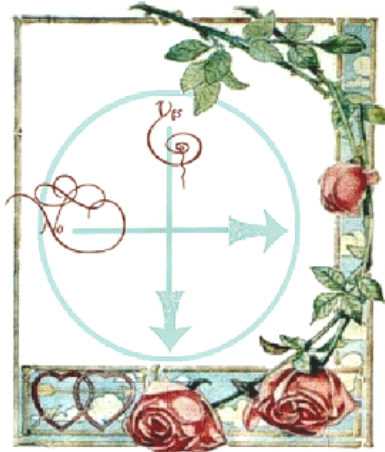
The simplest interpretation of the pendulum's movement is in answering YES and NO questions. Simply hold the string or chain of a pendulum as still as possible. Often people brace their elbow on a table to steady it, since even one's heartbeat can be read by its sensitivity. However, since everyone tends to have their own magickal or psychic signature, there are differing interpretations on how it answers questions. So, you should practice, record your findings and discover if there is a particular way your pendulum chooses to work.

The most basic movement of the pendulum is the linear reading. Back and forth or North and South is a YES answer. And side to side or East and West is a NO answer. Different movements between YES and NO are often interpreted as an ambiguous answer like "Maybe" or "Possibly" or "Not Likely." In my Family Tradition, we were never allowed to accept an ambiguous answer. Ambiguity in the answer means you've asked an ambiguous question and you need to rephrase the question until you get a definitive answer. You keep working until you gain clarity or there is no purpose in the exercise. It's ALL ABOUT THE QUESTIONS.

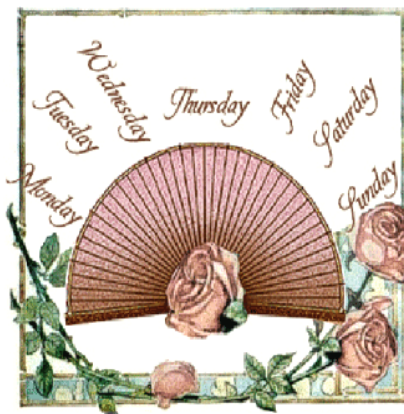
Another movement is the circular reading. If the pendulum swings Widdershins (counter-clockwise), it is a YES answer. If Deosil, (clockwise) the answer is NO. If this seems backwards to Wiccan thinking...it is because in group work the directions encircle the group, instead of being done by one person. In circle, we follow the Wiccan attributions of Deosil (attracting) and Widdershins

(banishing). However, in my family tradition...all magickal gestures were interpreted as actions that either draw energy toward you or away from you. So, for a right-handed person, the above pendulum directions would do this. And since right-handedness is dominate, this is largely true for everyone. Yet, every so often, a left-hander might find that the movements and answers reverse for them. Let it. Rules are guidelines to help you find your own personal signature. Rules as to which hand to use are largely contrived. Use the hand that gives you the most accurate answers.

Another interpretation is that either linear direction (back and forth OR side to side in a straight line) means YES and any circular direction (clockwise OR counter clockwise) means NO.



The method that Grandmother taught me was the after dinner pendulum. She would remove one of her rings, usually one that is top heavy, and suspend it from a silk thread or use a necklace with a weighted pendant. She would hang the jewelry over a crystal water goblet just below the lip. The answers came when the ring made bell-like chimes as it gently tapped the side of the glass. A single tap indicates a YES, while two taps indicate NO.



As the digital age has infiltrated the "old ways" there are dozens of pendulum charts that one can make and place under their pendulum, from a simple cross for YES and NO to printed references for very specific questions. I'm not sure this is better training to learn to ask better questions. But experiment and see what your results are.

Most of the charts I've found are spoked, fan-shaped charts with the words arched across the top. The pendulum follows the direction of the spoke pointed to the word that is appropriate. Some charts are numbered while others have specific words to aid decision making. Other charts include charts that cover questions on colors, chakras, the elements, months, days or weeks. There are health related charts for vitamin use or disease diagnosis but I'd prefer to go to my doctor for those and not trust my health to a divination form. You can make a pendulum chart for anything you are trying to make a decision on, even if it's what color to wear to work. You can also make a number chart or percentage chart for timing questions. And thirteen

year old girls love to write several boys names on a chart and ask which one is interested in them.

One chart is like a Ouija board with the full alphabet on the chart. For me it's just easier to use a Ouija board. Mother used to do a form of divination using only her eyes as the mechanism to pick out the letters. She called it Trick Sight. I can do a bit of that, so I can't use the alphabet pendulum charts because my eyes move faster than the pendulum seeking out each letter.

I prefer the Yes and No practice of the pendulum because it helps grow a better witch by teaching him or her to ask good questions. Again, never accept an ambiguous answer. In our tradition, you've failed the exercise if you do not achieve some clarity.



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Ardriana Cahill lives in Western USA and is a Hereditary Witch, den of Clan McCormick and a Kell of Brighid since 1998. She has been a member of EW since 2004.

www.ArdrianaCahill.com

The Art Loft ~ Original Art from Sabrina "The Ink Witch"



7 Day Spell Candles have all the components of a spell delivered in artwork. You light them at preferably the same time each day for 7 days straight. Each artwork comes with it's own specialized incantation on the back, or the user might create their own words. The magick is in the artwork. Much in the way of research for symbols and items used throughout history were selected for these spell artworks.



Sabrina "The Ink Witch" lives in Philadelphia and has been a member of Email Witches since 2007

www.theinkwitch.com

Seasonal Festival ~ Nowruz

By Graham & Pari

The spring equinox marks a time on the wheel of the year when Nature renews the land, bestowing the blessings of regeneration, regained fertility and growth to all. Western astrology venerates this time as the start of the Zodiacal year with the ascension of the first sign, Aries, whose characteristics duly reflect the energy and vibrancy of the season. The roots of this astrology go far back to the birth of civilization itself - to the cultures of ancient Mesopotamia, which included the Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian and Chaldean. These cultures were synonymous with the names of some of their most famed rulers, Sargon, Hammurabi and Nebuchadnezzar; fabled cities such as Ur, Nippur, Nineveh and Babylon; and a pantheon of deities including Anu, Marduk, Inanna and Ishtar. This ancient cultural melting pot arose more than 5,000 years ago around the fertile basin nourished by the mighty rivers Tigris and Euphrates, which flow through the heart of the Middle East in present-day Iraq. These cultures had an enormous influence on the development of the ancient world – not only through their meticulous and scientific studies of the heavens for the purpose of divination, but also with the credited invention of writing, wheeled vehicles, the discovery of bronze, and the creation of history's first cities, to name but a few.

Given the significance of the spring equinox as the start of the astrological year and its relevance to the divinatory practices of ancient Mesopotamia, it should perhaps be no surprise that the start of the year continues to be celebrated at this time in parts of the Middle East and India – in particular by the followers of Zoroastrianism with the festival of Nowruz. The true origins of Nowruz are shrouded in the mists of time, but the oldest surviving records of it come from the Persian Empire which came to dominate the region following the conquests of Cyrus the Great in 546 BCE. Wall carvings found in the ruins of the Persepolis complex symbolize the festival as a celebration of the time when the powers of the Bull (personifying the Earth) and Lion (personifying the Sun) came into balance, reflecting the observed equality of night and day-time hours. It is thought that the immense Hundred Columns Hall, built by Darius I in Persepolis, was specifically used for the purpose of celebrating Nowruz, and a number of royal traditions were established for this most important day of the year - such as the granting of audiences, cash gifts and the pardoning of prisoners. This ensured the popularity of Nowruz through the ages as a festival embraced by both officialdom and the general population alike.

The arrival of Nowruz is traditionally heralded by a character called *Haji Pirooz* (or *Hadji Firuz*). Dressed in a red costume and wearing black makeup, Haji Pirooz dances through the streets to a chorus of tambourines and trumpets as he spreads good cheer for the approaching year. These events are symbolic of the mythology associated with the ancient Sumerian god of sacrifice, *Domuzi* (also identified with the regenerative gods *Tammuz*, *Osiris*, *Attis* and *Adonis*), who was killed only to be reborn at the beginning of the year.



A Nowruz parade



A wall carving from Persepolis showing the power of the Lion (Sun) overcoming the Bull (Earth) at the time of Nowruz



Haji Pirooz

Families prepare by spring-cleaning their houses and purchasing new clothes, consistent with the theme of rebirth and starting afresh. On the first day of Nowruz, family members gather and await the precise moment of the equinox before exchanging gifts. The festivities continue for twelve days during which time there are planned visits to seniors, other extended family members, and friends. Visitors are served pastries, cookies, dried fruit and other tasty food, accompanied by drinks such as tea or syrup. An important symbolic aspect of the household celebrations is the creation of an altar called a *Haft Seen*. Seven specific items are traditionally placed on this altar, including: wheat, barley or lentil sprouts growing in a dish to symbolize rebirth; garlic to symbolize medicine; sumac berries to symbolize the rising power of the sun; apples to symbolize beauty and good health; and vinegar to symbolize longevity and patience. Other items that may also be placed on the altar are decorated eggs to symbolize fertility; a bowl of water containing goldfish to symbolize life within life, and the Zodiac sign of Pisces that the Sun is leaving; and rosewater, which is believed to have magical cleansing powers.

The thirteenth and final day of the Nowruz festivities is called *Sizdah Bedar*, which literally means “thirteen outdoors”. The ancient Persians believed that the twelve constellations of the Zodiac each ruled the Earth for a thousand years, after which the Earth descended into chaos. The thirteenth day of the festival reflects this by being a time when orderly activities are left aside; families head out to enjoy Nature and the outdoors through picnics, dancing and music. Sprouts from the Haft Seen are thrown away in running water to add to Nature’s greenery, and to also dispose of any bad luck or ills that may have been ensnared by the sprouts while they were kept in the household.

Nowruz is a major festival of Zoroastrianism, which was once the religion of ancient Persia and hence much of the known world. Today, though Zoroastrianism is considered to be the smallest of the world’s major religions, it lays claim to being the first religion to introduce monotheist principles, and it significantly influenced the development



The Sacred Flame~ Original Art by Pari



A Nowruz “Haft Seen” altar



Zoroaster

of the Jewish, Christian and Islamic faiths.

The *Avesta* are the ancient scriptures of Zoroastrianism, with the most important component being the hymns or *Gathas* composed by the great *Manthran* (or “thought-provoker”) *Zoroaster* (known to the Persians as *Zarathustra*) some 3,000 years ago. Zoroaster proclaimed that humans are the highest creation of a supreme “wise being” - *Ahura Mazda*. Through the exercise of free choice, the task of humans is to revere and protect all other creations, and to adhere to moral principles (“good thoughts, good words, good deeds”) so that the divine perfection of *Ahura Mazda* may be brought into material existence. The followers of Zoroastrianism see the immanence of *Ahura Mazda* in all things. Therefore, they are obliged to maintain purity of the elements – earth, air, fire and water – and to not pollute the environment. Thus Zoroastrianism was probably the world’s first “ecologically responsible” religion.

Fire is especially sacred to the followers of Zoroastrianism, who keep sacred flames burning in their temples to symbolize the inspired vision of Zoroaster, to illuminate the mind, and to purify the spirit. The now widespread use of an “eternal flame” for remembrance and veneration purposes is thought to

have stemmed from this ancient Zoroastrian tradition.

After the time of Zoroaster, under what may have been the influence of the Magi (the ancient Mesopotamian caste of mystic astrologers), some aspects of the old polytheist beliefs found their way back into Zoroastrianism. An important case was that of the sun god Mithras, who, according to mythology, had slain a divine bull from which all plants and animals then sprang forth – seemingly an allegory for the triumph of the Sun over the Earth at the spring equinox, bringing with it the fertility of the season. Mithras came to be known beyond the borders of Persia, particularly in Rome, where he was venerated as a protective deity for those engaged in battle, and as an icon of the Mithraic Mysteries in which initiates were bathed in the blood of a sacrificial bull, and who sought spiritual growth, cosmic knowledge, and the secrets of eternal life in a manner that paralleled other ancient mystery cults such as those of Osiris and Dionysus.

As we celebrate the spring equinox, with its annual promise of renewal and rebirth, we join with some of the oldest traditions of mankind; who, through careful observation of the movements of the heavens and the ebb and flow of the seasons, sought to gain deeper insight into the mystery of Nature's eternal cycles of growth, decay and regeneration. With each new generation and culture, the insights gained have evolved into fresh religious, philosophic and scientific ideas. However, the mystery remains - ever present, yet elusive and confounding – though never far from the ways of old.



Tauroctony of Mithras at the British Museum London

Sources:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki>

<http://www.crystalinks.com/noruz.html>

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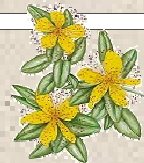
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<http://www.peacefulpaths.com>



The Bard's Corner

Spring Equinox



*Walking the land that nature's made, the rising sun reduced the shade.
Mother Nature shows her hand, with the greening of the land.
Preparation is at hand for the later harvest needs;
Ceremonies take place for the blessing of the seeds.*

*The people live their daily life within the land of reason.
The things they do as the circle turns, changes with every season.
The hours in the daytime are the same as in the night;
All things are done to make sure everything goes right.*

*The equinoctial light has a significantly brighter shine.
The suns faintly glow of Imbolc past has shown its growth this time.
To follow all the patterns of the stars you need a key to all the locks.
At this point in time I see the sign, for it is the Vernal Equinox.*

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Down under in Australia

All Alone

by Nan



Original art by Danny Roberts

Kermit used to say it wasn't easy being green, but neither is it easy to be solitary. Those of us who practice alone have to be disciplined and focussed. If we hold a solitary ritual we often find ourselves debating whether or not we should bother with the formalities – do we call the elements? What do we want to do about deity today?

The benefits of being a solitary pagan, for me, are that I can do what I want when whim takes me. I don't have to wait for an appointed hour or day – I can just pick up my basket of ritual items and head off to my circle.

Sometimes I choose midnight, sometimes the light of day. I go out in the rain – although that hasn't happened for a while – and I go out in the wind and sun. And, I'll definitely be going out in the rain the next time drops fall, and give thanks for it.

What do solitaires do? Well, here's what I do. I work with the seasons and local events in a seemingly random pattern. Once a year we hold an open ritual for friends around about Yule – if it falls near Yule, then it is a Yule celebration, and if it is a bit later we call it our Fire Festival.

I especially value the opportunity to share ritual with others and love being invited to participate. I feel privileged to be included at ceremonies which honour the wheel of the year. One of the things I love about the South Australian Pagan community is that we have plenty of chances to get together at events and discussions, which make me feel connected to the whole. I think the interaction at Pagans in the Pub and groups like Gawler Pagans is invaluable for people who mostly work alone, as it is a chance to meet others on the same path, ask questions and share practices.

Although I don't find being a solitary lonely exactly, I do find it challenging at times, particularly when I want to raise a lot of energy for something – it takes a bit more effort to do this alone. I'm also very careful when working with unfamiliar deity archetypes and tend to over-research them when I feel the need to involve God or Goddess energy other than my familiar two.

My circle is dedicated to the Goddess Brigid and Dragon energy. There are two reasons for this. I chose Brigid because of her resilience – after all, she was a Celtic Goddess who is still worshipped today – albeit also by Christians – and who, apart from a small bit of time off when her flame was extinguished, has managed to transcend spiritual philosophies.



Photo by Nan

Circle Statue—Photo by Nan



Water Statue - Photo by Nan



– formed before there was any life at all on this earth, but somehow it has a strong energy and this energy seemed to me to be a bit dragonish.

The more I work with it the more solid the dragon persona becomes for me. This is an energy I don't mess with – it's unpredictable and something which cannot be manipulated. I have had to develop rules and ways of working with this, which has been a lot of trial and error.

Although we make our own decisions, or as solitaires we sometimes like to share our failures and achievements with others and unless someone has been in ritual with you, it is hard to discuss techniques or practices – it's a bit like going to the cinema on your own.

On the whole though, what I gain being solitary is that there is no friction with others, no disagreements about how things should be done, I am able to indulge my own ideas, try out new things, make mistakes without anyone knowing – and I get to drink the whole cup of ritual wine!

Nan

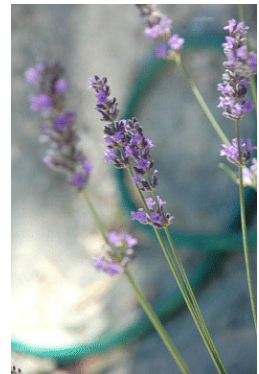
Kildare in Ireland hosted a sacred fire before Christianity overwhelmed early pagan practices. The flame was kept alight to honour the Goddess Brigid. A triple Goddess with three distinct sets of attributes, she is not the traditional maiden, mother, crone trinity. Her aspects are united through the symbolism of fire and thus she is also known as a fire goddess. Her attributes encompass all four elements – she is goddess of metalsmiths, healing and fertility, poet and prophet; she was believed to have developed the Ogham alphabet. Brigid is associated with water and fire, livestock and midwifery. With all these interests it is not surprising she presents as three women in one – it is easier to divide up the chores than do them all yourself! I connect with her through her healing, literary and divination aspects.

Christians took over tending her flame when Brigid became a Saint. Tended by the nuns of St. Brigid, it burned through the 12th century and on into the 16th century when it was finally put out during the reformation.

Brigid's sacred flame was relit at Solas Bhríde in Kildare in 1993 and blazed brightly for one week a year during Brigid's Festival – Feile Bhríde. This flame was used to light a perpetual memorial flame to Brigid in 2006 in Kildare's town square – the flame still burns.

The dragon is both easier and harder to explain. I have a love of fantasy as a genre, believed in faeries at the bottom of the garden but grew out of it, and had an imaginary friend as a child, but left him behind at some point as I grew older. I'm a practical person not given to whimsy, and as an adult, although I liked the concept of dragons, never imagined I would create one as an energy form which would link me with male deity energy. If I had been asked I would have said my deity of choice would be a human-style archetype.

The Dragon energy evolved when we were building our home circle. For many years we used an almost perfect ring banded by young gum trees. One day my husband felt he had to formalise it for me and brought home four enormously heavy pillars of slate. Each was almost five foot tall, and he dug them in to the quarter points. A slate altar slab on a slate plinth came next followed by smaller plinths with flat square tops at the entry and triangular slate pieces which went down at the circle boundary. Last of all came a fire pit made of slate in the centre. After that, everywhere I looked I saw dragons – pictures, toys, statues. The slate is very, very old – millions of years old



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Email Witches is a pagan friendly email group attracting people from all walks of life, from all spectrums of society and from all around the world. Most are individuals seeking a personal practical religion that can be adapted to their own needs and criteria, and Wicca is a wonderfully diverse religion that meets these needs. Email Witches, a Yahoo! Group, is set up as a place where those of same interest can meet, discuss, share and gain more information about their chosen paths. All visitors to my website Controverscial.com are welcome, so feel free to join us and make new friends.



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