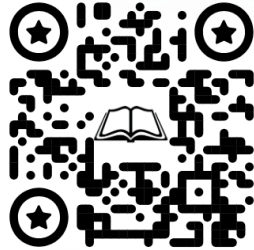


*May you find a path that fills your heart,
and sanctuary wherever you go.*



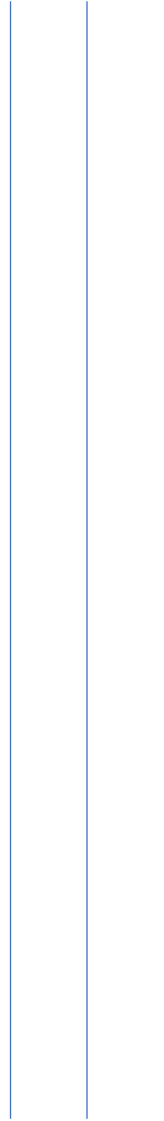
Bright Blessings, and Safe Travels!

Mabon
Mabon
Mabon

Mabon



By Ryan Robinson



Gather the wealth of the earth
Given for work of the fields

Revel in this time of life
Dance into the night

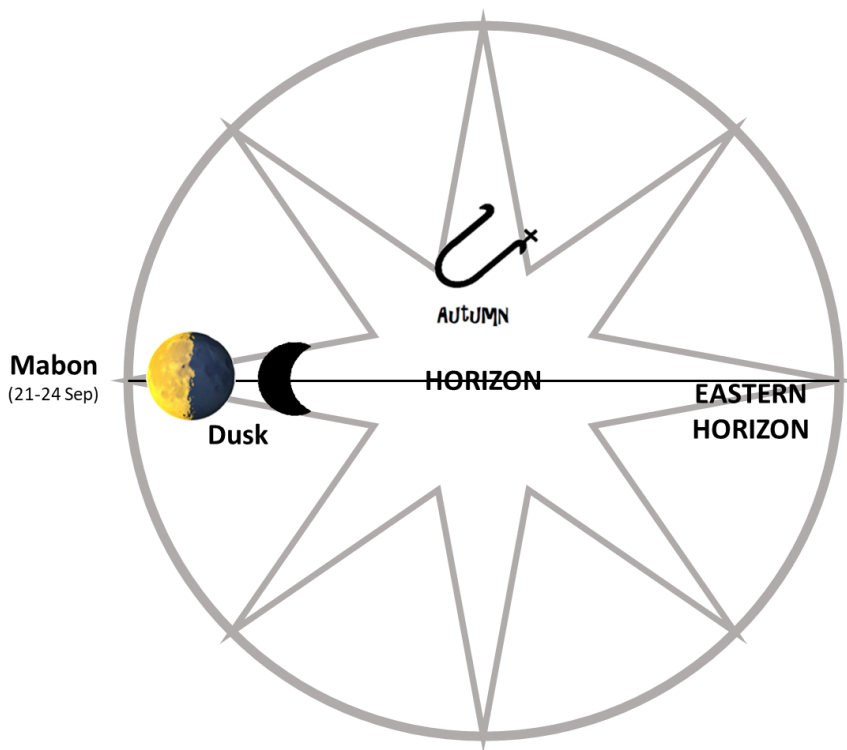
Drink deep from this time of vibrant riches
And take from it a measure of balance

With the turning sun
The growing darkness comes

But find in these days of work and nights of glory
Light to carry into the long dark

Eat, drink, and be merry
Filling your stomach with memories to sustain you.

Let the joy of life surround you,
That you may carry its warmth through the long nights to come.



Mabon – Maturity, fullness, completion, plenty, gratitude, gathering, harvest, family, and community.

Mabon is the second of three harvest festivals. Its focus is on bounty, plenty, and the coming together of family. The symbolism very similar to American Thanksgiving – gourds, cornucopia, oranges and browns, autumn leaves, apples and other fruit harvests. It is a celebration of gratitude and gathering.

As the autumn equinox, Mabon marks the beginning of the Autumn cooling. The nights have become longer than the days as we descend into the darker half of the year.

Druid Fire Festivals

What is Mabon?

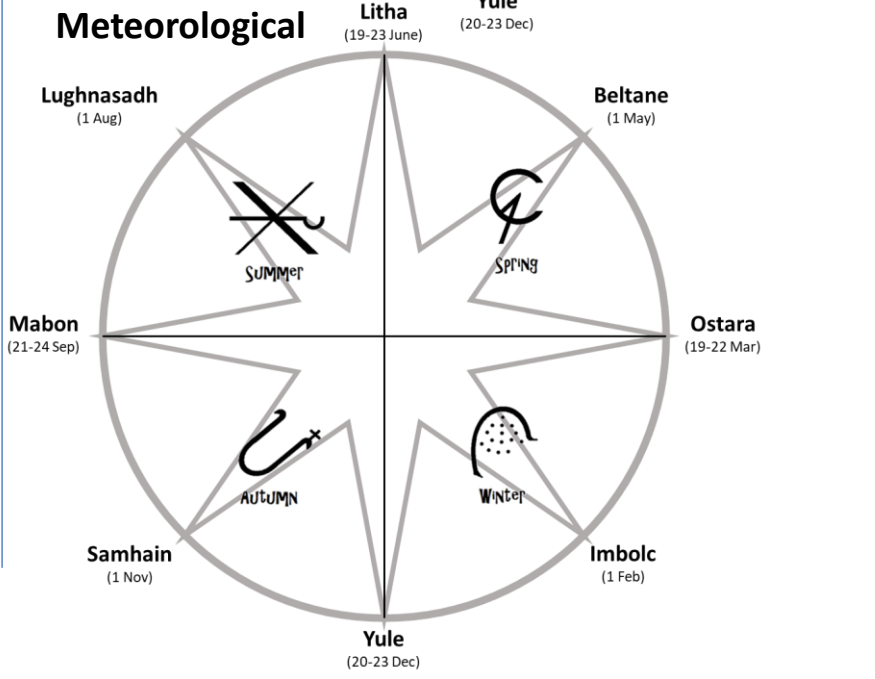
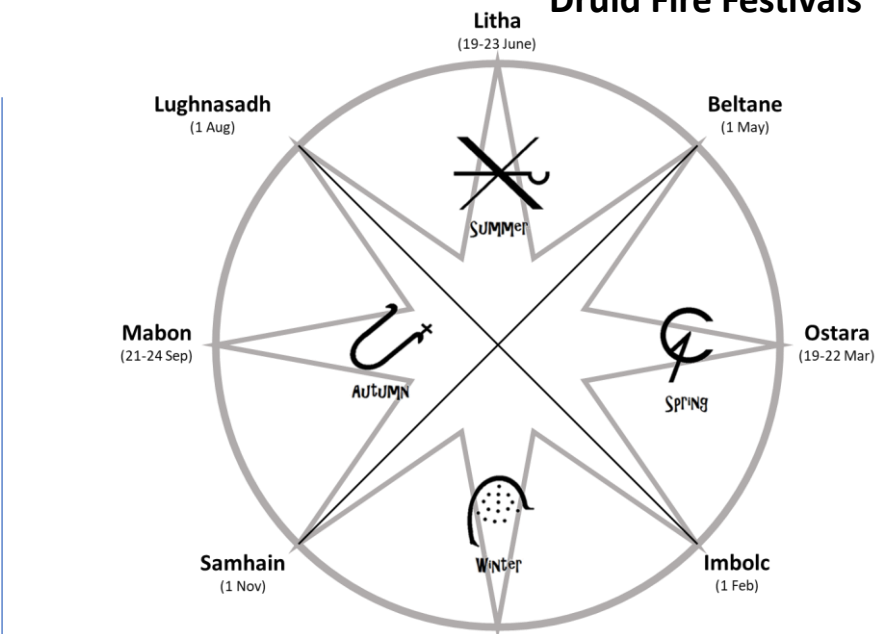
From ancient times the autumn equinox has been marked as a time of remembrance and thanksgiving. The balancing of day and night comes at the height of harvest.

The rush of harvest is no small task. Crops could not be harvested early without risking them being under-ripe; resulting in smaller yields more likely to spoil. Taken too late and the risk early frosts might take them. Thus, the harvest of the fields was a burden shared between neighbors, families, and friends.

The time leading up to the equinox was a time of heavy work, The shortening days came at the same time as the growing risk of harsh weather which would make the task of harvest harder, if not outright destroy crops in the field. This work would often be shared throughout the community. As the daylight faded it was traditional to use the relatively bright light of the full September moon to continue working.

So, the wealth and splendor of ripened, hearty fruits and vegetables are gathered and on full display. As the days grow shorter beasts of the field begin to be brought close in preparation for winter. The stores to see the people through the winter were counted and considered. As the harvest was gathered, the community that shared the labor of collecting it came together again to share in rejoicing and enjoy rich and plentiful food. Versions of this celebration are found around the world, ranging from family gatherings to grand festivals.

In this time of harvesting, we mark fullness and completion. We begin our own reckoning of the year. We give our thanks for that which we have. Most of all, we take this time to gather close friends and that family with whom we wish to celebrate the wealth, wonder, and lessons we have harvested.



Southward Equinox

The September equinox is known as the autumnal equinox (autumn equinox) in the Northern Hemisphere and as the vernal (spring equinox) equinox in the Southern Hemisphere. It may be taken to mark the beginning of astronomical winter and the end of astronomical spring in the Northern Hemisphere, or vice versa in the Southern Hemisphere.

The September equinox is also called the southward equinox. The equal length of night and day of an equinox happens because the point at which its sun is at its zenith (perceived to be directly overhead) is at the equator. Some track the precise moment of an equinox; which is when that zenith point, also called the subsolar point, appears to leave the Northern Hemisphere and cross the equator (0° longitude).

The southward equinox occurs as early as 21 September or as late as 24 September in the common western (Gregorian) calendar. Each common year the equinox is about 5 hours 49 minutes later than the previous year. As with many calculations, leap years serve to reset this, making it about 18 hours 11 minutes earlier than the previous year. This system balances the increases of the common years against the losses of the leap years to keep the calendar date from drifting more than one day from 22 September.

From the surface of the Earth the subsolar point appears to move west, completing a circuit around the globe each day. It also moves north and south between the tropics over the course of a year; spiraling like a helix. The subsolar point contacts the Tropic of Cancer on the June solstice and the Tropic of Capricorn on the December solstice. The subsolar point crosses the Equator on the March and September equinoxes.

Lughnasadh and Mabon

Lughnasadh begins the harvest season, as we reap, pick, and gather the first ripening of what has been planted and grown for the year. There may be time in these waning days for another planting, but as light and dark reaches its balance point at Mabon the harvest will reach its height. Lughnasadh is the first blush of the season of riches, but Mabon is its fulfillment. A time of labor bringing opulence of bounty. This is a season of thanksgiving and cooperation; knowing the strength of one is the strength of all in the coming season of darkness.

Lughnasadh – Adulthood, wheat, ripening, reaping, life, and wealth.

Mabon and Samhain

During the arc from Mabon to Samhain the night becomes noticeably longer than the day. Mabon celebrates the culmination of harvest and the rush of a life well lived with family and friends. Samhain marks the turning from abundance to introspection, remembrance, and the mysteries of shadows and darkness. Both festivals share opportunities for reflection, gratitude, and connection with the cycles of nature. But, the outward focus of twilight turns to a thinning of the veil between the worlds of the living and the spirits. We turn from the celebration of those who still stand with us and turn our attention toward those who have passed.

Samhain – Old age, ancestors, endings, passings, sacrifice, slaughter and butchery, winnowing, and wisdom.

Mabon and Ostara

The equinoxes are about balance. Mabon is the dusk to Ostara's dawn. As these moments are the beginning and end of the day, the equinoxes are the major endpoints of the year's growing season. Ostara is the beginning of the arc that ends with Mabon's harvest celebrations.

Ostara – Birth, rebirth, awakenings, creation, new ideas, sowing, planting, and beginning new cycles.

Decorating for Mabon

The decorations for Mabon are very similar to other cultural harvest festivals around the world. Perhaps the most recognizable are the symbols used for Thanksgiving in the United States.

With the wealth of the harvest in the field, a traditional symbol of the season is the scarecrow. These talismans of the field, made into human shape and size to be used as guardians of the bounty against all manner of creatures that might seek to raid it before it can be gathered home.

One of the single most distinctive and recognizable symbols is the cornucopia. The horn-shaped wicker basket filled with harvested fruits and vegetables spilling forth.

Those fruits and vegetables themselves are symbols of the season. Mabon is known as the season of abundance because of rich foods like pumpkins and other gourds, apples, grapes, and all the fruits that are in season for harvest.

Apples take on additional symbolic meaning in the Pagan community. It is a well-recognized and loved fruit that is in season. However, it also represents healing, renewal, regeneration, and even immortality in various myths and stories.

Other signs of autumn are also used as symbols of the holiday; these include grapevines, autumn leaves, and all the oranges and browns that come with these things. These may be used as individual decorations, or used as seasonal "greenery." Wreaths are a common style, both for their aesthetic beauty and as a symbol of the never-ending cycle of life.

We seek numinous places and events. Those points in space and time that strike a spiritual chord through a sense of mystery or awe. Numinous comes from the Latin word meaning a deity or spirit presiding over a site or thing. It describes the power, presence, or realization of divinity. Psychologists have described both mystical and psychedelic experiences as numinous; a "non-rational, non-sensory experience or feeling whose primary and immediate object is outside the self." This mental state "presents itself as [...] wholly other, a condition absolutely [of its own kind] and incomparable whereby the human being finds himself utterly abashed." (Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige*)

We seek the sublime. Anything that excites our senses beyond the ordinary limits of their capacity. This word also comes from Latin, meaning "to raise on high," and is used to describe something which has been exalted, dignified, or ennobled. The idea of language being sublime was described between the first and third century CE by the Greek writer Longinus which defines the literary sublime as "excellence in language", the "expression of a great spirit" and the power to provoke ecstasy in one's readers. "Sublimity refers to a certain type of elevated language that strikes its listener with the mighty and irresistible power of a thunderbolt. A sublime passage can be heard again and again with equal pleasure."

We seek to transcend. Literally to climb (scend) across (trans) to surpass the usual limits and become supreme in excellence. To experience that which is beyond the range of usual perception and knowledge, free from the constraints of the material world.

Whatever the particulars we believe, as Pagans we find something filling for the soul in the spirit of myth and legend and hear echoes of the divine in the chords of song and poetry. On some level we experience life through the dirt and grass underfoot, the cathedral of reaching trees above, the ebb and flow of the crashing waves, the ageless mountains, the heart of the bonfire, and the ever-spinning stars above us.

A Dance of Starlight at Dusk

Even the most grounded, non-theistic, naturalistic Pagan seeks a sense of spiritual connection. We seek to escape experiencing everyday life as mundane, banal, and dreary. We seek to move outside such tedious understanding and put ourselves in a state of timelessness beyond ages.

The dark part of the year comes with a different set of challenges to this than the days of light. Western civilization has spent vast numbers of words celebrating life and summer. On the experience of warmth as joy; transcendent and uplifting. On the outward, shared aspects of life as refreshing and fulfilling; celebrating the extrovert over the introvert. We are told again and again to revel in the light of day, until we can't even question what it is we celebrate in the sunlight.

But, mortals thrive best when we find balance. Too much of either darkness or light will make any living thing wither. So, we must seek those things that feed our souls in the shadows as well as the light. The hours of night that grow long in winter invite us to contemplation, and it is easy for those thoughts to turn to loneliness and emptiness in the quiet. But, the liminality of it also makes it the best frontier from which to peer in our search for the transcendent, numinous, wondrous, and sublime. Like stars in the sky, these points of scattered light appear most clearly shimmering in the darkness.

We seek the wondrous things in life. All the experiences and places that amaze us, are marvelous, surprising, and extraordinary. Wondrous things can also be described as "wonderful," both in the sense of exciting wonder or, more literally, themselves being filled with wonder. As an emotion, wonder is a sense inspired by the curious or unknown – a surprise bringing joy or delight. Wonder is often compared to awe; except that awe implies fear, respect, or reverence that suggests a level of threat. Where the things that inspire awe are both beautiful and terrifying those that bring wonder replace that sense of fear with hope.

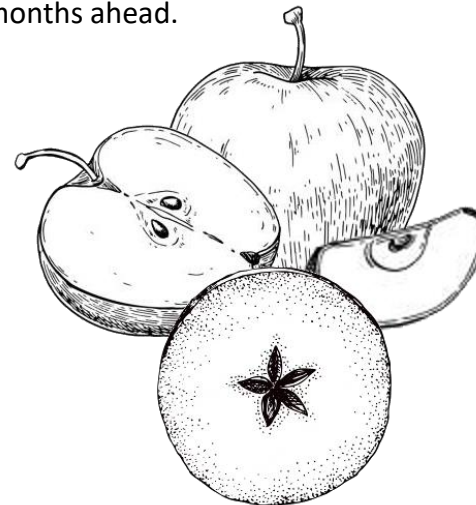
Apple Star

One of the great symbols of the feasts of Mabon is the humble apple. The ripeness and richness of the season are represented in the fruits that come to ripeness at this time. The apple is one of these, but its bright color, many uses in cooking, and difficulty in keeping completely fresh without preservation make it exceptionally tied to this time.

There are several seasonal rituals that include apples. Some of these involve cutting an apple across the mid-section core - rather than how most people cut for slices along the core from stem to base. When an apple is cut this way, the core reveals a five-pointed star, a pentacle.

The pentacle is an important symbol for many types of Pagan beliefs and practices. The most common interpretation of the pentacle is that the points represent the elements of Earth, Air, Fire, Water, and Spirit.

These apple stars may be wished upon, sacrificed, or used as decoration for a Mabon altar. In all these cases it serves to celebrate the gifts of the earth and bring hope for the dark months ahead.



Celebrations for Mabon

The most common celebration of the fall equinox and harvest is the gathering of family and community for feasting. Celebrating the labors of the year coming to fruition, and the joys of those who live and love us in the height of this wealth. This may be a grand family dinner, a bonfire to gather all those we rely on, a picnic for your favorite people, or a potluck where the community can share the wealth of their year and the labor of preparation.

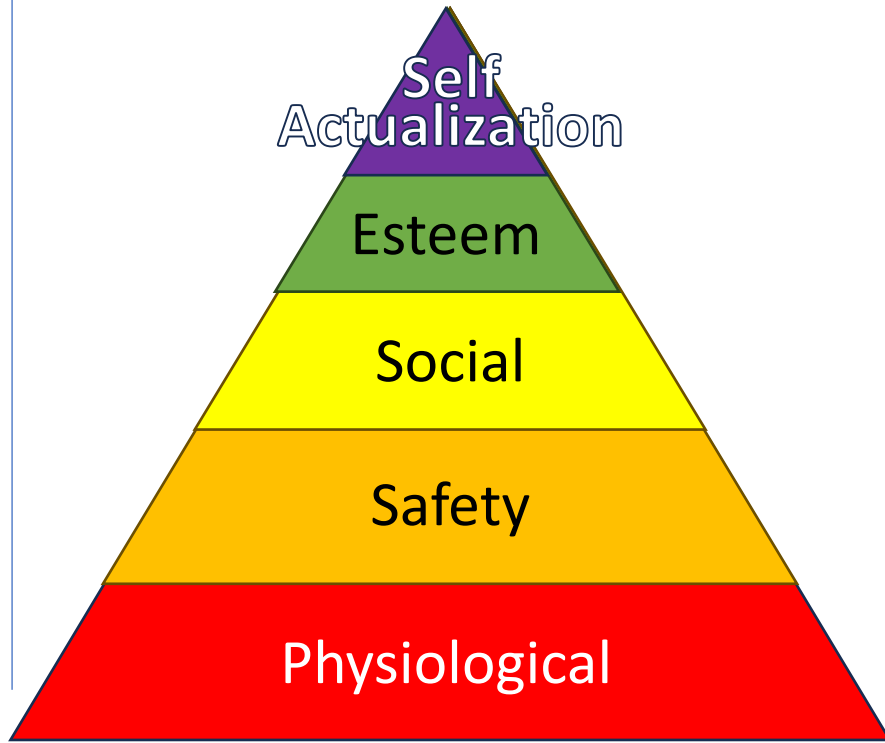
All manner of harvest activities are celebrated in the season. One particular activity is apple picking. In places where apples are abundant orchards may have fairs with fresh juice, cider, and apple sauce available, along with other activities. Along with orchards, there are pumpkin patches, corn mazes, and other such places to take a day and get in touch with the season.

Perhaps you have a literal garden to harvest. But we live in a time where the availability of food is untethered from the cycle of the year. Often our harvests are more metaphorical. This time can be celebrated simply by remembering to look back over all that you've worked on in the year. Asking yourself how have you grown and progressed and what sacrifices have paid off. This is a time to feel pride and accomplishment for how far you've come. For some, laying in their harvest means writing down their blessings and achievements from the past year in a journal.

This is the time of year when farmers could see how well their crops and livestock did and determine how well their family will be sustained through the winter. So, with the bounty of this season, it is a time of gift-giving. For all to be generous with whatever they are rich in. To be free with their gratitude and giving of thanks; remembering all those who supported and helped you grow, the land that sustained you, and the home that kept you safe. Because of this, the holiday is known as the Pagan Thanksgiving.

The fifth and final layer is the need for self-actualization, sometimes called transcendent needs. These are motivated almost entirely by hope and desire. They are attempts at fully realizing one's personal potential and achieving self-fulfillment. These needs include things like seeking personal growth, meaning, purpose, and balance while expressing creativity, beauty, and morality.

No single harvest will bring achievement and completion in all of these needs. But, these are the things we sow ever seeking growth.



The Richness of Modern Harvest

These days, concerns of survival are often separated from our daily awareness. The rise of civilization has given us space to move beyond the base worries of starvation and exposure to the elements. However, we find we have needs for safety that go beyond simple food and shelter. Within the framework of social connections required to function in modern society are needs that run deep.

One of the best-known descriptions of the needs of living creatures is called Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This model divides the needs of living creatures into five layers. No layer's needs can be met if those of a lower layer aren't mostly met, or if we feel they are at risk. However, all of these needs are things that an individual may seek, even if a lower level's needs haven't been met.

The first two layers are called deficiency needs; they motivate us through fear and pain. The features of these needs are things that civilization generally agrees that people should be able to reliably meet. The base layer of needs are physiological requirements; food and shelter. Air to breathe, something to eat, water to drink, places to sleep, clothes to wear, and the like. The next layer is safety and security needs. Certainty against personal attacks, health, freedom from fear, stability, and the ability to gather personal property.

Beyond these basic deficiency needs are growth needs. These layers motivate us through hope and desire, and the rewards when these needs are met can be great. The third layer is filled with our basic social needs; the need for a sense of connection, friendship, acceptance, belonging, and family. The fourth level builds on those needs; esteem. This is divided into outward esteem and inward esteem. Outward esteem is sometimes considered part of the social layer. It is a feeling of not just belonging and being accepted by others, but being valued; having trust, respect, intimacy, status, recognition as an individual, and appreciation of contributions. Inward esteem is the sense of personal strength, confidence, dignity, achievement, mastery, and independence. Where outward esteem is something that is generated within a particular group, inward esteem is something that we take from place to place and helps us build those social connections and esteem with new people.

Several customs have been celebrated at harvest festivals throughout the ages. In some places, it is considered ill luck to have the last uncut wheat or corn stalk. Sometimes the spirit of the land would be honored by taking the last remaining corn sheaf and dressing in fine clothes. Depending on the place this corn dolly might be saved through the winter as a talisman for spring, or the spirit of the corn released by setting the effigy alight among the autumn festivities.

As you enjoy the bounty of the earth and the year, feed your soul in other ways. Take a walk or drive, and enjoy the leaves changing from green to all the brilliant colors of Autumn. Watch the sunset and take in the late rush of life.

While the work of the growing season was coming to an end at this holiday, there was still preparation to complete before winter. We may not have livestock to tend or hay to bale and store or sell but the days are still getting shorter and the weather will soon start to cool. In some places, this means we will be spending more time inside. Some animals will soon turn to their hibernation, seeking dens in which to be cozy. You should seek to make the same sort of winter sanctuary where you can be comfortable as the season leads you to turn inward as well.

Modern technology which allows us to communicate with people around the world reduces the isolation of winter. But in places where the weather turns bad, we are still less able to share space with others. This makes those feasts of Thanksgiving shared with loved ones all the sweeter.

Other Celebrations

Yoruba, and related religions and practices like Santería, recognize days of celebration for the Orisha throughout the year. Three of the major Orisha are celebrated around this time:

Yemaya is primarily patron of water, the ocean and life-giving waters. She is also associated with the moon, parenting, child safety, love, and healing. She is the protector of women and governs feminine mysteries. She is celebrated on September 7.

Oshun is a deity of rivers, and the youngest of the Orisha known for her incredible beauty. She is connected to destiny and divination, and considered goddess of divinity, femininity, fertility, beauty, and love. She is celebrated on September 8, and has the Osun-Osogbo festival which lasts for 14 days starting during the last part of August.

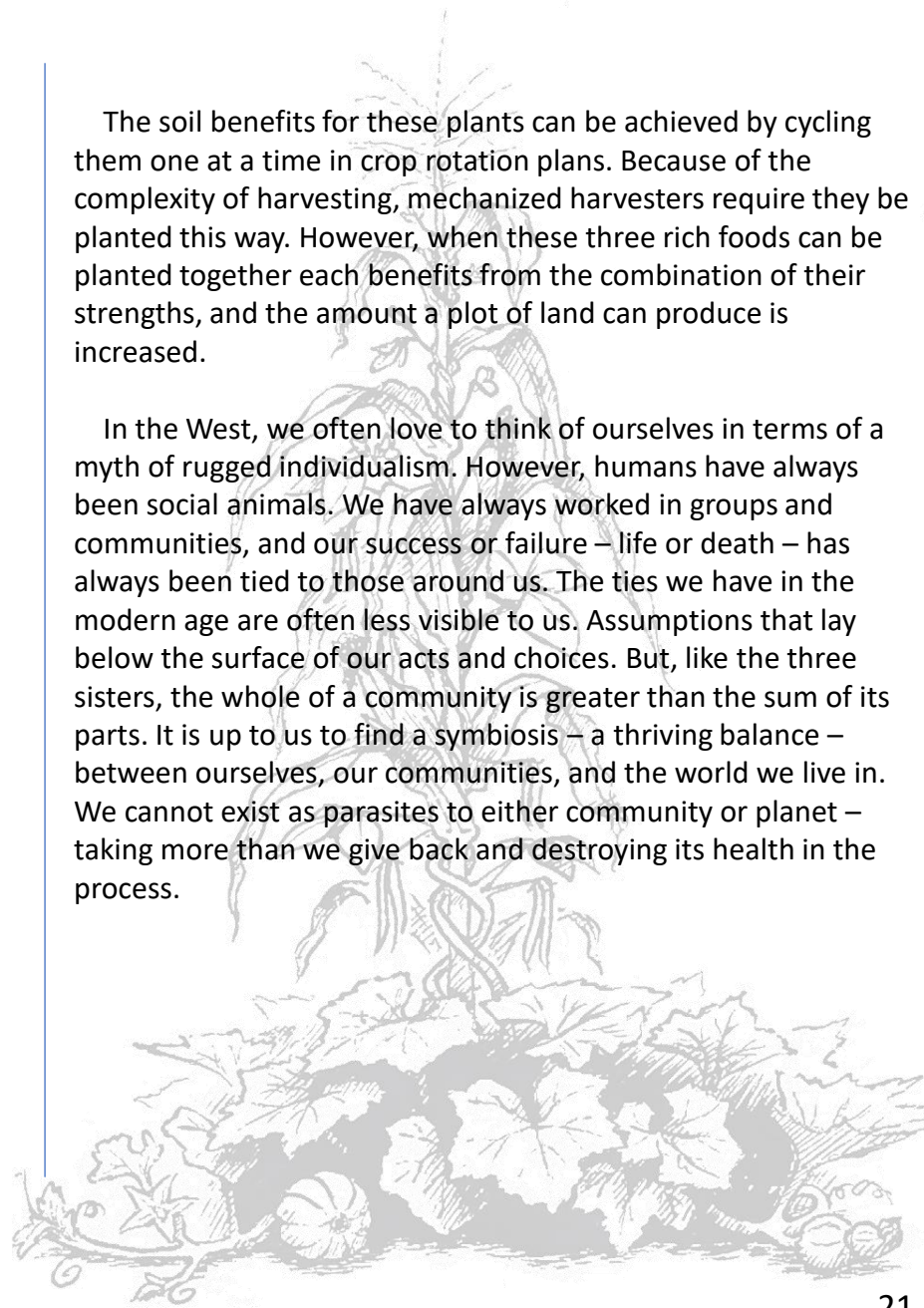
Obatala is the creator of humans and associated with honesty, purity, and forgiveness. They are a protector of people with disabilities. With both male and female traits they are often depicted as gender-fluid. Obatala's festival day is September 24.

The town of Saint-Émilion, France celebrates the Ban des Vendanges, which translates to "lifting the ban of the grape harvest." A ceremony performed by the Jurade, a group of winegrowers dressed in red caps and robes. This event was founded 800 years ago with the mission to supervise the production of fine wines. This event has grown to include a parade, and festival with wine tastings, local arts, crafts, and produce. This is just one of many grape and wine festivals held throughout Italy, France, Germany, and other parts of Europe during this season.

One of the best-known events of this season is Oktoberfest in Munich, Germany. Held in Bavaria for more than 200 years, this famous traditional German harvest celebration takes place between the third weekend in September and the first Sunday in October. It is known as the world's biggest beer festival, but it offers many German traditional foods and treats as well as live music, parades, and carnival rides.

The soil benefits for these plants can be achieved by cycling them one at a time in crop rotation plans. Because of the complexity of harvesting, mechanized harvesters require they be planted this way. However, when these three rich foods can be planted together each benefits from the combination of their strengths, and the amount a plot of land can produce is increased.

In the West, we often love to think of ourselves in terms of a myth of rugged individualism. However, humans have always been social animals. We have always worked in groups and communities, and our success or failure – life or death – has always been tied to those around us. The ties we have in the modern age are often less visible to us. Assumptions that lay below the surface of our acts and choices. But, like the three sisters, the whole of a community is greater than the sum of its parts. It is up to us to find a symbiosis – a thriving balance – between ourselves, our communities, and the world we live in. We cannot exist as parasites to either community or planet – taking more than we give back and destroying its health in the process.



Three Sisters

When growing crops, one of the many things that requires consideration is soil depletion through over-farming. This happens because each type of crop that is grown requires certain minerals and materials from the soil, and if the same things are demanded from the same dirt over and over it can lead to exhaustion. The typical response to this in modern, mechanized, single-crop planting is a crop rotation. Cycling through planting crops that require different materials. When done best, the byproducts of one crop will be beneficial to one or more others in the cycle. However, this is not the only way to achieve this.

When Europeans arrived in the Americas, they found that the indigenous culture used what is now described in technical terms as “companion planting.” This is where multiple crops are planted at the same time on the same plot of land. These plants grow in symbiosis, not only helping maintain a balance in the soil but benefitting from the presence of one another in other ways.

Throughout the different tribes and cultures of the Americas, different sets of companion planting are used. The best known are referred to as the “three sisters,” corn, beans, and squash. The corn stalk serves as a trellis for climbing beans. The beans, in turn, provide usable nitrogen into the soil while stabilizing the stalks against high winds. Finally, the wide leaves of the squash plant shade the ground, keeping the soil moist and helping reduce the growth of weeds.

Michaelmas (also known as the Feast of Saints Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, the Feast of the Archangels, or the Feast of Saint Michael and All Angels) is a Christian festival observed in many Christian calendars on 29 September. It has been one of the four quarter days of the English and Irish financial, judicial, and academic year. This festival marked the new year for free tenant farmers and landowners in the Middle Ages and the early modern period. Harvest was over, and the bailiff or reeve of the manor would be elected and make out the accounts for the year; when rent was due, along with issuing or settling contracts or other legal transactions.

World Suicide Prevention Day (WSPD) is observed on 10 September every year to raise awareness to prevent cases of suicide. This day is organized by the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP) and co-sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO). The darkness of the coming part of the year can cause depression, and the winter holiday season can have negative impacts on many people.

September 11 is marked as the National Day of Service and Remembrance in the United States. The day provides a chance to help others in tribute to those killed and injured on September 11, 2001, many of them first responders rushing to provide aid.

The date 11 September has historical significance in India. In 1730, over 360 people from the Bishnoi tribe in the village of Khejarli objected to the felling of trees. Maharaja Abhai Singh Rathore wanted to cut down trees near their village. One of the beliefs of the Bishnois that any green trees should not be cut down. The villagers had pleaded with the representatives of the king to not cut down the trees. Led by a woman named Amrita Devi Bishnoi the villagers hugged the trees to shield them with their bodies. Announcing that they would rather die than stand down, the soldiers beheaded Devi along with her family and several other villagers. Other Bishnoi communities nearby sent people to support the Kherjali struggle, and 363 Bishnoi villagers were killed while protecting the trees. Abhai Singh ultimately traveled to the village to offer an apology and issued an edict that prevented the killing of animals and cutting of trees near all Bishnoi villages. Due to this, the country of India created National Forest Martyrs Day. This non-violent struggle inspired numerous passive resistance movements.

There are mid-autumn festivals throughout East and Southeast Asia. These festivals are enormously important, on par with the Lunar New Year. Countries throughout the region celebrate this season, including China (Mid-Autumn Festival, also known as the Moon Festival or Mooncake Festival), Japan (Tsukimi), Korea (Chuseok), Vietnam (Tết Trung Thu), and other countries.

In China, the history of the Mid-Autumn Festival dates back over 3,000 years. Based on the legend of Chang'e, the Chinese Moon goddess, this festival is held on the 15th (full moon) day of the 8th month of the Chinese lunisolar calendar – roughly mid-September to early October by the Gregorian calendar. The Chinese believe that on this day the Moon is at its brightest and fullest size for the mid-Autumn harvest time. The Chinese celebrate by carrying and displaying lanterns of all sizes and shapes as symbolic beacons to light the path to prosperity and good fortune.

This festival is known in Korean as Chuseok (literally "autumn evening") or sometimes as Hangawi (archaic Korean for "the great middle of autumn"). It is a three-day holiday in South Korea and the biggest traditional holiday in South Korea. As a celebration of good harvest Koreans visit their ancestral hometowns and share a feast of Korean traditional food. Chuseok also has significant aspects of honoring ancestors. This is done through memorial services at home as well as visiting ancestral graves to tidy and bring the ancestors their favorite meals as an offering.

According to popular belief, Chuseok originated from a month-long weaving contest between two teams called Gabae during the reign of the third king of the kingdom of Silla (57 BC - 935 AD). This grew into a festival with archery competitions and martial arts demonstrations and ended with a feast in honor of the winner of the weaving contest put on by the team who lost.

Celebrated at the start of October, Mehregan is a Zoroastrian and Iranian festival in honor of Mithra; a divinity responsible for friendship, affection, and love. Into the early period of Islam, this holiday was celebrated with the same pageantry and festivity as Nowruz, the spring equinox, and filled with feasts and gift-giving.

Eternal Summer, Unending Harvest

The modern age seems like a time of eternal bounty. In many ways, this era is characterized by the abundance of food in most of the world. The availability of fresh produce has little or nothing to do with the season. The harvests of this age are so vast we willingly waste food at industrial scales. We discard edible food which is not visually appealing. We destroy produce to maintain the value of the work that creates it. While places in the world continue to be impacted by horrific starvation, they are most frequently the result of catastrophes. Sometimes these are natural catastrophes; floods, fire, and drought. Far more often, they are human-created catastrophes; war, greed, and cruelty.

This wealth of resources exists because of another type of bounty we have learned to grow and harvest; technology. The evolution of science has given us greenhouses, hydroponics, refrigeration, global supply chains, and other wonders that deliver a nearly boundless wealth of food. These miracles provide to each member of society vastly more than they might otherwise have. While even in the richest parts of the world there are those who are destitute, that poverty is still more forgiving than the life most people a hundred years ago aspired to.

But, these modern wonders also tie us together in new ways. We live in a web of connections far more complex than the simple yearly cycle of waxing and waning life. Every part of this system requires specialization of labor and depends on a thousand other connections. While each individual is vastly more comfortable than they would be without the whole, each individual is also dependent on the whole for their quality of life and even survival.

In pre-modern agrarian societies, the season of harvest was about enjoying a few good meals and setting aside food that would last your family and small community through the winter. There would be work to do to ensure foods were properly stored without the benefits of refrigeration; drying, pickling and other confits, fermentation, sweet preserves, and smoking or salting meat.

In this age of eternal summer, take the time to appreciate this unending harvest. Acknowledge those whose creations and inventions allow you to live in relative comfort, honor the members of your greater community whose labor feeds you though you may never meet them, and remember those who still hunger

The Horn of Plenty

The cornucopia, also called the horn of plenty, is the well-recognized hollow, horn-shaped wicker basket filled with fruits and vegetables. Throughout the West, it is a symbol of the season of harvest, in the United States that is often focused on the holiday of Thanksgiving. The symbol comes from classical antiquity. Our modern term for it comes from Latin cornu (horn) and copia (abundance).

Baskets of this type were used in Western Asia and Europe to carry food as it was harvested. As the horn-shaped basket was worn on the back or slung around the torso it left the harvester's hands free for picking.

Two major myths from ancient Greek traditions describe the origins of the horn. The first is a story of the baby Zeus who was cared for and protected by several divine attendants, including the goat Amaltheia who fed him with her milk. In one version, as Zeus grew into a child and needed solid food, Amaltheis (the "Nourishing Goddess") broke off her own horn, which then had the divine power to provide unending nourishment. In another the babe, not knowing his strength, accidentally broke her horn off while they were playing.

The cornucopia became a tool shown with several Greek and Roman deities. It was particularly tied to those associated with harvest, prosperity, or spiritual abundance. Examples include personifications of Earth (Gaia or Terra), the child Plutus, Demeter, Fortuna, and the nymph Maia. In the Roman Imperial cult, abstract Roman deities who fostered peace and prosperity were also depicted with a cornucopia, including Abundantia ("Abundance" personified), and Annona (goddess of the grain supply to the city of Rome).

Hades, the classical ruler of the underworld, was a giver of wealth from the earth. This included not only mineral wealth, such as gold and gems, but also agricultural and spiritual wealth. As a result, he often holds a cornucopia when shown in art. It was common to pray to Demeter as the goddess of agriculture and the harvest to preside over crops, grains, and food. Hades also controlled the growth of seeds in the dark and the wealth of crops rising from the soil. Thus they also honored him seeking the promise of a good harvest.

A holiday called Harvest Home, Ingathering, and Kirn (from churn) are traditional English, Irish, and Scottish festivals celebrated in antiquity. It has survived to modern times in isolated regions and has been reinstated by various authorities in others. In 1861 the Church of England recognized Harvest Home in the Church calendar on 3 September, though it has historically been celebrated later in September.

Participants celebrate the last day of harvest by singing, shouting, and decorating the village with branches from trees. The ancient festival included the symbolic sacrifice of the spirit of grain. The last sheaf of grain – called the cailleac – is taken to represent the spirit of the field. It is made into a harvest doll and drenched with water as a rain charm then saved until spring planting.

Meán Fómhair is celebrated by some Irish and Celtic polytheists. This festival takes its name from the Gaelic name for Autumn and the word harvest ("Fómhar"). The names for September (Meán Fómhair) and October (Deireadh Fómhair) translate directly as "middle of harvest" and "end of harvest."

Alban Elfed is the Autumnal Equinox festival celebrated as a harvest and Thanksgiving festival by members of some Druidic traditions. Most notably it comes from the Order of the Bards, Ovates, and Druids.



The Origins of Names

Much like the wheel itself, the names of the Sabbats are a combination of construction and reconstruction. Some names go back hundreds or thousands of years, some reach back only decades.

One particular example is the name of the holiday celebrated at the Autumn Equinox. Aidan Kelly created a Pagan Craft Calendar in 1974 and needed names for the summer solstice and fall equinox that were aesthetically balanced with Yule and Ostara. Numerous figures have arrived at Litha as a name for the solstice. Tolkien, for one, deduced this name from Bede's description of the Saxon calendar.

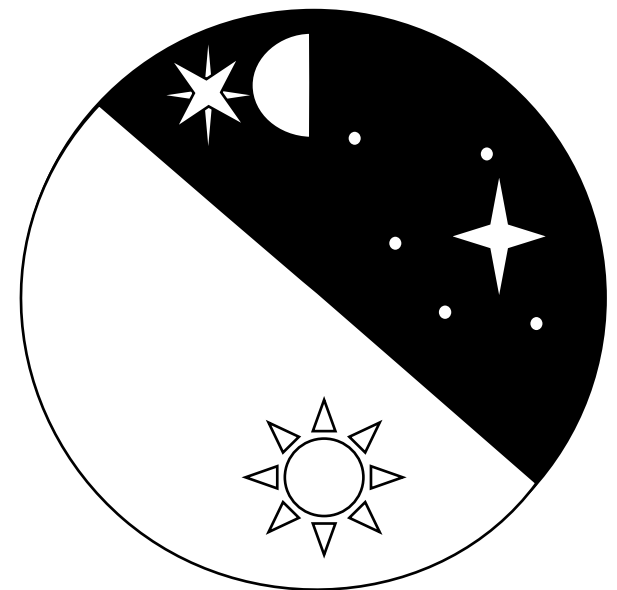
Sir Fred Hoyle proved in his book on Stonehenge that a secondary circle in the oldest layout of Stonehenge showed that the fall equinox had been honored three thousand years before the start of the Common Era (five thousand years ago). But no name for it is recorded.

Kelly wanted to find a Saxon name to match those of Litha, Yule, and Eostre, but there did not seem to be a good source. The only similar story came from the Mabinogion; the rescue of Mabon ap Modron from prison. So he chose Mabon and put it in the calendar he submitted to Oberon Zell-Ravenheart who began using the name in the major Pagan publication *Green Egg*.

Aidan Kelly chose Mabon from a manuscript of Welsh mythology and lore. The Mabinogion text includes some of the earliest tales of Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. The hero of one of the stories is a handsome young god named Mabon ap Modron ("Son of the Mother") who was held hostage in the underworld as a baby.

Throughout the spring and summer, we focus on how the physical can be transcendent and wondrous. But, in the cooling of autumn, we need to ensure that we hold on to that sense of connection. Even as we may find ourselves confined to smaller spaces, we need to make sure that we don't lose that sense of the wondrous physical world. We need to find within ourselves the sublime nature of the things we can fill those spaces with. To find that numinous nature, and not allow our lives to become mundane through rote and complacency.

The ancients saw beauty in the balance of this point of symmetry. They saw that not only were dark and light equal, but other aspects of the universe they saw as having tension; masculine and feminine, inner and outer. In the time between, they saw these as poised and suspended. Liminal, and filled with possibility.



A Play of Light and Shadow

As an equinox, Mabon is a time of balance. Day and night, light and dark, are equal as it was at Ostara. Again we stand at the edge of transition. Unlike the spring equinox, now the shadows grow, and life begins its turn inward. With the fading light, the trees begin to withdraw their sap toward their roots, causing their leaves to blaze into color. Creatures frantically prepare by stockpiling to build hoards of food and gorging themselves to build fatty stores; all to see them through the hunger of the coming darkness. Shadows grow longer, and warmth will soon begin to cool.

Pagans see little separation between the physical world and the spiritual world. Whether we experience it through a sense of wonder that the natural world we experience is the totality of what is, through a sense of the supernatural that remains constantly present, or some balance between these. Our experience of the divine is in its immanence; the blurring and unity between the two.

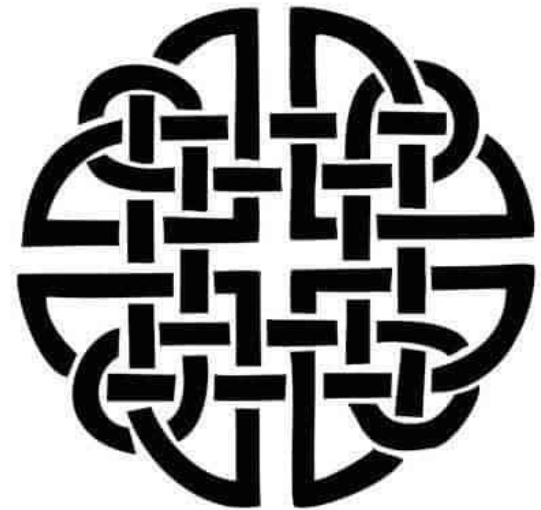
The division that is experienced is between the mythic and the mundane. When we see light through leaves or stained glass we can experience it as simple illumination. A thing we observe, that we see, and which allows us to see other things. Instead, it can be an extraordinary thing; something we allow ourselves to experience, childlike and filled with wonder.

When preparing for the coming months of long darkness it is particularly important to remember this. During this time when the world we look to with our eyes and feel with our skin has less natural light, we must turn these lessons inwards to make our own warmth; planting seeds within our own mind and spirit to grow hope and joy throughout this time.

Kelly chose this name because the Welsh god's story has some elements in common with the Greek goddess Demeter, whose story is often told at the fall Equinox. Kelly has written about this choice saying, "There seems to be a complex of myths associating the fall equinox with the rescue of a young person from death, datable back to about 1500 B.C.E." He continues by referencing the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac which is read at Rosh Hashanah, a Jewish holiday that also happens in late September.

It is important to remember that we celebrate these holidays because of the way they connect us to the world, each other, ourselves, and, through these and other doors, to the divine. Where we can, we seek to honor and celebrate the history and practices of our ancestors. Where we can, we seek to use the tools of those historical figures who held communion with the gods we seek to honor. But, so much of that information is lost or obscured, sometimes the best we can hope for is poetry.

In the end, it is the intent and effort that makes the thing sacred.



Adulthood and Maturity

Adolescence is typically expected to end somewhere between 18 and 21 years of age. At this point, an individual has reached the point of physical maturity, though their personality is often still developing and they are establishing the course for their life. The human brain continues to develop until the individual reaches about 30 years of age. This is still a time of firsts, discovery, and learning, but the constant wonder of newness that fills childhood and even adolescence starts to slow. Those discoveries and firsts are the result of what came before; skills and traits developed and nurtured starting to bear first fruits and grains on which we live our lives. Young adulthood is part of what the Wheel of the Year characterizes as the brighter half, but at Lughnasadh the days are getting shorter and harvest time is beginning.

At about 30 years old the human brain goes through a process where the speed at which new connections are made decreases and unused neural connections fall away. In many ways, we become who we most are and will be in terms of our thoughts and personality. Learning should never stop, but the way we approach things becomes much harder to change once we reach this point. We harvest what we have planted and grown, using the tools we have wrought. As we come to Mabon in the Wheel of the Year light and dark reaches its balance point, and the harvest is at its height. Mabon is an age of riches; the power of summer is fading towards the wisdom of age but, like so many things, at the equinox they sit in balance.

Family and Community

One of the frequently talked about parts of celebrations at this time of year is the gathering of family. Many things needed for survival in an agrarian society are far larger than one person or small group can accomplish on their own. Raising a barn and gathering crops by hand required the effort of many people; an entire community.

Modern life rarely puts us in situations where we need to construct our own buildings or gather food for survival. The challenges we face in life are always easier and the weights we carry are lighter with the help of hands from those close to us. It is vanishingly rare for a person to prosper alone and without support from those around them. Individual success is nearly always a result of community effort.

A few of us are lucky enough to be born into families who can support us in the ways we need to thrive. More often in the modern world, our families of birth lack the individual wealth and personal growth to fully support all their children. For a variety of reasons, Pagans are often “black sheep,” who go their own way and challenge the assumptions of their families of birth. So we build our own communities, constructing families of choice who can and will support us in the moments when blood family can’t or won’t.

Even for those who don’t feel like aliens in their homes of origin, life can present many challenges to this idea of family and community. The choice of military life makes wanderers of us all. We are scattered far from the homes, friends, and families where we grew up; so we build our own families in the spaces we are put with those we find. More and more people in the modern world find themselves living lives in this way. Even without joining the military, people have to move again and again to find employment in a world that hosts fewer and fewer physical spaces where we are invited to build the connections that make a community. This is why, when we can make these connections they are precious and, ultimately, as fantasy author Jim Butcher put it; “I don’t care about whose DNA has recombined with whose. When everything goes to hell, the people who stand by you without flinching – they are your family.”