***Beltane***

*Under Full Scorpion Moon,*

*this sabbat doth take place.*

*My blood drips from under me*

*to paint the Mother's face.*

*We bleeding women arise*

*from Springtime's laborious toil*

*to fashion ourselves a ring,*

*to sanctify this soil.*

*We hear the menfolk drumming*

*and running through the trees.*

*There are no deer to battle here*

*to bring them to their knees,*

*still their hearts are racing.*

*As we are facing*

*the four corners of the Earth,*

*we do plead as we bleed*

*that She will coax our grain to birth.*

*A priestess takes her Hawthorne wand*

*to cast a cone of power.*

*Our prayers we state, and we meditate*

*til we hear a distant howl.*

*We know they come.*

*The men with their drums run*

*leaping o'er our fires.*

*The chanting begins,*

*we women join in*

*and the power soars farther and higher.*

*We open the circle to welcome the God,*

*and magic now comes into play.*

*We drink and we dine,*

*passing kisses like wine*

*til it's time for the Great Rite of the day.*

*In pairs we do lay*

*making love under stars,*

*rhythms born from our hearts,*

*to consecrate the magic we'd spun.*

*And all through the night,*

*under fire and moonlight,*

*gods and goddesses unite as One.*

*As Sola arises in the eastern sky,*

*atop the island, the sea*

*and the incoming tides,*

*I make my start, with full heart.*

*In search of some morning dew,*

*to anoint my brow, to anoint you,*

*my love,*

*on this holy day...*

*I make my way.*

*Emily Colay, 1999*

*Playa del Carmen, México*

**Circle Five: Beltane**

The world outside is a marvel to me now. It has happened: Spring has sprung, and my entire being is bursting along with it.

Though Summer is so beloved to me, it is somewhat bittersweet to arrive at Litha, knowing the Sun will slowly begin its next descent into the Underworld. Here, at Beltane, the light and heat are still waxing to its zenith. There is comfort in knowing we have many months of this abundant unfurling yet to enjoy. There is *time*.

The chartreuse leaves budding on the trees in mid-Spring is one of my favorite sights to behold. My most beloved flower, the Bleeding Heart, is also starting to bloom in my garden - more populated this year than last. The scent of the lilacs and the apple blossoms are intoxicating. The sounds of the birds are enchanting. The open waters on the lake nearby - finally released from their frozen state - splashing and lapping at the shores, is nothing short of blissful. And the winds… no longer slicing the skin, but now warmly kissing and caressing… *this* is heaven on Earth.

First thing this morning, I baked spicy oat cookies, molded into little crescent moons, and brewed some hibiscus tea. This is an old tradition, an offering I make to the little people outside, as this is the time of year when the veils between our world and theirs is at its thinnest. I’ve collected some hair and fingernail clippings for them as well. I’ve been told they use them for tools… but secretly, I hope that sharing a little of my essence somehow binds me to them in a good way.

Many of my rituals on this holy day carry that same intention: to bind myself to the other beings, the non-human relatives, with such profound gratitude and love. Whether by making a crown of flowers; or bringing my altar items outside to soak in the light of the Sun; or later, leaping over a fire, to release the last of any lingering ills of Winter… as life returns to the world around me, life also rises profoundly within me. I am one with Creation.

In a few days, I will begin to transfer the little seedling plants growing inside my warm home to the garden beds outside, returning them to the embrace of the Earth Mother, where they belong. Over the next many months, as Her dutiful daughter, I will look after them, like a big sister. I’ll make sure they are watered, pruned, and nourished. I will sing to them, and pray with them. I will admire their beauty, and their bounty. We will know one another as true relatives.

I will also praise the soils in which they grow, and all the little microorganisms living within… as well as the birds and the bees, the butterflies and other insects. Together, as one family in the great hoop of life, we all have our role. Our collective abundance is tied, one to the other. I honor their work, and am devoted to my own, all for the greater good. So be it. Blessed be.

**An Introduction…**

Beltane marks the second cross-quarter day in the Wheel of the Year. The first was Imbolc, representing the halfway point between Winter and Spring. At Beltane, we are now halfway between Spring and Summer.

There is a clear difference in the energy at the midpoint of this season. We see plainly that the Wheel has shifted. The days are noticeably longer, and the sun sets well into the evening now. The air outside is much warmer. And new life is cropping up everywhere: from the buds of leaves on the trees; to the patches of baby grass growing on our lawns; to baby birds and critters crying and scampering about. There is no denying that the goddess Persephone has risen from the Underworld, and the Earth has been reborn.

Beltane is a Celtic word, meaning “the fires of Bel.” Bel likely referred to the Celtic Sun god, Belenus. The fires were a very important symbol to the ancient Celts, used in all of the holy sabbat rituals.

As the Gaelic Celts were primarily herdsmen, their Beltane rituals were designed to protect their herds and encourage their growth. Therefore, there were typically two great bonfires lit, for purification as well as to increase fertility. The herdsmen would drive their animals through the smoke of the fire, and people would leap over the fires themselves, believing this would purify them all from any lingering ills of Winter. People would then take the embers home to light the fires in the hearths of their homes. This was believed to protect them in the months ahead, and encourage growth in their animals and in their lives.

As the counterpoint to the sabbat of Samhain, when the veils between the living and the dead are at their thinnest, so is it believed that at Beltane, the veils between the worlds of human and faerie folk (or, the little people) is also at its thinnest. These spirits and faeries are thought to be especially active at this time of year. Offerings would be left at the ancient faerie forts, the wells and in other sacred places in an effort to appease these nature spirits to ensure a successful growing season.

There are many other traditions at Beltane, most of them honoring fertility and sexuality. In modern times, these ancient ways have been adapted into May Day celebrations. Like many of the other co-opted pagan sabbats, remnants of the original rites have carried forth - like the Maypole dance, crafting May Day baskets, leaping over fires, and community gatherings as larger outdoor celebrations. Given our overculture’s more conservative views on sexuality, this most important aspect honored at Beltane is now largely overlooked, or even intentionally omitted. For those of us reclaiming these ancient ways, we understand the importance of honoring sexuality and fertility as sacred rites. And, it makes our Beltane rituals that much more festive and fun. ;)

**The God Belenus**

The Gaulish god Belenus (Belinus/Belenos), whose worship goes back to deep antiquity, was a widely recognized deity associated with healing, springtime festival, protection, and, on occasion, with the S[un](https://www.ancientpages.com/2019/04/01/sun-highest-cosmic-power-worshiped-by-ancient-people-and-represented-by-deities/). His name is probably a Latinization of the god Beli, worshiped by the [Celts](https://www.ancientpages.com/2017/03/01/celts-facts-and-history-about-the-powerful-and-superior-people-of-central-and-northern-europe/), who inhabited the European continent before being driven away by the Romans. In ancient depictions, this deity was recognized as the equivalent of the Roman god [Apollo](https://www.ancientpages.com/2019/02/06/apollo-loved-and-feared-greek-god-of-divination-and-prophecy-who-was-also-seer-of-zeus/), a god of light and the Sun, but sometimes associated with the god [Lugh](https://www.ancientpages.com/2018/04/30/lugh-mighty-god-of-light-sun-and-crafts-in-celtic-beliefs/).

Belenus was often depicted riding the sun across the sky in a horse-drawn chariot. Other depictions show him riding a horse and throwing thunderbolts while using his wheel as a shield. Both a wheel and head with solar rays and halos are also associated with Belenus. The lines surrounding Belenus’s head could probably symbolize the warm, glowing rays of light coming from the sun god. The goddess Belisama in Gaul is sometimes shown as the consort of Belenus.

As we know, the god Apollo acquired power over medicine, healing, and disease after he was established at Delphi. In Celtic culture, however, Belenus was associated with health, fountains, and the pastoral lifestyle. His other associations were with the symbols of the phallic-shaped stone, the bull, the oak, and the horse.

Due to his healing functions, he was worshiped as ‘the Master of Power’ or ‘the Powerful One’ at healing waters including Aquae Borvonis (Bourbon-les-Bains) in France, and water sanctuaries, such as sacred springs at Sainte-Sabine, Burgundy, France.

In various records, Belenus also appears as a protective deity of the livestock and crop along with areas related to agrarian activities. In this ritual, both cattle and crops were purified with the intention of ensuring prosperity for the following year. This ritual of protection was held in honor of this deity.

**History**

Inscriptions dedicated to Belenus were found at many sites. He was worshiped among the Illyrians, in central and southern Gaul, in the eastern Alps, and Aquileia (North Italy), where scholars identified as many as fifty-one of them. In the 3rd century, this god was the patron deity of the city, and the most popular divinity, according to Aelius Herodianus, one of the most celebrated grammarians of Greco-Roman antiquity. Herodianus in “The Roman Histories” equated Belenus with Apollo; however, it was only confirmed in a few of the inscriptions.

Herodianus (Herodian) writes that the god Belenus appeared above a battlefield in Aquileia, Italy. The emperor Maximinus besieged the city in 238, but oracles testified that the city would be protected by Belenos, who was later attested to have been seen hovering over the soldiers. Aquileia was really a very tough city; it was defended by the former consuls Crispinus and Menophilus, and it did withstand the siege, outlasting the emperor, who was assassinated within four months.

Another author, Julius Capitolinus (300 AD -350 AD) also referred to Belenus as Apollo or the Sun.

Traces of his worship in ancient times were found in other places in Europe as well, and most probably, early European settlers had their ritual site dedicated to Belenus at a site in New Hampshire called Mystery Hill, where a stone tablet with an Ogham inscription "Dedicated to Bel" on it, was discovered in 1967, and translated by Dr. Barry Fell, president of the Epigraphic Society:

*“The ancient author Apollonius relates a Celtic story of a stream formed by the tears of Apollo Belenus when he was forced from heaven by his father; as Apollo was the Greek sun divinity, this textual evidence strengthens the argument that Belenus had solar connections. In Britain, a hero Belinus was mentioned by the early historian Geoffrey of Monmouth as the twin to Brennius, the two went to war over the throne but ultimately agreed to share power.*

*The continental god Belinus is not described as warlike, so despite the similarity in names, it is not clear that the same figure is intended.”[[1]](#footnote-0)*

It is conjectured that he is the patron of [Beltane](https://www.ancienttexts.org/library/celtic/jce/beltane.html) (the First of May). The identification with Beltane is likely based on two texts: [Cormac's Glossary](https://www.ancienttexts.org/library/celtic/jce/cormac3.html), which says that Beltane is named for Bel, and that cattle were driven through two bonfires to purify them; the same idea is echoed in [Tochmarch Emire](http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/G301021/):

*“To Beldine, i.e. Beltine, viz., a favouring fire. For the Druids used to make two fires with great incantations, and to drive the cattle between them against the plagues, every year. Or to Beldin, viz., Bel the name of an idol. At that time the young of every neat were placed in the possession of Bel. Beldine, then Beltine.”[[2]](#footnote-1)*

Traditionally bonfires were lit to honor the Sun and encourage the support of Bel and the Sun's light to nurture the emerging future harvest and protect the community. As was the case with the worship of many ancient deities, Bel had to be won over through human effort.

**Blodeuwedd, the May Queen**

The Welsh legend of Blodeuwedd is not so well known, but of all the incarnations of the Spring Earth goddess, she may be the most splendidly interesting May Queen of them all.

Blodeuwedd was considered to be the fairest maiden ever seen - a lovely sum of nine Spring blossoms: bean, broom, burdock, chestnut, hawthorn, meadowsweet, nettle, oak and primrose. This flower bride was created for the son of the goddess Arianrhod by his uncles to thwart his mother who declared he would not marry a mortal woman. The uncles piled flower on top of flower until they had made a flower woman, a lady of the green, a May Queen, for him to marry. She was duly presented in marriage to Arianrhod’s son, who changes his name throughout the story, but here is called Llew Llaw.

Llew represents the Winter King who marries the May Queen. Their marriage rites were held on Beltane, and all was well for them… for a while.

When Summer arrived, Llew left her alone in the castle to go visit his uncles who promised him some land. However, in the meantime a hunting party arrived and Blodeuwedd invited the leader of the party into the castle. They immediately fell in love and “she knew great joy at heart, and their talk that night was of the affection and love that they had conceived for the other.” Losing no time, they made a plot to kill her husband on his return.

Showing a degree of cunning that has earned her a reputation for betrayal, Blodeuwedd told her husband that she feared for his untimely demise. He tried to reassure that this would not be easy, for in order to die, he must be killed with a spear that was a year in the making. Not only that, but the manner of his death is very specific: “By making a bath for me on a river bank, and making a vaulted frame over the tub, and thatching it well and snugly too thereafter, and bringing a he-goat and setting it beside the tub and myself placing one foot on the back of the he-goat and the other on the edge of the bath. Whoever should smite me so, he would bring about my death.”

Bloudeuwedd listened demurely. “Why,” she replied, “I thank god for that. It can be avoided easily.”

Armed with this information, her lover got to work and fashioned the spear needed to kill his rival. A year later, once they had their plan in place, Blodeuwedd once again feigned concern, and asked her unsuspecting husband to demonstrate how he might meet his untimely death. This he dutifully did, and as he stood precariously with one foot on the bathtub and the other on the back of a he-goat, her lover jumped out and stabbed him with the spear. Llew Llaw flew up in the form of an eagle and gave a horrid scream… and after that he was seen no more.

But that is not the end of the story.

Llew’s aggrieved uncles once again come to his rescue and set out to find him. Eventually they found a maggot-covered eagle and sang him out of a tree, changing him back into the form of a man with the tap of a magic wand. Llew Llaw was in a pitiful state and it took him a year to get his strength back. But then he came back to the castle where his wife and her lover were ensconced to seek revenge.

Blodeuwedd’s maidens were all drowned in a lake whilst trying to escape, but she herself survived. For her was reserved the fate of being turned into an owl, “so that she may never show her face in the light of day, and that there be enmity between thee and all the birds, and that it be their nature to mob and molest thee wherever they may find thee.”

So, it could be said that the flower maiden, made as the perfect wife to serve her husband, falls in love and thereby empowered herself. This enabled her to take the sort of ruthless action that those deprived of choice must take. But she must take responsibility for her actions as she matures, symbolized by the owl, an ancient symbol of wisdom and cronehood. She also achieves independence and self-determination in the end (the owl), and remains connected to the cycle of nature for ever more.

Her suitors also face each other in combat. So in this way, the story may be perceived in terms of the May Queen, goddess of the land (Sovereignty) and her two suitors, the Holly King and the Oak King, or the Green Men, who act as consort to the goddess, forever locked in an eternal cycle of waxing and waning, linked to the seasonal power of the sun.[[3]](#footnote-2)

Blodeuwedd as the May Queen, or Mother Nature, caused the seasons (the Holly King as Winter, and the Oak King as Summer) to battle for her hand, her attention, her domain, her world. Winter must always surrender, just as Summer must, too. Such is the sacred duality of the polarization of seasons in the Wheel of the Year.

Blodeuwedd herself represents that polarization between the seasons of Spring and Autumn, wherein she represents both the Maiden (as the May Queen and young bride), and the Crone (when she is transformed into the owl).

These myths personified the changing seasons, and the natural cycles of nature. Though this particular legend is of a Celtic lineage, there are others from traditions and cultures around the world sharing similar symbols and meaning.

**The Great Rite - Hieros Gamos (Sacred Marriage)**

The Great Rite is a [Wiccan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wicca) ritual involving symbolic sexual intercourse with the purpose of drawing energy from the powerful connection between a male and female to receive more power. It is an uncommon ritual in a full coven, as it is used when the coven is in need of powerful spiritual intervention. Most often it is performed by the [high priest and priestess](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_priest) of a coven, but other participants can be selected to perform the rite.

*Hieros gamos*, hieros (ἱερός) meaning "holy" or "sacred" and gamos (γάμος) meaning marriage, or Hierogamy ([Greek](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greek) ἱερὸς γάμος, ἱερογαμία "holy marriage"), is a sacred marriage that plays out between a [god](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_(male_deity)) and a [goddess](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goddess), especially when enacted in a symbolic [ritual](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ritual) where human participants represent the deities.

The notion of *hieros gamos* does not always presuppose literal sexual intercourse in ritual, but is also used in purely symbolic or [mythological](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mythology) context, notably in [alchemy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alchemy) and hence in [Jungian psychology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jungian_psychology). *Hieros gamos* is described as the prototype of [fertility rituals](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fertility_rite). Its roots date back to ancient Sumerian times, as well as in Egyptian, Greek and Buddhist traditions.

In the symbolic version of the Great Rite, the high priestess plunges the [athame](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athame), or ritual knife that represents the masculine, into a cup or [chalice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chalice_(cup)) which represents the feminine. The chalice is filled with wine and is held by the high priest. The Great Rite symbolizes creation in the union of the maiden [goddess](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goddess) with the lover [god](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God), and thus is also known as a [fertility rite](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fertility_rite).[[4]](#footnote-3)

A variety of ritual occasions call for the Great Rite to be performed, most notably during the festival of [Beltane](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beltane) on or about May 1 in the northern hemisphere and November 1 in the southern hemisphere.

Beltane honors life. It represents the peak of Spring and the beginning of Summer. Earth energies are at their strongest and most active. All of life is bursting with potent fertility and at this point in the Wheel of the Year, the potential becomes conception.

On May Eve the sexuality of life and the Earth is at its peak. Abundant fertility, on all levels, is the central theme. The Maiden goddess has reached her fullness. She is the manifestation of growth and renewal, as Flora, the Goddess of Spring, the May Queen, the May Bride.

The Young Oak King, as Jack-In-The-Green, as the Green Man, falls in love with her and wins her hand. The union is consummated and the May Queen becomes pregnant.

Together the May Queen and the May King are symbols of the Sacred Marriage (or *hieros gamos*), the union of Earth and Sky. This union has been re-enacted by humans throughout the centuries. For this is the night of the Greenwood Marriage. It is about sexuality and sensuality, passion, vitality and joy. And about conception. A brilliant moment in the Wheel of the Year to bring ideas, hopes and dreams into action. And have some fun.[[5]](#footnote-4)

This sacred union of the goddess and god is a deeply joyous affair, celebrating sexuality on many levels. Its rites ultimately honor our striving for that union of the Divine Masculine and Divine Feminine deep within us. It explores that magical process when we truly open to another - just as the blossom to the bee - and in the surrendering of that boundary become something more than ourselves.

Love and sex bring us some of our most profound experiences; some ecstatically joyous; others deeply painful – but at best they open us and let the mystery of another’s being flood into that intimate, hidden space, changing us.

Beltane encourages us to ask “What is life without passion and connection?” It opens us to the extraordinary energy of our desire but also to the deeply empathic nature of our being, one that strives to relate, make connections, open ever further to the mystery of life.[[6]](#footnote-5)

**Handfasting**

As Beltane is the Great Wedding of the Goddess and the God, it is a popular time for pagan weddings, or Handfastings, a traditional betrothal for 'a year and a day' after which the couple would either choose to stay together or part without recrimination. Today, the length of commitment is a matter of choice for the couple, and can often be for life.

The true origin of handfasting is not known, but the typical modern handfasting ceremony is derived from the Celtic tradition, predating Christianity. It is a historical term for the word “wedding,” and as couples in Celtic England could not wander down the high street to buy a gold ring, they used handfasting as their marriage ceremony. Gold bands were also the preserve of the aristocracy, so the relatively simple, but highly symbolic ritual of handfasting, was much more affordable.

Couples would pledge their intent and love by binding their wrists with strips of fabric torn from old garments, or cord from rope to symbolize their union, and would then be tied till midnight. They would often then be escorted to the bedchamber to consummate their union. It was considered that if the couple survived the obstacles of life for the rest of the day then surely they would survive in marriage together.

In the Scottish Celtic tradition, the binding would be for a year and a day, and if after that they still wanted to stay together, the handfasting was formally recognised as their wedding ceremony. By contrast, in Medieval and Tudor England, handfasting was legally binding: as soon as the couple made their vows to each other they were validly married. It was not a temporary arrangement. Just as with church weddings of the period, the union which handfasting created could only be dissolved by death. English legal authorities held that even if not followed by intercourse, handfasting was as binding as any vow taken in church before a priest.

Handfasting ceremonies are often unique to the couple, but include common elements, most importantly the exchange of vows and rings (or a token of their choice).

The act of handfasting always involves the tying of hands (“tying the knot”) of the two people involved, in a figure of eight, at some point in the ceremony, and then later unbinding. This is done with a red cord or ribbon. Tying the hands together symbolizes that the two people have come together and the untying means that they remain together of their own free will.

Another common element is 'jumping the broomstick' - this goes back to a time when two people who could not afford a church ceremony, or want one, would be accepted in the community as a married couple if they literally jumped over a broom laid on the floor. The broom marked a 'threshold', moving from an old life to a new one.

Mead and cakes are often shared in communion as part of the ceremony. Mead is known as the “Brew of the Divine,” and is made from honey, which is appropriate for a love ceremony (and is the oldest alcoholic drink known to humankind).

At Beltane, whether handfasting or not, both young and old went “a-Maying”: couples spent the night in the woods and fields, made love, and brought back armfuls of the first May or hawthorn blossoms to decorate their homes and barns. Hawthorn was never brought into the home except at Beltane - at other times it was considered unlucky.

Young women gathered the dew to wash their faces, made flower crowns and May baskets to give as gifts. Everyone was free to enact the Sacred Marriage of goddess and god, and there was an accepted tradition of Beltane babies arriving nine months later.

At this time of year when the Earth is bursting with fertile energy, it is a powerful time to acknowledge and celebrate the fertility inherent in all of life.

**Offerings to the Fae**

*"This was the Celtic beginning of summer, and also marked an important transition for the people of Faerie, for this was the time when the Milesian Celts landed on the shores of south-west Ireland. With this, the last of the magical peoples (the Tuatha de Danann) receded from the world of humans into the Hollow Hills and became the people of the Sidhe. However, they and the other Fairy folk have not gone very far."[[7]](#footnote-6)*

As previously mentioned, at Beltane the veils between the worlds of the human and the fae (aka faerie-folk, little people, etc.) are at their thinnest. This is similar to Beltane’s counterpoint sabbat, Samhain, when the veils between the living and the dead are considered to be thin as well.

Fairies have many different representations throughout history and in various cultures. They are beings of the Earth plane living in a parallel dimension. This means that they exist here among us, but are hidden by the veil like the spirit realm.

These ethereal beings are very much grounded to the Earth, and do hold a sense of ego like us humans. There are many types of Fae and connection with them is not for the faint-hearted. Of course, some fairies hold a very special magical energy based on love and kindness, but there are varieties of dark Fae that wish to cause harm or chaos. They have a tendency to be mischievous, and this can present as either humorous or downright disastrous. Anyone wanting to connect with the Fae is advised to be very clear about their intent.

As they do not wish to be seen as our servants, they typically do not like to be thanked, but will gladly provide support if the being invoking them is pure of heart and has good environmental values. It is critical to ensure that you have some sort of spiritual protection when requesting the Fae to join you in this Earthly plane.[[8]](#footnote-7)

Many Beltane practices were designed to ward off or appease the [fairies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aos_S%C3%AD), and prevent them from stealing dairy products. For example, three black coals were placed under a butter churn to ensure the fairies did not steal the butter, and Maypoles were tied to milk pails, the tails of cattle, or hung in the barns to ensure the cattle's milk was not stolen.

Flowers were also used to decorate the horns of cattle, which was believed to bring good fortune. Food was left or milk poured at the doorstep or places associated with the *aos sí*, such as 'fairy trees', as an offering. However, milk was never given to a neighbor on May Day because it was feared that the milk would be transferred to the neighbor's cow.

In Ireland, cattle would be brought to “[fairy forts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fairy_fort),” where a small amount of their blood would be collected. The owners would then pour it into the earth with prayers for the herd's safety. Sometimes the blood would be left to dry and then be burnt. It was thought that dairy products were especially at risk from harmful spirits.

To protect farm produce and encourage fertility, farmers would lead a procession around the boundaries of their farm. They would "carry with them seeds of grain, implements of husbandry, the first well water, and the herb vervain (or rowan as a substitute). The procession generally stopped at the four cardinal points of the compass, beginning in the east, and rituals were performed in each of the four directions.” People made the sign of the cross with milk for good luck on Beltane, and the sign of the cross was also made on the back sides of cattle.[[9]](#footnote-8)

Here are some practices that will draw the Fae into your life this Beltane:

**A Magical Offering** - The Fae love all things sweet and natural so you can leave an offering of milk and honey out on Beltane eve. This will attract the Fae to your home space or garden, inviting them to work their magic and bring abundance. It is said that they appreciate personal offerings of fingernail clippings or locks of hair, which they use as tools. They also have affinity for all things shiny and beautiful so flowers, crystals and fairy gardens will work in exactly the same way.

**Connect to Nature** - Spend some time outdoors if you can and let your bare feet touch the Earth. If you are able, go outside at sunrise on Beltane morning, call the Fae in by chanting these words “Fairies, fairies, come to me, I ask for your guidance, so mote it be”. Then sprinkle some fresh morning dew on your face which is said to hold magical properties and retain youth. As you watch the sunrise, look out for little sparks of light or anything you feel represents a message from the Fae.

**Make a Wishing Tree** - You can either use a tree in your garden, a bush or some branches/twigs to display in your home. Please be respectful to nature when tying items onto trees, especially outside of your home space. Use ribbons or pieces of material and as you tie these make a wish. Think about the colors you are using and how these colors enhance the magic.

**Create Sacred Spaces** - Build small houses or caves out of stones in your yard. Tuck them into hidden places under bushes, in the sides of trees, or nestled into your flower beds. You might also craft small wooden chairs or tables to place outside. Paint them in bright colors, and wrap them in ivy or other vining plants.

**Symbols and Traditions of Beltane**

Here are some additional ways in which Beltane is honored and celebrated:

**The Maypole**

The Maypole dance is a Spring ritual long known to Western Europeans. Usually performed on Beltane (May Day, in the modern era), the folk custom is done around a pole garnished with flowers and ribbon to symbolize a tree. This phallic pole, often made from birch, was inserted into the Earth representing the potency of the God. The ring of flowers at the top of the Maypole represents the fertile Goddess. Its many coloured ribbons and the ensuing weaving dance symbolize the spiral of Life and the union of the Goddess and God, the union between Earth and Sky. Practiced for generations in countries such as Germany and England, the Maypole tradition dates back to the dances ancient people used to do around actual trees in hopes of harvesting a large crop.

Historians have suggested that Maypole dancing originated in Germany and traveled to the British Isles courtesy of invading forces. In Great Britain, the dance became part of a [fertility ritual](https://www.learnreligions.com/paganism-wicca-4684806) held every spring in some areas. By the Middle Ages, most villages had an annual Maypole celebration. In rural areas, the Maypole was typically erected on the village green, but a few places, including some urban neighborhoods in London, had a permanent Maypole that stayed up year round.

In the British Isles, the Maypole celebration usually took place the morning after [Beltane](https://www.learnreligions.com/beltane-rites-and-rituals-2561678). When couples performed the Maypole dance, they had usually come staggering in from the fields, clothes in disarray, and straw in their hair after a night of [lovemaking](https://www.learnreligions.com/beltane-bonfire-rite-group-ceremony-2561649). This led 17th-century Puritans to frown upon the use of the Maypole in celebration; after all, it was a giant phallic symbol in the middle of the village green.

When the British settled in the U.S., they brought the Maypole tradition with them. In Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1627, a man named Thomas Morton erected a giant Maypole in his field, brewed a batch of hearty mead, and invited village lasses to come frolic with him. His neighbors were appalled, and Plymouth leader Myles Standish himself came along to break up the sinful festivities. [Morton later shared the bawdy song](http://www.bartleby.com/400/prose/38.html) that accompanied his Maypole revelry, which included the lines,

*"Drink and be merry, merry, merry, boys,*

*Let all your delight be in Hymen's joys.*

*Lo to Hymen now the day is come,*

*about the merry Maypole take a room.*

*Make green garlons, bring bottles out,*

*and fill sweet Nectar, freely about.*

*Uncover thy head, and fear no harm,*

*for here's good liquor to keep it warm.*

*Then drink and be merry, merry, merry, boys,*

*Let all your delight be in Hymen's joys."*

In England and the U.S., the Puritans managed to squash the Maypole celebration for roughly two centuries. But by the late 19th century, the custom regained popularity as the British people took an interest in their country’s rural traditions. This time the poles appeared as part of the church May Day celebrations, which included dancing but were more structured than the wild Maypole dances of centuries past. The Maypole dancing practiced today is likely connected to the dance's revival in the 1800s and not to the ancient version of the custom.

Today, many pagans include a Maypole dance as part of their Beltane festivities. Most lack the space for a full-fledged Maypole but still manage to [incorporate the dance into their celebrations](https://www.learnreligions.com/celebrate-beltane-with-a-maypole-dance-2561651). They use the fertility symbolism of the Maypole by making a small tabletop version to include on their [Beltane altar](https://www.learnreligions.com/crafts-for-the-beltane-sabbat-4126784), and then, they dance nearby.[[10]](#footnote-9)

**Fire Rituals**

In addition to the tradition of jumping over a bonfire to purify oneself of Winter’s ills, Fire can be used in various other rituals at Beltane.

To begin, Fire is a symbol of the Sun. So, simply making a fire to honor the Sun’s light and warmth is customary.

The Fire can also be used to symbolically burn away the things that no longer serve you by writing them out on a piece of parchment, and offering it to the fire.

Beltane is also a good time to reawaken and renew your inner fire. Making offerings of spring herbs and branches to ask for the fire’s protection and blessing is appropriate.

For those who are unable to kindle fires in their homes or yards, you can always elect to use candles for the same purpose. Even LED candles are fine. The material isn’t so important, rather, the intention is everything.

### **Trees of Beltane**

This is the perfect time to go out and celebrate a tree. Especially a hawthorn, rowan or birch - but the tree spirit will welcome your attention whichever kind of tree it is. Sit with it, talk to it, dance around it (Maypole), honor the tree and its fertility. Hang ribbons from its branches, as each ribbon represents a wish or prayer.

**Hawthorn**

Hawthorn is a deeply magical tree and is one of the three trees at the heart of the Celtic Tree Alphabet, the Faery Triad, 'by Oak, Ash and Thorn'. Traditionally Beltane began when the Hawthorn, the May, blossomed. It is the tree of sexuality and fertility and is the classic flower to decorate a Maypole with. It was both worn and used to decorate the home at Beltane.

A common Beltane tradition is to make some Hawthorn Brandy. You will need a bottle of brandy and at least one cup of hawthorn flowers, plus a little sugar to taste. Mix the ingredients together and leave away from direct light, for at least two weeks. Shake occasionally. Strain, bottle and enjoy. Hawthorn is renowned as a tonic for the heart.

**Birch**

Birch is regarded as a feminine tree and deities associated with Birch are mostly love and fertility goddesses. It is one of the first trees to show its leaf in Spring. Eostre/Ostara, the Celtic goddess of Spring was celebrated in festivities and dancing around and through the birch tree between the Spring Equinox and Beltane. Birch twigs were traditionally used to make besoms (a new broom sweeps clean). Maypoles were often made from birch and birch wreaths were given as lover's gifts.

**Rowan**

A tree of protection and healing. Branches of Rowan were placed as protection over the doors of houses and barns at Beltane to protect from increased Faery activity as they woke from their winter slumber. Sprigs were worn for protection also. Rowan berries have a tiny five-pointed star on the bottom reminiscent of the pentagram.

**Flowers, flowers and more flowers.**

This is the festival of Flora. Make a flower crown to wear - the daisy chain in the simplest of all. Make a traditional flower basket, and fill it with Beltane greenery and all the flowers and herbs you can find. Think about and honor their magical and healing properties while you do so. Give it to someone you love.[[11]](#footnote-10)

**Sharing the Wisdom: Preparing Your Ritual**

Use this space to consider how you would honor this sabbat in a ritual way, whether for yourself or for others. This is meant to be a loose guide to inspire you, and to build confidence in your own intuition, vision, and abilities to incorporate more ritual in your life.

1. **What would your ritual space look like/what environment do you envision?**
2. **What items would you include on your altar? What do they represent to you?**
3. **What Elements would you include? How will you include them? And why?**
4. **What words do you feel should be spoken or sung? You might jot down your ideas, and create a loose outline to follow.**
5. **What is the best way for you, personally, to connect with this sabbat? How will you demonstrate that through ritual action?**

**Reflections and Integration**

Going back through your life in increments of 5 years, reflect upon this season/sabbat in the Wheel of the Year and what it has meant to you in those various stages of life. Use these questions as a guide:

* **What memories stand out to me the most about this season in each stage of life?**
* **How did this season/sabbat make me feel emotionally? Physically?**
* **How do my past experiences of the season/sabbat correlate to the present?**
* **In my highest vision, how would I best connect with this season/sabbat?**
* **From this year forward, what changes might I make to align myself more with the energies of this season/sabbat?**

1. From “Belenus: Mighty Gaulish God of Light” by A. Sutherland at Ancientpages.com [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. From Jones Celtic Encyclopedia [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. From “Beltane: Of Flower Brides and Green Men” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. From Wikipedia [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. From “The Goddess & The Green Man” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. From “Sacred Sex and the Goddess and God of Beltane” by Maria Ede-Weaving [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. From The Fairy Bible by Teresa Moorey [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. From “Beltane - Creating a Connection With the Fae” by Rebecca Broomfield [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. From Wikipedia [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. From “A Brief History of the Maypole Dance” by Patti Wigington [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. From The Goddess and the Green Man [↑](#footnote-ref-10)