# ***Vernus***

 *1. Equinox*

*Today most especially*

*we hover in the balance.*

*Day meets dark in*

*equal parts,*

*but we — we are tipping into the light.*

*2. Winter’s End*

*Out of a season*

*of pruning, pause, prudence,*

*of waiting waiting waiting,*

*we emerge:*

*bony, ashen creatures*

*lapping at dregs*

*weary of cold*

*hungry for light,*

*wringing gray flakes from our creaking limbs.*

*3. Below*

*I want to plunge deep roots*

*putting out blind tendrils that grope for more*

*to entwine and bind —*

*with you —*

*together holding our dear Earth.*

*We will weave her a shining net,*

*gold in the broken places.*

*4. Above*

*I want to spread my fingers into the sun*

*to cup it into the pale curved leaf of my body*

*swallow down the liquid light*

*course it through my secret channels*

*and greedily nourish each twining limb.*

*Draw the ancient promise deep*

*into my tree heart.*

*The light is coming.*

*- By Jess Vice*

**Circle Four: Ostara**

I’ve noticed a change over the last couple of weeks. The morning light creeps in earlier than it has in months - so much so, that before I’ve even finished my morning rituals, the Sun shines so brightly onto my writing desk, I have to drop the shade a bit to shield my eyes.

While I revel and relish in the growing light and warmth, there remains a deep blanket of white snow on the ground. Its reflection of the Sun is what blinds me so. It’s one thing to pass the long, cold months with overcast skies. By this time of year, still weary and sleepy from Winter’s toils, we have to readjust - our eyes and our minds - to welcome in the long-awaited Spring.

I am a Spring baby, born just days after this holy sabbat. Like the Sun, this has always been my time of year to shine. This far north, it’s incredibly rare to have experienced our final snowfall by Ostara. We likely have weeks (if not more than a month) yet to go. I can count on one hand the number of birthdays I’ve celebrated in my four-and-a-half decades that were ever truly Spring-like, though my northern kin insist the end of March always bears the promise of the end of Winter, and warmer days ahead.

Though I often balk at their optimism, I can’t deny, the energy is palpable. I monitor patches of ice over my garden beds that are turning to puddles, and imagine the soils below drinking deeply, and slow. I see friends ordering seeds and starter trays, and am anxious, worrying that I’m somehow already behind. I caught a glorious sunset on my ride home from work last night - not at 5pm, but closer to 7. I’ve been listening to more birdsongs, in greater variety, and try to sing them back. And this sunshine on my face, even now… it’s warmth… causes my whole being to sigh with gratitude and relief.

We have arrived at the balance time. Night and day are of equal length. I am reminded and inspired to consider how I might invite greater balance back into my own life. I tune into my disparate bodies - heart, mind, flesh and soul - and sense the lingering refuse; the detritus of the last half-year, attached to me like a film of pond scum. I envision the work ahead will entail a thorough cleaning out of both my inner and outer soils: it’s time to prepare the garden beds for the seeds I intend to grow.

The promise of Spring. The promise of living. The promise of sowing, and also of growing. I can’t help but feel new hope running through my veins, like sap running through the trees. It was one of the longest, coldest Winters of my life, and I was here for all of it. Whether the snows fall for another week or another month, it’s time to put it all to bed. Time to let my losses melt away, and focus on the many blessings surrounding me. It’s time to turn the page, write a new chapter, sing a new song. Time to turn my face to the Sun, and grow a little taller. So be it. Blessed be.

**An Introduction…**

Ostara marks the first equinox in the Wheel of the Year. The word *equinox* already implies the meaning of its cosmic phenomenon: it is when the Sun and the Moon share *equal* time in the sky, and the days and nights are of *equal* length. An equinox thus represents the sacred duality inherent in all of nature, and the balance of opposing forces.

Like the solstices, there are two equinoxes each year: Ostara is the first, symbolizing the onset of Spring, and the time of Mother Earth’s fertility; and Mabon, the counterpoint to Ostara, heralding Autumn, and the season of decay and death. Ostara promises to usher in the light, while Mabon leads us into the darkness of the year’s end. With the equinoxes, there is always a central message about balance. Energetically, this is an optimal time of year for personal inventory: to check in with yourself - mind, body, heart, soul, work, home, relationships, etc. - to identify areas calling to be brought into greater alignment with your divine purpose, and the highest expression of your spirit. “Spring cleaning” is a practice not just for our external environments, but our inner world as well.

In the pagan version of the Wheel of the Year, Ostara represents the young Maiden, ripe with fertility, and the promise of renewal and rebirth. The Sun God, born at Yule, is now growing strong in His power and light. At Beltane (the cross-quarter day between Ostara and Litha, the Summer Solstice), He will court the Goddess, and impregnate Her. We see this myth played out in real time as the Winter snows melt, and the soils of the Earth open to receive and nourish seeds, which will grow and bear fruit in the warmer months ahead.

Most indigenous cultures around the world have all historically subscribed to mythologies and cosmologies based on the agricultural seasons of the year. Our ancient ancestors were nomads, whose paths gravitated towards wherever food would be most abundant, This included plants to be foraged, and game to be hunted. As human cultures evolved and built permanent settlements over time, they learned how to cultivate the Earth. They farmed and grew crops which provided food in the temperate times of the year, and would then be harvested to sustain them through the barren months.

By Ostara time, most Winter reserves were quite diminished. One can imagine what a great relief it must have been to feel the Sun’s warmth and light, to see the snow melting and the ground below reappear, and to welcome back the birds and critters who had migrated or hibernated for months on end. This is what is referred to as “the promise of Spring”: if you could survive the long, cold Winter, there would be the opportunity once again to plant your gardens and work your fields to return to abundant providence. These seasonal celebrations were spiritual rituals, connecting humans to the land, to the waters, to the plant allies and animal kin. This was how we honored not only the Wheel of the Year, but the circle of life, in which we are all *equals*.

**The Goddess Eostre**

Eostre is the Germanic goddess of dawn who is celebrated during the Spring Equinox. On the old Germanic calendar, the equivalent month to April was called “Ōstarmānod” – or Easter-month. As a holiday, Easter predates Christianity and was originally the name for Spring Equinox celebrations.

The evidence for Eostre as an actual goddess people worshiped is a bit uncertain. She’s mentioned in the writings of an 8th century monk known as Venerable Bede, who reported that pagan Anglo-Saxons in medieval Northumbria held festivals in her honor during the month of April.

Eostre first makes Her appearance in literature about thirteen hundred years ago in the Venerable Bede's *Temporum Ratione (“The Reckoning of Time”)*. Bede tells us that April is known as *Eostremonath*, and is named for a goddess that the Anglo-Saxons honored in the Spring. He says:

*"Eosturmonath has a name which is now translated ‘Paschal month,’ and which was once called after a goddess of theirs named Eostre, in whose honor feasts were celebrated in that month.”*

After that, there's not a lot of information about Her, until [Jacob Grimm and his brother](http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/grimm.html) came along in the 1800s.

In his 1835 [*Deutsche Mythologie*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deutsche_Mythologie), [Jacob Grimm](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob_Grimm) cites comparative evidence to reconstruct a potential [continental Germanic goddess](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continental_Germanic_mythology) whose name would have been preserved in the [Old High German](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_High_German) name of Easter, “Ostara.” Addressing skepticism towards goddesses mentioned by Bede, Grimm comments that "there is nothing improbable in them, nay the first of them is justified by clear traces in the vocabularies of Germanic tribes." Specifically regarding Ēostre, Grimm continues that:

*“We Germans to this day call April ‘ostermontag,’ and ‘ôstarmânoth’ is found as early as* [*Eginhart*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Einhard)*. The great Christian festival, which usually falls in April or the end of March, bears in the oldest of Old High German the name ôstarâ... it is mostly found in the plural, because two days were kept at Easter. This Ostarâ, like the [Anglo-Saxon] Eástre, must in heathen religion have denoted a higher being, whose worship was so firmly rooted, that the Christian teachers tolerated the name, and applied it to one of their own grandest anniversaries.”*

Grimm details that the Old High German adverb ôstar "expresses movement towards the rising sun", as did the [Old Norse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Norse) term austr, and potentially also Anglo-Saxon ēastor and Gothic [\*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asterisk#Historical_linguistics)𐌰𐌿𐍃𐍄𐍂 ([\*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asterisk#Historical_linguistics)áustr). Grimm compares these terms to the identical Latin term auster, and contends that the cult of the goddess may have been centered around an Old Norse form, Austra, or that Her cult may have already been extinct by the time of Christianization.

Grimm notes that the [Old Norse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Norse) [Prose Edda](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prose_Edda) book [*Gylfaginning*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gylfaginning) attests to a male being called [Austri](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nor%C3%B0ri%2C_Su%C3%B0ri%2C_Austri_and_Vestri), whom he describes as a "spirit of light." Grimm comments that a female version would have been “Austra,” yet that the High German and Saxon peoples seem to have only formed Ostarâ and Eástre, feminine, and not Ostaro and Eástra, masculine. Grimm additionally speculates on the nature of the goddess and surviving folk customs that may have been associated with Her in Germany:

*“Ostara, Eástre seems therefore to have been the divinity of the radiant dawn, of upspringing light, a spectacle that brings joy and blessing, whose meaning could be easily adapted by the resurrection-day of the Christian's God. Bonfires were lit at Easter and according to popular belief of long standing, the moment the sun rises on Easter Sunday morning, he gives three joyful leaps, he dances for joy ... Water drawn on Easter morning is, like that at Christmas, holy and healing ... here also heathen notions seem to have grafted themselves on great Christian festivals. Maidens clothed in white, who at Easter, at the season of returning spring, show themselves in clefts of the rock and on mountains, are suggestive of the ancient goddess.”*

Writing in the late 19th century, [Charles J. Billson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_J._Billson) notes that scholars before his writing were divided about the existence of Bede's account of Ēostre, stating that:

 *"Among authorities who have no doubt as to her existence are* [*W. Grimm*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm_Grimm)*,* [*Wackernagel*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm_Wackernagel)*,* [*Sinrock*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Joseph_Simrock)*, and Wolf. On the other hand, Weinhold rejects the idea on philological grounds, and so do Heinrich Leo and Hermann Oeser. Kuhn says, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Eostre looks like an invention of Bede;’ and* [*Mannhardt*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm_Mannhardt) *also dismisses her as an etymological* [*dea ex machina*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deus_ex_machina)*… The whole question turns upon Bede's credibility. … One is inclined to agree with Grimm, that it would be uncritical to saddle this eminent Father of the Church, who keeps Heathendom at arms' length and tells us less than he knows, with the invention of this goddess."*

Billson points out that the [Christianization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianization) of England started at the end of the 6th century, and, by the 7th, was completed. Billson argues that, as Bede was born in 672, Bede must have had opportunities to learn the names of the native goddesses of the Anglo-Saxons, "who were hardly extinct in his lifetime."

According to philologist [Rudolf Simek](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_Simek) (1984), despite expressions of doubts, Bede's account of Ēostre should not be disregarded. Simek opines that a "Spring-like fertility goddess" must be assumed rather than a "goddess of sunrise" regardless of the name, reasoning that "otherwise the Germanic goddesses (and [matrons](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matres_and_Matronae)) are mostly connected with prosperity and growth". Simek points to a comparison with the goddess [Rheda](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rheda_%28mythology%29), also attested by Bede.

Scholar Philip A. Shaw (2011) writes that the subject has seen "a lengthy history of arguments for and against Bede's goddess Ēostre, with some scholars taking fairly extreme positions on either side" and that some theories against the goddess have gained popular cultural prominence.

Shaw notes that:

“*Much of this debate, however, was conducted in ignorance of a key piece of evidence, as it was not discovered until 1958. This evidence is furnished by over 150 Romano-Germanic votive inscriptions to deities named the matronae Austriahenae, found near Morken-Harff and datable to around 150–250 AD.”*

Most of these inscriptions are in an incomplete state, yet most are complete enough for reasonable clarity of the inscriptions. As early as 1966 scholars have linked these names etymologically with Ēostre and an element found in Germanic personal names. Shaw argues against a functional interpretation of the available evidence and concludes that "the etymological connections of Her name suggests that her worshippers saw Her geographical and social relationship with them as more central than any functions She may have had.”[[1]](#footnote-0)

There are also scholars who have seemingly decided that Eostre is a form of Freya. Others believe She is actually Iduna, or Walburga. Modern Norse pagans consider Eostre to be a Vanic goddess, or at least very close to the Vanir… but again, Her origins continue to be a mystery.

One common falsehood we can most definitely eradicate is the notion that Eostre is somehow linked to the Babylonian goddess, Ishtar. Although they share similar qualities, there is zero evidence to support this claim.

These very qualities, Her symbols, are consistent in the works which reference Her name throughout time:

She is usually experienced as a young maiden, old enough to bear children, but not yet a mother. She is wreathed in flowers and fresh greenery, and often dances. She is often joyous, but can turn solemn - much like the Spring weather that can quickly turn to rain.

She is the first warm Spring winds, the birds that return, the trees that bud and curl forth leaves and flowers. She is the awakening Earth, rabbits and hares, the eggs that appear after a Winter of no light. She is the sunrise, and the dawn, and the promise of a new day.

Ancient rituals to Eostre included gathering holy water in the form of dew, or water collected from brooks, to wash oneself with, restoring youth. Beautiful maidens would dress in sheer white gowns, and enjoy a frolic in the countryside. Spring flowers would be chosen to fashion into crowns, as well as to adorn homes - often made into a ring, with sacred water placed in a dish in the center. And, as it is with most holy sabbats, a fire is lit and a feast is prepared and enjoyed by all.

**Other Cultural Springtime Celebrations**

As previously mentioned, cultures throughout time and across the globe have sought ways to honor and celebrate the major astrological and agricultural events in the Wheel of the Year. The solstices and equinoxes, which mark the onset of each of the four seasons due to the timing and positioning of the Sun and Moon, are four such events which continue to be celebrated around the world even today.

When we think of the Medicine Wheel - the great hoop of life and nature that contains all of divine creation - we see four quadrants, each representing those inherent qualities found in all our relations: the cardinal directions; the four elements; the four stages of life; the four races of humanity; the four seasons; and many others.

When we think of the seasons in the Wheel of the Year, they align with the Medicine Wheel thusly:

* **North:** Winter (Yule); Earth; Elders; Foundations/Wisdom; White (Caucasian race)
* **East:** Spring (Ostara); Air; Men; Thought/Enlightenment; Yellow (Asian race)
* **South:** Summer (Litha); Fire; Children; Energy/Stamina; Black (African race)
* **West:** Autumn (Mabon); Water; Women; Emotions/Relationships; Red (Native race)

Therefore, Ostara (representing the East) is also aligned with the symbols of this direction: the sunrise; the new day; new beginnings; clarity of thought and vision; the ability to express one’s truth; imagination; mental acuity; the ability to make decisions; education; and spiritual awakening.

These concepts are a blend of indigenous wisdom, modern pagan interpretation, and intuitive understanding. There are many other cultural celebrations at this time of year, and though they differ in many ways, you will find common threads of the symbols mentioned above which weave them together.

**Easter - Christian**

Of course, the most well-known Spring holiday in western culture is Easter. We can see how the very name of this Christian holiday is derived from the goddess Eostre, and the pagan holiday Ostara. This is a common custom of the Christian missionaries: to adopt the spiritual traditions, gods and language of the peoples they conquer and transform them to align with their own scriptures and beliefs.

At Yule, when the light of the Sun is reborn on the darkest night of the year, the Christians celebrate Christmas as the birth of the Son of God. The Vernal (Spring) Equinox was historically recognized worldwide as a time for renewal, rebirth, and revivification. It was the celebration of the symbolic resurrection of Earth itself, thus, when the Christian religion took hold of European lands, this was the ideal time to honor the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Even the timing of Easter is dictated by pagan tradition: it is celebrated on the first Sunday after the Full Moon that follows the Vernal Equinox. If the Full Moon falls on a Sunday, then Easter would be the following Sunday. Many of the original symbols of Ostara were also usurped by Easter: bunnies; eggs; flowers; and hot-cross buns, which are traditionally baked at Easter, but historically have represented the four faces of the Moon Mother, or, the four holy sabbats of the year (the solstices and equinoxes).

**Feast of Cybele - Roman**

In ancient Rome, the [followers of Cybele](https://www.learnreligions.com/cybele-mother-goddess-of-rome-2562630) believed that their goddess had a consort who was born via a virgin birth. His name was Attis, and he died and was resurrected each year during the time of the vernal equinox on the Julian Calendar (between March 22 and March 25).

The river Sangarius had a daughter named Nana who ate the fruit of this almond tree. When, as a result of her snack, Nana delivered a boy child 9 months later, Nana exposed the child. This was an ancient method of dealing with unwanted children that usually led to death. Infant death was not to be his fate, however. Instead, reared by the proverbial area shepherds, the boy soon became healthy and handsome—so handsome his grandmother Cybele fell in love with him. The boy, whose name was Attis, was unaware of the love Cybele bore him. In time, Attis saw the king of Pessinus' beautiful daughter, fell in love, and wished to marry her. The goddess Cybele became insanely jealous and drove Attis mad as revenge. Running crazy through the mountains, Attis stopped at the foot of a pine tree. There Attis castrated and killed himself. From Attis' blood sprang the first violets. The tree took care of Attis' spirit. Attis' flesh would have decayed had not Zeus stepped in to assist Cybele in his resurrection.

Since then, a yearly ritual has been performed to purify the body of the dead Attis. The priests—referred to as Galli or Galilee—are emasculated in emulation of Attis. A pine tree is chopped down, covered with violets and carried to the shrine of Cybele on Mt. Dindymus. There

Attis is mourned for 3 days. Then, when Cybele brings him back to life, there is a wild and joyful celebration.

**Purim - Jewish**

Purim, which literally means “lots” and is sometimes known as the Feast of Lots, is the Jewish holiday in which Jews commemorate being saved from persecution in the ancient Persian Empire.

According to the Book of Esther in the Torah, the Jewish people of the city of Shushan were threatened by the villain Haman, a prime minister who convinced King Ahasuerus to kill all the Jews (because the Jewish Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman). Haman casts lots (hence the name of the holiday) to determine the date he would carry out his plan: the 13th of Adar. In the end, the Jews are saved by the heroic Queen Esther, Mordecai’s niece (and adopted daughter), who married Ahasuerus (after he banished his first, rebellious wife Vashti). When Ahasuerus discovers that his wife Esther is Jewish, he decides to reverse Haman’s decree, and instead of the Jews being killed, Haman, his sons, and other enemies are killed instead.

Purim is a lively holiday on the Jewish calendar and occurs on the 14 day of the month of Adar (March 16-17). Observance of the holiday begins with dressing up in costume: some people choose to dress as characters from the Purim story, and others dress in non-Purim-related costumes. It is a mitzvah to listen to the story of Purim chanted from The Scroll of Esther, and to hear every word. It is customary to make loud noise with a noisemaker called a *ra’ashan* in Hebrew, or *grager* in Yiddish, every time Haman’s name is mentioned, in order to fulfill the obligation of blotting out Haman’s name. Part of the holiday also includes giving gifts or charity to the poor, called *matanot l’evyonim*. A fun tradition on the holiday is to perform a Purim *spiel*, a satirical show either dramatizing the Purim story in a humorous way, or just a funny skit on any theme.[[2]](#footnote-1)

**Nowruz - Central Asia/Persia**

Nowruz is the Iranian New Year which corresponds to the Spring Equinox. The Persian language word translates as “new day.”

A number of ancient kingdoms and cultures of the Mesopotamian region celebrated some form of spring rites as a passage of renewal, and the beginning of Nowruz celebrations is undoubtedly connected.

The renewal of natural life blended symbolically with the struggle between the dual Gods of Lightness and Darkness. Nowruz marked a turning point, the triumph of hope over despair, as the forces of darkness (Winter) began to give way to the goodness represented by light (Spring).

**Equinoccio - Mexico**

Spring Equinox in Teotihuacán is an annual event which takes place around the [20th and 21st of March](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equinox) at the pre-Hispanic site of [Teotihuacán](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teotihuac%C3%A1n), [Mexico](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexico). This event is mirrored by other similar events in other pre-Hispanic sites such as [Chichén Itzá](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chich%C3%A9n_Itz%C3%A1) and [Malinalco](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malinalco%2C_Mexico_State).

In Teotihuacan, thousands of people visit for the event, many dressed in white with a red scarf or other accessory. Many dance, burn copal and chant but the defining ritual is to stand at the top of the [Pyramid of the Sun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pyramid_of_the_Sun), with arms outstretched facing the sun in the morning on the eastern horizon. Most climb this pyramid between 9am and 1pm.However, those who arrive early enough can see the sunrise over the Apan Mountains to the east of the Pyramid of the Sun, with its red rays coloring the landscape and the onlookers’ clothing. Chanting and other clamor accompanies this sunrise as participants stand with arms outstretched.

The first rays of the sun that stream across the landscape on the day of the Spring Equinox are broken on their way to Teotihuacan by an elevation called the Cerro Colorado Grande. Some believe that this point was used by the ancient people of Teotihuacan to mark the equinox.[[3]](#footnote-2) Some attendees believe they are following in the footsteps of their ancestors, in asking the gods for energy and health on this day. Some sources claim that at the point of the equinox, man is at a unique place in the cosmos, when portals of energy open. Climbing the 360 stairs to the top of the Pyramid of the Sun is claimed to allow participants to be closer to this energy.

Although some are now closed off during the Spring Equinox, a number of the buildings at the Teotihuacan site show relationships with astronomy. It is very likely that the Palace of [Quetzalcoatl](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quetzalcoatl) functioned as a solar observatory. On the Spring Equinox, from between 7:15 and 7:45am when the sun rises, a shadow travels upwards along figures etched and painted red onto a battlement-like structure on the west wall. Some of the figures depicted are owls, a bird associated with darkness as well as rays of light. The symbolism is that of balance between light and dark. Birds also symbolize the stars. This structure is called an *unxicalcoliuhqui*, a type of [fretwork](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fretwork) that can also be seen at Chichén Itzá. As with the Butterfly Palace, there are circles on the walls created with reflective mica.

At the ruins of Chichen Itza, the ancient Maya city in Mexico, crowds now gather on the Spring (and Fall) Equinox to watch as the afternoon sun creates shadows that resemble a snake moving along the stairs of the 79-foot-tall Pyramid of Kukulkan, also called El Castillo. On the Spring Equinox, the snake descends the pyramid until it merges with a large, serpent head sculpture at the base of the structure. While the Maya were skilled astronomers, it’s unknown whether they specifically designed the pyramid to align with the equinox and create this visual effect.

**Goddesses of Spring**

With each of the eight sabbats in the Wheel of the Year, we find a plethora of deities who are either specifically honored and celebrated with the sabbat, or whose myths share many of the common symbologies. This is a brief list of some such goddesses whom one might choose to celebrate at Ostara time:

**Freya - Norse**

Ostara (Frigg/Freya), the mother of our race, is the symbol of love and the family, the symbol of the great feminine powers. But she is much more than any mere symbol. Ostara is a living and real spiritual entity, a warm and loving mother, a friend to turn to in fear and distress, who never rejects those who come to her.

In Icelandic mythology we are informed that this great goddess, personified as Freya, was one of the Vanir, and there is some indication that in Scandinavia Freya was considered to be a distinct personality. It is evident, however, that in Germany and Anglo-Saxon England there was no such division - that the names Freya, Frigga, Ostara, Hulda, etc. really referred to a single divinity. While there is a tendency in Odinism in general to refer to her as Freya, we can interchangeably use the name Ostara. It is a triumphant name, a symbol for the defeat of the cold death of Winter, for the victory of the warm forces of life renewed. She is a symbol of hope for our people, as Spring follows Winter in exultant joy, so too will we resurge into new life after the Winter of this Dark Age.[[4]](#footnote-3)

**Persephone - Greek**

Persephone was the goddess queen of the Underworld, wife of the god [H](https://www.theoi.com/Khthonios/Haides.html)ades. She was also the goddess of Spring growth, who was worshiped alongside her mother [Demeter](https://www.theoi.com/Olympios/Demeter.html) in the Eleusinian Mysteries. This agricultural-based cult promised its initiates passage to a blessed afterlife.

Persephone was titled Kore (the Maiden) as the goddess of Spring's bounty. Once upon a time when she was playing in a flowery meadow with her Nymph company, Kore was seized by Hades and carried off to the Underworld as his bride. Her mother Demeter despaired at her disappearance and searched for her throughout the world accompanied by the goddess [Hecate](https://www.theoi.com/Khthonios/Hekate.html) bearing torches. When she learned that [Zeus](https://www.theoi.com/Olympios/Zeus.html) had conspired in her daughter's abduction she was furious, and refused to let the earth fruit until Persephone was returned.

Zeus consented, but because the girl had tasted of the food of Hades - a handful of pomegranate seeds - she was forced to forever spend a part of the year with her husband in the Underworld.

Her annual return to the earth in Spring was marked by the flowering of the meadows and the sudden growth of the new grain. Her return to the Underworld in Winter, conversely, saw the dying down of plants and the halting of growth.

**Tlazolteotl - Mexica**

Tlazolteotl, Goddess of Cotton, Goddess of Filth, Eater of Excrement. She is the regenerative power of the Earth, the midwife, and the pardoner. One of the most provocative renditions of Tlazolteotl is from the Codex Borbonicus. She squats in the birth-giving position, wearing the conical Huastec hat with tassels, similar to the tassels on new corn. She wears black and red, decorated with crescent moons which mimic the shape of a vulva.

Tlazolteotl was also connected with childbirth, and was regarded to be the patroness of midwives. In some artistic depictions of the goddess, Tlazolteotl is portrayed as a woman giving birth to a baby. Tlazolteotl’s role as an earth goddess or fertility deity also makes sense when one interprets the filth associated with her as rotting organic matter, and that her connection to childbirth is symbolic of new life.

She is also referred to as the “goddess who eats filth to birth flowers.” This regenerative quality is what likens her to the energy of Spring: as the Earth consumes the dead organic matter from the last harvest, it fertilizes the soil, enabling new growth, and supporting abundant harvests to come.

**Sita - Hindu**

Sita’s earliest known appearance is in the Rig Veda, where She is worshiped in several hymns as an agricultural and fertility deity. The Kausika Sutra also identifies Her as "mother of gods, mortals, and creatures," and equates Her with intelligence, growth, increase and prosperity.

As Cornelia Dimmitt explains, "Sita literally means 'furrow,' as in a plowed field, or the parting of the hair on the head; it also implies the female vaginal furrow as the source of life." Vedic writings show that “She was worshiped as a goddess, the furrow personified." She is a Goddess who connects the fecundity of the earth with the eternal divine. Sita's ancient associations with fertility and the Earth are continually echoed throughout the Ramayana. Plants and animals constantly reflect Sita's actions and moods. She is the very essence of Prakriti, or Nature. In general, Sita is presented as if She were truly the mistress of vegetation.

**Iris - Greek**

Iris was the goddess of the rainbow and the messenger of the Olympian gods. She was often described as the handmaiden and personal messenger of [Hera](https://www.theoi.com/Olympios/Hera.html).

Iris was a goddess of sea and sky - her father Thaumas "the wondrous" was a marine-god, and her mother Elektra, "the amber," a cloud-nymph.

For the coastal-dwelling Greeks, the rainbow's arc was most often seen spanning the distance between cloud and sea, and so the goddess was believed to replenish the rain-clouds with water from the sea. Iris had no distinctive mythology of her own. In myth she appears only as an errand-running messenger and was usually described as a virgin goddess. Her name contains a double meaning, being connected with both the Greek word *iris* "the rainbow" and *eiris* "messenger."

Iris is depicted in ancient Greek vase painting as a beautiful young woman with golden wings, a herald's rod (*kerykeion*), and sometimes a water-pitcher (*oinochoe*) in her hand. She was usually depicted standing beside Zeus or Hera, sometimes serving nectar from her jug.

**Eos - Greek**

Eos was the Greek goddess of the Dawn in Greek mythology, and although her name might not be amongst the most famous of Greek deities, Eos played an important role in bringing light to the Earth each day.

The primary role of Eos in Greek mythology was to rid the world of the darkness of night, and to announce the imminent arrival of Helios, the Sun.

Thus it was said that Eos would emerge from the realm of Oceanus in the east upon her golden chariot, a chariot pulled by two horses, Lampus and Phaethon, and would thus precede [Helios](https://www.greeklegendsandmyths.com/helios.html) across the sky. Before descending at the end of the day into the realm of Oceanus in the west.

Some writers though would state that once darkness had been eliminated, Eos would leave her own chariot and climb aboard the chariot of Helios, a chariot pulled by a different Lampus, Erythreus, Acteon and Philogeus. Thus brother and sister would enter the realm of Oceanus together at the end of the day.

Each night, Eos would travel through the realm of Oceanus to ensure that she was back in position in the east for the start of the next day.

**Symbols and Traditions of Ostara**

There are many common and recognizable symbols at this time of year, most of which pertain to light and fertility, rebirth and renewal.

**The Hare**

In Celtic tradition, the hare is sacred to the Goddess and is the totem animal of lunar goddesses such as Hecate, Freya and Holda - the hare is a symbol for the Moon. The Goddess most closely associated with the Hare is Eostre, or Ostara. The date of the Christian Easter is determined by the phase of the Moon. The nocturnal hare, so closely associated with the Moon which dies every morning and is resurrected every evening, also represents the rebirth of nature in Spring. Both the Moon and the hare were believed to die daily in order to be reborn - thus the Hare is a symbol of immortality. It is also a major symbol for fertility and abundance as the hare can conceive while pregnant.

Over the centuries the symbol of the Hare at Ostara has become the Easter Bunny who brings eggs to children on Easter morning, the Christian day of rebirth and resurrection. Hare hunting was taboo but because the date of Easter is determined by the Moon together with the Hare's strong lunar associations, hare-hunting was a common Easter activity in England (and also at Beltane).

**Eggs**

Eggs and seeds contain 'the totality of potential', full of promise and new life. They symbolize the rebirth of nature, the fertility of the Earth and all of creation.

In many traditions the egg is a symbol for the whole universe. The 'cosmic' egg contains a balance of male and female, light and dark, in the egg yolk and egg white. The golden orb of the yolk represents the Sun God enfolded by the White Goddess in perfect balance, so it is particularly appropriate at Ostara and the Spring Equinox when all is in balance for just a moment, although the underlying energy is one of growth and expansion.

There are many associations between the hare and the egg, dating back to pre-Christian times.

Below is a traditional story from the west country of Ireland:

*“Once upon a time the Animal Kingdom gathered together for a meeting in a flurry of great excitement. There was to be a Very Special Party and a Very Special Guest was coming to visit them. The Very Special Guest was none other than the Goddess herself, and every creature wanted to give her a Very Special Gift.*

*Now some of the animals were very rich and some were very poor but off they went to prepare their gifts, for only the very very best would do for the Goddess. Hare was very very excited, he dearly loved the Goddess and although he was very poor he had a big generous heart - he was going to give her the very finest gift he could find!*

*Hare rushed home to see what he could find to give to the Goddess - he looked everywhere, in the cupboards and under the bed but there was nothing, even the larder was empty, he had absolutely nothing to give Her. Except for one thing. On the shelf in the larder was a single egg. And that was it. It was the only thing he had left. Hare gently took the egg out of the larder and lovingly decorated it and took it to the party.*

*Hare was very worried, all the other animals gave their gifts of gold and silver and precious jewels and all Hare had was the egg. Eventually all the gifts had been given and Hare was the very very last. Hare very shyly presented the Goddess with the egg. She took it and looked at him and saw the true spirit of Hare. And there and then the Goddess appointed Hare as her Very Special Animal - because Hare had given her everything he had.*

Here, too, is a tradition shared by Counter Enchantress, from her own family traditions:

## ***Nana Violet's Egg Charm.***

*Think carefully what you wish for! The general rule of thumb is: a brown egg for wishes involving animals; and a white egg for wishes involving people and plants.*

*1.* ***Blow the egg****. Using a fat needle, pierce a hole in both ends of the egg, making one hole larger than the other. Using the needle, pierce the egg yolk gently and swirl it around to break up the yolk. Place a small drinking straw in one end and gently blow through the other hole to help gravity do its work.*

*2.* ***Paint Your Egg Talisman.*** *When your egg has thoroughly dried out, place it on top of a little mound of blue tack to hold it in place and you are ready to go!*

*Choose a symbol to represent your wish - a heart for love, coin for prosperity, a candle for wisdom, whatever is meaningful for you. Or you can paint the whole egg in a corresponding color - red for love, green for prosperity, purple for wisdom and so on. Another way to do it is to stick rose petals on for love, or feathers for fertility - again it is what is meaningful to you that is important.*

*3. When it is ready,* ***find a suitable place for it*** *and prepare it for hanging by threading a thin thread (embroidery thread, thin wool) through the two holes, securing it with a large knot, a bead, or even a matchstick at the bottom to hold it steady.*

*4.* ***Clear your mind and focus on your desire*** *for abundance/fruitfulness and its place in your life:*

*'Little charm made of shell as I hang you here may all be well. May all things grow. May all things flow. Blessings for the turning of the Wheel."*

*Use these words or any others that you are comfortable with - remember this is all about your intention.*

**Flowers**

Of course, one immediately thinks of flowers when Spring comes to mind. Some of the earlier bloomers include: daffodils, primroses, violets, celandine, forsythia, catkins, pussy willow, dwarf iris, hellebore, crocus and bloodroot. Spring flowers are traditionally used at Ostara to fashion flower crowns, to adorn homes and altars.

For those further north, who might still expect snow to fall throughout April, Ostara can be thought of as a seed-planting time. Potted plants and seedlings growing in the home can become a ritual in itself - nurturing the small, new life bursting forth as we slowly begin to clear out our garden beds from last year’s decay.

**Hot Cross Buns**

Most of us think of Hot Cross Buns from the famous children’s song, but we can re-envision their meaning to represent a Celtic Cross: the four equal armed crosses of balance within the circle. You have two Equinoxes crossed by the two Solstices, the four seasons, the four Sacred Directions of North, East, South and West and the five elements of Earth, Air, Fire and Water with Spirit at the Centre. The circumference represents the cycle of the year, the circle of life, with the still point of balance at its center.

Breads, cakes, and pastries in general are a common staple at most holy sabbat celebrations. Breads represent “the staff of life,” the foods common to many cultures which have sustained humans throughout time, and helped us to thrive with simple, filling nourishment.

Below is a wonderful recipe for Hot Cross Buns by Nagi, found on the Recipe Tin Eats website:

### **Ingredients**

#### **BUNS:**

* ▢
* 3 teaspoons instant or rapid rise yeast (9 grams)
* ▢
* 1/2 cup (110g) caster sugar (superfine sugar)
* ▢
* 1 1/2 cups (375ml) milk, warm
* ▢
* 4 1/4 cups (640g) bread flour (or plain / all purpose)
* ▢
* 2 tsp cinnamon powder
* ▢
* 2 tsp All Spice
* ▢
* 1/2 tsp salt
* ▢
* 1 1/2 cups (210g) sultanas
* ▢
* 1 - 2 oranges, zest only
* ▢
* 50g / 3.5 tbsp unsalted butter, melted and cooled
* ▢
* 1 egg

#### **EXTRA FLOUR FOR DOUGH**

* ▢
* 1/4 cup (35g) Extra bread flour

#### **CROSSES:**

* ▢
* 1/2 cup (75g) flour
* ▢
* 5 tbsp water

#### **GLAZE:**

* ▢
* 1 tbsp apricot jam
* ▢
* 2 tsp water

**Instructions**

1. Place flour, yeast, sugar, all spice, cinnamon, and salt in a large bowl. Briefly mix with stand mixer fitted with a dough hook.
2. Add butter, milk, egg, sultanas and zest.
3. **Standmixer:** Mix until a smooth elastic dough forms - 5 minutes on Speed 2 of standmixer. After 1 minute, add extra flour if required, just enough so dough comes away from side of bowl when mixing and doesn't stick terribly to your fingers.
4. **Hand kneading:** Alternatively, dust a work surface with flour and knead by hand for 10 minutes.
5. **Dough is kneaded enough** when it's smooth and does not break when stretched - see photos video for before/after comparison.

#### **RISE #1:**

1. Leave dough in the bowl, cover with cling wrap and place in a warm, wind free place to rise until doubled in size. This will take anywhere between 30 minutes to 1 1/2 hours depending on how warm it is.

#### **FORMING BALLS:**

1. Line a 31.5 x 23.5 cm / 9 x 13" tray with baking paper with overhang.
2. Remove cling wrap and punch dough to deflate.
3. Dust work surface with flour, place dough on work surface, shape into a log - this will deflate the air. Cut into 12 equal pieces.
4. Take one piece and press down with palm, then use your fingers to gather into a ball, then roll the dough briefly to form a ball. This stretches the dough on one side and that's how I get a nice smooth surface.
5. Place the ball with the smooth side up on the tray. Repeat with remaining dough. Line them up 3 x 4.

#### **RISE # 2:**

1. Spray a piece of cling wrap lightly with oil (any), then loosely place over the tray.
2. Return tray to warm place and leave it for 30 - 45 minutes, until the dough has risen by about 75% (less than double in size).
3. Partway through Rise #2, preheat oven to 180°C/350°F (all oven types).

#### **CROSSES:**

1. Mix flour and water until a thick runny paste forms - see video for thickness required.
2. Spoon into a round 3 mm piping bag or small ziplock bag then snip corner.
3. Remove the cling wrap and pipe crosses onto the buns. Go slow so it hugs the curves.

#### **BAKING/GLAZE:**

1. Bake for 22 minutes, or until the surface is a deep golden brown. The surface colour is the best test for this recipe.
2. Meanwhile, place jam and water in a bowl, microwave for 30 seconds. Mix to combine.
3. Remove buns from oven. Use overhang to lift buns onto a cooling rack.
4. Brush with jam mixture while warm. Allow to cool to warm before serving.

## **Trees of Ostara**

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## **Birch**

As Birch is one of the first trees to come into leaf, it is an obvious choice as representing the emergence of Spring. Deities associated with Birch are mostly love and fertility goddesses. 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). It signifies a new start, beginnings and birth.

## **Ash**

This is one of three trees sacred to the druids (Ash, Oak and Thorn). The cosmic tree, Yggdrasil was the Ash which links the world of men with the realms of spirit and myth, and imparted understanding of the interconnection of all things. Ash teaches that all life is interconnected on all levels of existence - past, present and future, spiritual, mental and physical. Whatever happens on one level, happens on all levels. Your thoughts and actions and whatever you do in the physical world will affect all levels of your being.

## **Alder**

In the Ogham Alphabet Alder rules from March 18-April 14. At this time of the Spring Equinox, the Alder is flourishing on riverbanks, its roots in the water, bridging and holding the magical space between both heaven and earth, holding the space between worlds. It is sacred to Bran who laid himself down for his men to use as a bridge to cross the sea.

**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 Wikipedia [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Written by Tori Avey [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. From Wikipedia [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. From The Gods and Goddesses of Odinism, published by The Circle of Ostara [↑](#footnote-ref-3)