

*Winter Solstice/Yule Dec 21st- Dec 25th
The Deep Rest and time of Celebration.
Yule, Shamanic Christmas and.... Krampus?*



The last of the summer has all been pulled from the garden and the big outward work of summer and autumn is over. We now have moved into the time of the big darkness as the sun sets earlier and earlier cutting off our days and pulling us into the season of deep rest.

And yet for many of us, no matter how we may fight it December has become one of the busiest months of the year. There is so much to do from decorating our homes and tiny apartments to all of the many holiday parties that our multi-cultural society has to offer, from Hanukkah to Ramadan and Diwali from office parties to house parties and family gatherings, there really is so much to do and ways to celebrate.

Christmas has become a selling frenzy, lacking any real meaning, regardless of it's beginnings, and so it really is up to us to come back to ourselves, our values and re-claim what once was a time of deep rest and celebrating having come most of the way through the darkest and hardest season of the year.

There was a good reason for so many drunken celebrations in December, for this is the time of the big darkness, and in ancient times there would have been real risk of things such as sickness, starvation, and cold so bitter that many perished just simply trying to stay warm.

There is no wonder that hidden stashes of mead and wine got pulled out and



shared amongst friends, and families pulled together more, they needed to stay warm and survive the long winter months and thus the many traditions of wintertime were born.

In our modern world though, there is shopping and baking to be done, and so much to prepare and it literally all begins the moment stores place the first Christmas decorations out for sale in November.

It is easy to get caught up in it all and why shouldn't we? We all share a rich ancestral history of celebrating during the colder months many of which we will go into here.



However over the years, I have found myself personally on both sides of deep rest and outward celebrating, and there really is something to be said for both.

These days I willingly and gratefully tuck myself up inside and read the days off of work away, drinking tea and pulling cards for the following year. This way of being feels easy and right and truthfully my body asks for a deep nourishing rest after too many long nights of outward social time.

For many though this time of year is another painful reminder of their lack of family or the dysfunction within that keeps them away.

I myself struggled for many years with this until I decided that I needed to create my own traditions for our family and follow my own ways back into remembering. This brings us straight into the Celtic wheel once again, a starting place for many of us to get back on track with something that resembles our values and an opportunity to make it meaningful once again.

Over the years yule has come to be an inspiring time, and the hard work of creating traditions for our ourselves and our children has eventually paid off, because now they look forward to our yearly solstice and Yule traditions themselves and it is my hope that they carry it one and onto their one families one day...

La Befana, Italy's Christmas Witch

Winter Celebrations happen all around the world:

We have examples hundreds of not thousands of ancestral traditions pertaining

to the return of the sun, from the Italian Strega La Befana the Christmas witch who bring presents to children on her broom to the Germanic Mōdraniht which means "The Mothers Night" that celebrated the return of fertility to the land along with the return of the sun at Solstice, to the Mexican *polo voladore* which celebrates the return of the sun with a dangerous pole dance that it is truly terrifying to watch.

Three men climb on top of a 50-foot pole, and as one of them beats a drum and plays a flute, the other two men wind a rope attached to the pole around one foot and jump. If they land on their feet, it is believed that the sun god will be pleased, and that the days will start getting longer. There are no nets or safety catches and the pole is HIGH! I wonder if this tradition is perhaps a small nod to the time of the aztecs and their sacrifices to the sun god?

Wherever we are on our planet when the shortening of day changes there are celebrations for the return of the sun at the Solstice.

These days though our experience of the "Big Dark" is incredibly "Light filled" we have put up as many lights as possible to chase away the dark and filled our entire month with festivities in excess. It is like we are making up for all of the sufferings of our ancestors, like there is an ancient remembering within us that either drags us down and depresses us this month or fills us with longing to get out and chase the blues away. Whatever that feeling is for you it is always helpful to be mindful of it and notice it is there, perhaps pull out your trusty journal and see if you can't follow it back to source.

For this spin of the wheel as I sat with all of the different possibilities and information that we now have at our fingertips and I was torn between literally writing an essay on the origins of Christmas and Solstice, which many of you may or may not already have an understanding of, and scrapping it all in lieu of waxing poetic on the many ways we should rest during this time.

What I decided on was a mixture of information without having to re-write the wheel, inspiration, and deep nurturing rest. There is a LOT of fantastic articles, books and documentaries that have been written on this subject over the years, so I have included some of my favourites of each.

What it all comes down to though is this: The Solstice is the longest night of the year followed by a return of the sun slowly making it's way back across the sky and lighting up our days once again and is celebrated on the 21st Of December. This celebration was what our Celtic ancestors were all waiting for, and it seems to me that after the Solstice, anything else is just icing on the commercial Christmas cake!

Winter Solstice/Yule-The goddess gives birth to the son/sun of the earth....



The Winter solstice marks both the longest night of the year and the return of the sun the following day. Some say that the Solstice and Yule are one in the same but in fact they really are not. However over the centuries they have come to be celebrated on or near the same time and so in this way have become interchangeable.

Where the Solstice is an astronomical phenomenon that happens twice a year, once in summer and once in winter marking the shortest and longest nights of the year, Yule is an old Norse and pagan celebration whose origins come from the word 'lul' meaning Wheel. In old almanacs Yule was represented by the symbol of a wheel, conveying the idea of the year turning like a wheel. Because it was often celebrated during the same time as the solstice it has merged to become one.



During Yule, sometimes referred to as the Yule-tide, children were marched from house to house with gifts that represented the return of the sun, these were more often than not oranges and apples laid out on boughs of evergreens current to the season. Boughs of Ivy and Holly were also used as decorations both inside of the homes and outside in hopes that the nature spirits would come and join them in their celebrations.

Mistletoe was also hung as decoration as it represented the seed of the Divine, and at Midwinter, Druids would travel deep into the forest to harvest it.

At Solstice time the Yule log was the highlight of the evening and many said that the wood must either have been harvested from the land, or given as a gift but never bought which I like as a tradition, but for many these days even getting a log may prove to be difficult!

Once the log was brought into the home it was decorated with greenery and offerings of cider and ale were given to the spirits of the forest through the wood along with other sweet offerings that went into the fire along with the log. Often outdoor offerings were also made such as seed cakes and other things for the woodland creatures.

At our house we are fortunate enough to have a fire place, however in years past and even sometimes now in lieu of the log we all sit around the fire together and bind our hopes and dreams for the year to come, into small prayer ties made from cedar branches and then one by one we burn them.

It was said that traditionally Oak was the traditional wood used for a yule log, but others say it is Ash, I say in our modern times whatever kind of wood you can get is good!

Lighting a bonfire is also a fun and wonderful way to celebrate the solstice. When I was a youngster growing up in Ontario where the lakes would freeze all the way through the adults would set up large bon fires by the side of the lake and we would skate in the dark for hours with only the light of the fire to show us the way and keep us warm. We would drink hot chocolate and apple cider and the cold never seemed to get to us! There were many nights I wished to re-create this for my own kids while living here in B.C but alas we do not get cold or dry enough for a big evening bonfire in the wintertime.

The Pagan Origin's of Christmas

This 35 minute video will blow your mind if you have never explored this information before! The yule log was a phallic symbol representing the fertility god Jul, and large fires were lit for 12 days which included both human and animal sacrifices in his honour! Essentially it was a drunken orgiastic festival celebrating the sun. Bringing holly, mistletoe and greens inside represented our connection to mother nature and once again fertility, just like the Christmas tree which was an idol for worshipping, as tree worship was a sacred activity of pagan's in Europe. The belief was that there were spirits in the trees and the tree also



represented the "Tree of Life" and revered as the body of the goddess...

Packed with information from a completely historical perspective, I simply could not say it any better!

Krampus - The dark side of Old St Nick....



The shamanic Aspects of Christmas:



This bears mentioning because not only is it fascinating, but it just goes to show just how much missing information has been out there that is only coming to the surface now, about where many of our traditions come from such as the Yule tree, the colours red and white and why {to my delight}, the Swedish company Ikea put out millions of cloth amanita {Fly Agaric} mushroom tree ornaments a few years ago!

In ancient Siberia, the evergreen tree is the same tree that the shamans believed was the, and it was also the tree that the sweet red and white Amanata mushrooms love to grow under and then develops a symbiotic, non-parasitic relationship with the roots of the tree. It is said that the Evenki peoples would pick

the mushrooms and hang them on the trees to dry which explains in part where the tradition of hanging red and white christmas ornaments comes from.

The Evenki also lived in yurts, where they would often place a pine tree in the centre of for ceremonial purposes, as it symbolized the World Tree upon which the shamans would use the symbolic power of to help them leave their bodies and travel into other realms. This also served as a smoke hole/chimney letting the smoke out and also the chimney from which they would return bringing back "gifts" of information from the spirit realm.

"The Evenki also believed that the North Star was the very top of the Upper World, and because the World Tree was an axis that connected the entire cosmology, *the North Star sat upon the very top of the World Tree* – which is where the tradition of placing a star at the top of the tree comes from."

The shamans often gathered many mushrooms into large bags and then would take their sack around to the community where each family would help in the drying process by hanging them in sock over their fireplace to dry.

The Evenki and other tribal groups in the Siberian region are also big reindeer herders and the shamans realized over time that the reindeer also loved to eat the mushrooms and possibly were affected and so they would often drink the reindeer urine in order to "fly" to the spirit realms.

Some say that possibly this is where the idea of flying reindeer come from.....possibly with the Saami shaman on board...

I have included here this video as well as a great article on this at the bottom of the page.

Celebrating the season with Traditional Foods:

Traditionally things like sweet yellow custard with oranges or mandarin segments was given to children, to represent the yellow of the return of the sun, bread baked into the shape of a sun or sun shaped cookies were also baked and shared or given as gifts.

Other more adult things were consumed such as Wassail, a hot and spicy beer, which was drunk in ancient times as well as today, and many northern Europeans enjoy it all winter long.

I myself always turn to spices such as ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg and allspice, as their warming and comforting smells seem to always set the spirit of the season firmly in place once I begin cooking with them!



Easy Nonalcoholic Wassail

Wassail punch is an traditional alcoholic drink that people were given when they

went wassailing, or caroling, to people's house. The punch typically incorporates apple cider, sugar, cinnamon, ginger, and nutmeg.

{For an alcoholic version add in Hard cider head over to [Nourished Kitchen](#) for a different recipe.}

2 cups cranberry juice
2/3 cup white sugar
7 cups water
3 cinnamon sticks
1 tbsp. whole allspice
1 tbsp. whole cloves
1 (6 ounce) can frozen orange juice concentrate
2 (20 ounce) cans pineapple juice
6 fluid ounces frozen concentrated fruit punch



In a large pot over medium heat, combine the cranberry juice, sugar and water. Bring to a boil and stir until sugar is dissolved. Place the cinnamon, allspice, and clove into a cheesecloth bag and tie shut. Add to the liquid and simmer 20 minutes. Remove spice bag and add fruit juices. Serve hot.



Here is a video on making Victorian Wassail at Christmas:

Gingerbread cookies:

It is said that during the 13th century, gingerbread was brought to Sweden by German immigrants where making it was a long standing tradition, so much so they even had a gingerbread guild controlled production.

According to wikipedia the "first documented trade of gingerbread biscuits dates to the 17th century, where they were sold in monasteries, pharmacies, and town square farmers' markets. In Medieval England gingerbread was thought to have medicinal properties." This idea possibly came from Swedish nuns who would bake ginger into their bread to ease indigestion.

Traditionally most sweet things made at this time of year were sweetened with honey or if one was fortunate molasses which was a cheaper version of refined white sugar, high in iron and gave off the sweet treacly flavour that we have come to associate with the holidays, especially when paired with spices such as cinnamon and nutmeg.

These are my favourite wintertime cookies, however since they are so addictive I only make them at yule so as to keep them as a treat!

The recipe below is for chewy gingerbread to which I have added a full tsp of ginger to make them extra spicy!

Chewy and Spicy Gingerbread Cookies:

Ingredients:

- 2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 3/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/4 teaspoon salt

- 3/4 cup margarine, softened
- 1 cup white sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon water
- 1/4 cup molasses
- 2 tablespoons white sugar



Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). Sift together the flour, ginger, baking soda, cinnamon, cloves, and salt. Set aside.
2. In a large bowl, cream together the margarine and 1 cup sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in the egg, then stir in the water and molasses. Gradually stir the sifted ingredients into the molasses mixture. Shape dough into walnut sized balls, and roll them in the remaining 2 tablespoons of sugar. Place the cookies 2 inches apart onto an ungreased cookie sheet, and flatten slightly.
3. Bake for 8 to 10 minutes in the preheated oven. Allow cookies to cool on baking sheet for 5 minutes before removing to a wire rack to cool completely. Store in an airtight container.

Traditional Plum Pudding:

What I love about the old tradition of making Plum pudding is that what is not really known about the tradition of making it was that a lot of magic and love was baked into this sweet cake!

Eating Plum pudding was traditionally considered a symbol of good luck and success for the coming year, and interestingly enough, the plum pudding doesn't

contain plums at all!

During the seventeenth century, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "plum" was a catch-all term for dried fruits such as raisins and prunes, which were used in the deserts or what the British like to call "puddings".



Also traditionally they were made with suet, which is the fat that grows around the kidneys and liver of cows and sheep that was saturated with brandy, wrapped in cloth and then steamed or boiled.

According to English custom, the plum pudding was usually prepared several weeks in advance of Christmas - usually on the Sunday before Advent, which

became known as Stir-up Sunday.

It was called this for two reasons, the first being that it was so hard to stir it took everyone to get involved and take a turn stirring. As each person stirred the heavy batter, they made a wish for the coming year.

The best bit was that when the pudding was baked, tiny tokens were mixed into the batter, and were said to bring good luck to whoever found the token in their slice. The pudding was usually served with great cheer and lots of flames due to a liberal dousing brandy as it was brought to the table.

Symbols:

- For prosperity, a silver coin-wrap in waxed paper before cooking.
- For marriage or a long-term relationship, a ring
- For creativity, a thimble

Jaime Oliver's Nan's Christmas Pud:

This version does not contain suet, not to worry, as it is a more modern recipe.

As you stir up your batter, visualize your intent and then direct energy into the pudding, focusing on health, prosperity and good fortune for the coming new year for you, your family and friends.

Ingredients

- 500 g mixed dried fruit (such as cranberries, cherries, apricots, sultanas and raisins)
- 100 g dates , chopped up
- 3 tablespoons chopped crystallized ginger
- 125 g suet
- 1 orange , zest of
- 125 g plain flour
- 125 g caster sugar
- 150 g fresh white breadcrumbs
- 2 tablespoons vin santo or brandy
- 1 handful chopped nuts, such as pecans, Brazils or hazelnuts
- 1 medium free-range egg
- 150 ml milk
- golden syrup , to serve
- Method
- Grease a 1.5 litre pudding bowl.
- Mix all the ingredients together, except the golden syrup. Put the mixture into the greased bowl and cover with a double layer of aluminium foil. Tie a piece of string round the side of the bowl. Place in a large saucepan with water halfway up the sides of the bowl. Bring the water to the boil, put on a tight-fitting lid, and simmer for 3 hours. (Don't forget to check the water regularly, making sure that it never boils dry, because if it does, it will burn and the bowl will crack.)
- When it's ready, remove the foil, turn out on to a plate, drizzle with golden syrup and decorate it as you like. You can also light it with brandy if you want to be really fancy, or serve with custard.

Winter Solstice Ceremonies and Gatherings:

Traditionally on Solstice even families and communities would gather round a great fire outside for most of the night, or would gather at a central meeting place, with the intention of seeing the sun rise in the morning, however for many of us living in the city it is hard to really get outside for any length of time unless we rent a cottage somewhere.



However regardless of if you can get outside for just an hour in a park, most or all of the evenings depending on weather or just just stay tucked up inside all

evening with a candle or fire the sentiment is the same.

In our city we have the most wonderful thing called [The Secret Lantern Society](#) that puts on a Solstice festival every year in several locations across the city complete with lantern making workshops and events that are amazing for both kids and adults. Many different cities put on something for Solstice so spend some time and see what your city offers.

If there is nothing going on where you live, it is easy to create a simple ceremony that honors the return of the light. Try this, gather with your loves ones, or even alone in a park outside and bring a candle. Stand in the darkness for as long as you need to really feel the full affect of the longest night of the year, and then when you are ready light your candle to represent the return of the sun. If you are with friends each person lights the others candles.

An invocation for this is to call on Old Mother Winter:

Ancient mother of Midwinter

An Calliach, watcher over life and death,
the one who rebirths the world

be with us on this, the longest night of the year!

See us through the darkness mother,
stand with us, around us and,

bring with you the promise of new life at the dawn of the new day

when you the mother of the earth,
give birth to the sun.

If you live close to either an outdoor or indoor labyrinth it is wonderful to walk it while holding your candle to represent the inward and outward turning of the wheel. Once you are done walking blow your candle out and return to the warmth inside for feasting and sharing.



If you are with adults or the children have gone to be, you can take turns asking each other potent questions such as "Where did your inner light shine brightest this year?" if the person is having a hard time seeing it, everyone tunes in and shares what aspects of their friend they saw as a bright light for them.

Another good question that is a little more personal in nature and perhaps best taken to your journal is "What can I see if I shine light on my current situation? What am I missing in the

darkness of my own shadows?

Taking Back The Time of Deep Rest....

It is said that winter is the final end of the earth's seasons, bringing completion and quiet to the outward season of summer it's opposite, however what winter really brings us is an opportunity to start over, because there is no real beginning or end, there is only the never ending spin of the yearly wheel and winter brings us the deep quiet.

Winter holds within it's quiet blanket, clues of what has come before and what will be re-born again in the spring, and so the energy of winter offers us an opportunity to reflect on our own journey over the past year and to see where we shone brightly and where our light dimmed.

As we move ever so slowly towards the solstice and the return of the light, it is this inner reflection on those tender places where we may not have shone our brightest that we can gently begin to unpack and look at with curiosity.

I say curiosity because if we come at ourselves with shame or guilt it never serves us and it rarely ever allows for healing--shame and guilt are closed off emotions with little or no room for expansion or growth.

Curiosity is much better because it is expansive and opens us up to exploration and discovery about ourselves, which in turn can lead to healing should it be called for.

Winter Spiritual Practice:

Midwinter is the perfect time for deep contemplation, and travelling deep within ourselves in search of our own inner stillpoint, and it is also the time for the big deep rest. What this means is a divine balance of sleep, inner exploration, and really bad movies, preferably watched in the bath tub!

Studies have shown that watching television induces low alpha waves in the human brain. Alpha waves are brainwaves between 8 to 12 HZ. and are commonly associated with relaxed meditative states. Now I am by no means suggesting that we all go out and buy TV's and begin watching them as a form of meditation, far from it, but for those who do like to partake in a few bad movies over the holidays--put that shame and guilt away because it serves no purpose here!

I always think that we all need a divine balance between the "sacred and the silly" so a comedy or silly romance movie can be a wonderful part of deep self care.

Having said that the steady beat of a drum also affects our brains in a similar way, inducing a light trance that can be helpful in lowering stress, so if any of you have drums, pull them out and sit quietly with it for 15 min's or so and see how you feel.

For a daily spiritual practise try dedicating some time each day to soulful

journaling and reflection on the year just past, during this time set yourself up in a place that is as comfy as possible and light a candle and/or some incense and begin by grounding yourself and setting your intention for writing that day.

Walking also is another form of deep rest for the body and soul, so if the weather is permitting go outside to the quiet of the forest and allow the resting trees and small beings remind you how to slow down for the winter.

Meditations or Journey work:

Another thing to do is to journey or meditate.

The holiday season is a great time for reflection on the work you have done all year and to go back and review the year past, read through old journal entries and add a few new ones to the bunch.

I like to sit with my shamanic journey journal for a couple of hours and read through it cover to cover, finding the threads that link together and making notes about patterns I notice rising, this gives me a wonderful place to begin my yearly spiritual reflection.

It is also a good time to vision into the new year and see what you might like it to look like, dreaming and allowing our minds to flow around all of the things that fill us up.

Ideally though it does not matter what we do as long as we are engaging in a daily practice that rejuvenates the body and soul, so it could be yoga, or meditation, it could be taking long walks in nature and noticing what is going on around you as you walk, or it could be spending meaningful time with family with an intent on being really present with them.

The idea here is that there is no right or wrong way to engage in a daily spiritual practice, if whatever you are doing you are being mindful and with as much intent as possible.

Celebrating the season Naturally.....

We all need only look no further than our spice drawers, dehydrators and back-yards to celebrate the winter season naturally, so here are a few suggestions to get you inspired....

Make special bird seed containers for hungry outdoor creatures, Bake a sun bread to celebrate the Solstice, Tie ribbons and cedar all over a birch log to make a yule log and burn it in your fire place, If you do not have a fire place light candles all over your home to celebrate the return of the light, Make a cardboard cut out of a sun, Paint one side dark blue to represent the darkness and the other side bright

and sparkly and place it on your altar turning it around on solstice night, **Glue ribbon onto crystals and hang them on your tree, Glue cinnamon stick together to make stars and adorn with star anise and dried oranges, Bake gingerbread people and poke holes though their middles, then thread them onto red ribbon and wrap**



them around your tree, Make Pommades with oranges and cloves, Freeze cranberries and pine needles in a left over milk container and then cut it off to make a beautiful frozen centre piece, Play with Felt and make wee gnomes and advent spirals, Dehydrate oranges, apples and pears and string together for your home or tree, "Bake and Make" gifts for friends and family, Wrap all your gifts in fabric or old paper, and Lastly check out this Fantastic list of even more inspiring ideas here on [Pinterest.....](#)

Books and Articles of Interest

[Pagan Christmas](#). The Plants, Spirits and Rituals at the origins of Yuletide
[Yule](#): Rituals, Recipes & Lore for the Winter Solstice (Llewellyn's Sabbat Essentials)

[The Winter Solstice](#): The Sacred Traditions of Christmas

[The Old Magic of Christmas](#): Yuletide Traditions for the Darkest Days of the Year

[Krampusnacht](#): Twelve Nights of Krampus

Articles:

[The Lost female Figures of Christmas](#)

[Shaman Clause](#)-The shamanic origins of Christmas

[Who is Krampus?](#)

[Nine facts about Krampus](#) St Nicks Demonic companion

[The History of Christmas trees](#)

May Blessings of the Season fill you all with Joy!