

Early Spring



BRIGID - LAURA TEMPEST ZAKROFF

On Gumbaynggirr Country



Early Spring

Known to some as Imbolc, pronounced Imolg, marks the halfway point between Yule/Winter Solstice and Ostara/Spring Equinox. Traditionally held on the 1st or 2nd August in the Southern Hemisphere. Also known as The Quickening, Early Spring comes with the awareness of the first stirrings of life energy awakening in the earth; the Creative Urge rising from the womb of Earth. It holds the energy of the maiden, of newness, a gentle stepping into the world, hope, innocence, a fresh start, a world of potential and possibilities. It is popularly celebrated as the festival of Brigit (more about her later).



This midway place is a crossroads place, the pause between the in-breath and the out-breath, the tension between inaction or rest of Winter and the action and creativity of Spring and Summer; the tension between possibilities and making choices. Perhaps you may be aware of some awakening energy in yourself - a flutter or two of creative energy urging you to new projects. Is there a budding of newness within you, can you hear that inner maiden beauty singing to you?



In the past it was customary for women to dress in white (to honour the bride of the new year) as they gathered together at sundown to light sacred bonfires to purify the fields in preparation for the new year. These fires burned off the old year and invited in the fertilizing, life giving power of the new sun.

Because Brigid was the goddess of smithcraft, poetry and inspiration, her fires symbolized inner sight and illumination, and many women practiced the arts of fire divination.

Then, returning home, hearths were lit, and lighted candles placed in each window to light Brigid's way to their homes. Gifts of food were presented to the goddess before the traditional Imbolc or Brigid's Feast was served.



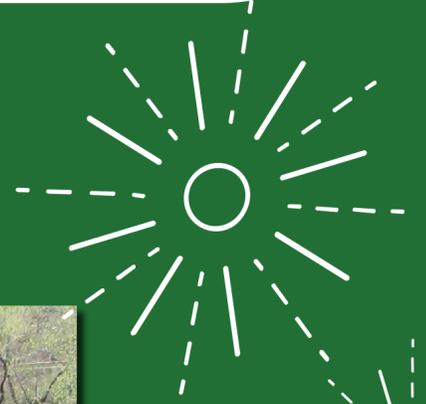
I love the idea that these rituals of cleaning, cooking, crafting, and fire-lighting were once considered integral to the well-being of our community (and to nature herself). Today we've come to see such thinking as superstitious. After all, baking a cake and lighting a ceremonial candle isn't going to causally affect the coming harvest.- "Imbolc & the Rites of Women: The Mid-Winter Festival of Lights, Gather Victoria

folklore



The origins of the word Imbolc are unclear. Many believe that it is derived from oimelc (ewe milk), which is understandable as the festival occurs around lambing time. But other ideas abound too – that it comes from the Old Irish imbolc (i molg in Modern Irish), meaning "in the belly" and referring to the pregnancy of ewes. Perhaps it comes from the Old Irish imb-fholc (to wash/ cleanse oneself). Gosh, does that mean no-one washed during Winter in the days before running hot water?!!! Yet another proposition is that it derives from Proto-Celtic embibolgon (budding).

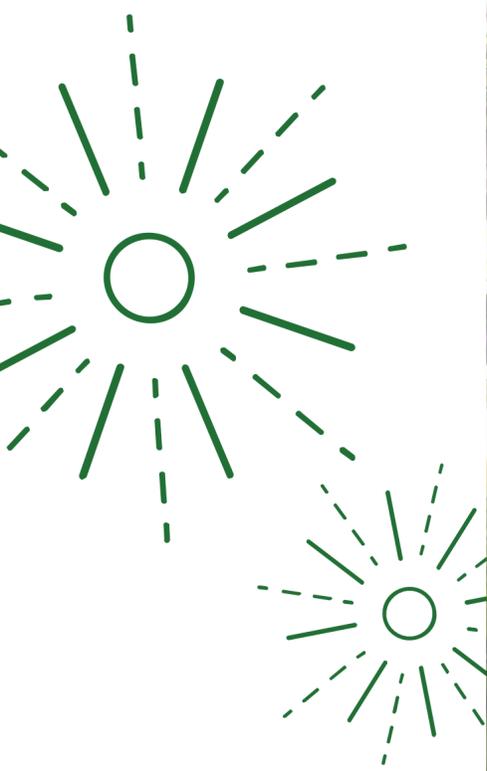
The return of fresh milk would have been extremely important for our European ancestors. Old food supplies would be running low by this time and new foods not yet ready for harvesting. Women and milk are naturally closely associated, not only because of breastfeeding, but women were also largely responsible for making butter and cheese, making this festival a feminine festival.



folklore

In the Northern Hemisphere, this part of the seasonal cycle is celebrated on 2nd February and is closely associated with Candlemas and the purification rite associated with it. Both milk (just ask Cleopatra) and fire are associated with purification and both figure in this festival. Another tradition at this time was to pilgrimage to sacred wells and springs. Pilgrims would tie clouties to the tree next to the well, often a hawthorn. Clouties are strips of cloth that represent a prayer or a wish. They would be made of natural fibre and allowed to disintegrate through weathering, releasing the wish or prayer into the world.

Early Spring is associated with birth and purification. Why would a period of purification be bound up with a festival of fertility, of spring and birth? Because what is purification, but a type of rebirth? We wash ourselves clean of the past in order to start anew. In the same way we may wash ourselves clean, we may feel the impulse or the idea of spring cleaning the house.



Celebrating *EARLY SPRING*

Celebrate this time with recipes using milk and honey. Spring clean the house, take a ritual bath, write a poem, if you're skilled enough, forge something for the home, plant some seeds.

Imbolc is a festival of fertility, Spring, birth, purification. Milk, fire, white candles are all synonymous with this festival



Another idea for the festival morning is to make a mug of chai, find the first rays of sunshine, and enjoy the crisp cool mornings. Don't forget to use the last little bit in the bottom of your mug as a libation in gratitude and prayer.



Celebrating *EARLY SPRING*

How To Make a St Brigid's Cross

Materials:

9 rushes/reeds/straws

4 small rubber bands, to tie up ends

Instructions:

Hold one of the reeds vertically and fold a second reed in half. Place the first vertical reed in the centre of the folded second reed. Hold the centre overlap tightly between thumb and forefinger. Turn the two reeds held together 90 degrees anti-clockwise so that the open ends of the second reed are projecting vertically upwards.

Fold a third reed in half and over both parts of the second reed to lie horizontally from left to right against the first reed. While holding the centre tightly, turn the three reeds 90 degrees anti-clockwise so that the open ends of the third reed are pointing upwards.

Fold a new reed in half over and across all the reeds pointing upwards.

Repeat the process of rotating all the reeds 90 degrees anti-clockwise, adding a new folded reed each time until all nine reeds have been used up to make the cross. (Add to the right, turn to the left)

Secure the arms of the cross with elastic bands. Trim the ends to make them all the same length. The St Brigid's Cross is now ready to hang.



Click on image above for video demonstration



Imbolc, The Dream of Awakening

I am the dream of awakening.

I am the returning of the light.

I am the tough green shoot pushing up through the pavestones, I am the first kiss of sunlight on the unfurling petals of the snowdrop. I am the wind which whispers the gentle pull of home to the migratory bird.



I am the drop of ice melting on the mountainside with its great dream of the ocean.

I am the sap rising in the blossom tree just before it reveals its sticky buds to the sky; I am the riotous celebration humming away beneath the earth's mantle of frozen sleep.

I am the rousing of the bee from its winter slumber, and the soft pad of the mother-wolf's paw on the snow as she prepares to birth her pups.

I am hope, potential, rebirth and promise. I am the kindling breath which transforms a spark of inspiration into a blazing torch.



Give me the silent crescent moon rising over the sea and I will build you a bridge of silver light so you can walk across and lie down in her arms.

Give me the frost-hardened wilderness and I will lay my cloak of radiant green life over her.

continued...



Give me the healer, the poet, the midwife, the craft smith and the prophet, and I will replenish her essence and make her new again.

I am Brigid, Bast, Inanna and Hestia. I am the fierce protectress of the sacred fire.

Tonight I bestow my gifts of power and courage at the hearth of your soul. Power to shed all that which no longer serves you, and courage to clear your heart and mind for the dawn that awaits you. For I am the longing of the spirit which refuses to be consumed by a narrative of fear and chooses instead to place itself vivaciously on the side of love.



I am the song which cannot be silenced, for it is carried deep in the bones of the land. I am the flame which cannot be doused, for it is kept aglow in the hearts of the free. I am the wellspring of knowledge and the milk of the life-force. From the darkness of the earth I give light to the flame which will forge the new world.

I am the stirring in your belly which knows what you are capable of, and just how much your gifts are needed now. For you are as much a part of this world as the rivers and the forests, the creatures and the stars in the night sky. All are sacred to me.

For I am the Exalted, Goddess of land, sea and sky.



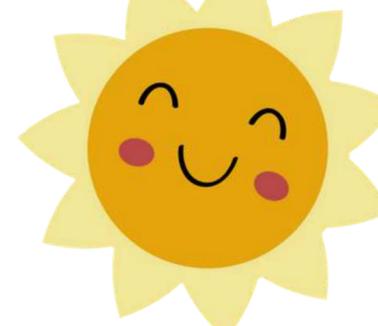
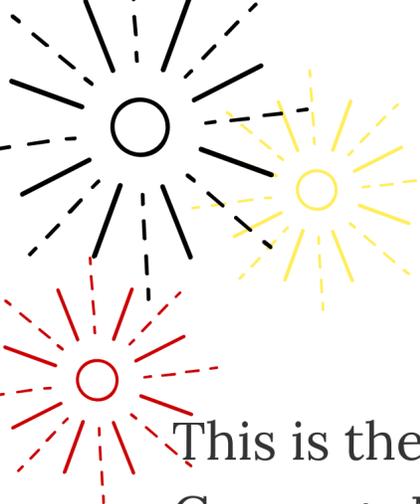
I am the fire within which will not be contained any longer.

I am the quickening, I am the serpent uncoiling, I am Imbolc.

I am the dream of awakening.

- Caroline Mellor





Indigenous Wisdom

This is the season of Guunuga Maguur (green/cold) in Gumbaynggirr. This calendar (right) was completed by Bellingen High School students and Nellie Gallup, based on work by Chels Marshall, Ricky Buchanan, Uncle Tony Perkins and Arrawarra Cultural Centre.



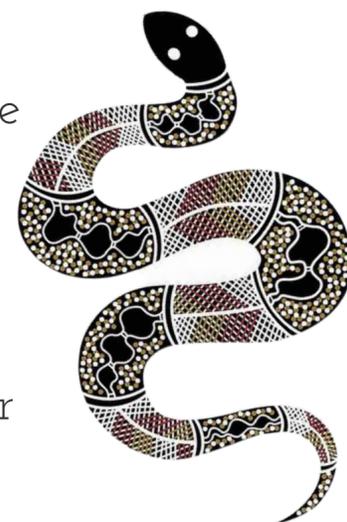
Hardenbergia violacea (Australian wisteria) is a heavy flowering plant so is excellent for bees, birds and butterflies. Traditionally the leaves are crushed to make a tea to soothe toothaches and sore throat but it is also used to maintain your health.

Jaaningga (wattle, green) in Gumbaynggirr language - the sweet gum (jaaning) which seeps from the trunk was eaten.



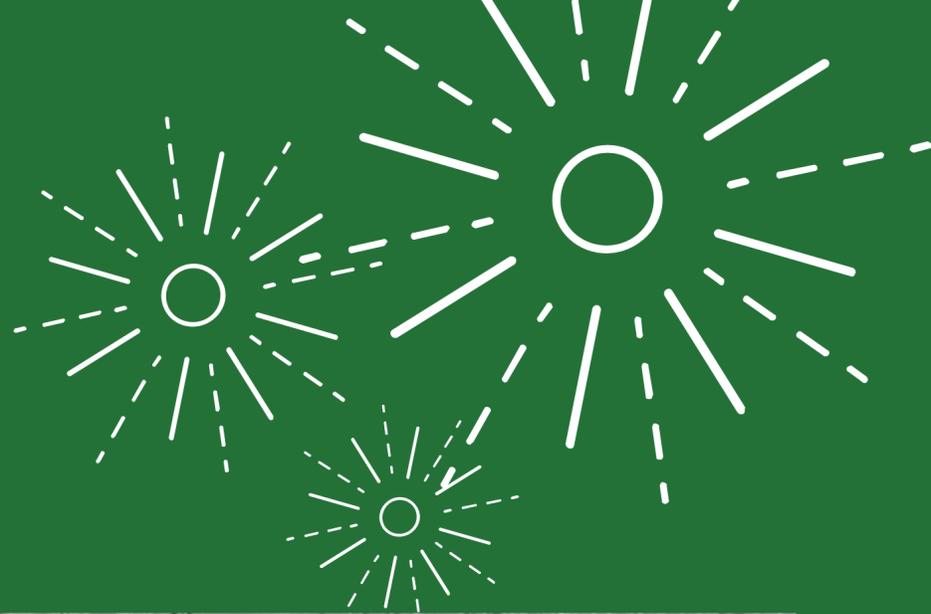
This little fella represents guidance and protection. Spirits of our ancestors use this bird to watch over and guide those who honour them in life offering strength and courage to continue on the right path, no matter what circumstances life throws at you. If it comes to perch near your home it is a good luck sign regarded as a messenger between the heaven and earth worlds.

This from Dance of the Plants



Introduction To A Goddess

BRIGIT



Like Persephone returning from the underworld, Brigit is associated with the return of life to the world. Her fire igniting our imagination and creativity, melting the snow and ice of Winter, and bringing hope and warmth to our hearts.



Brigit spreads her green mantle across the land banishing Winter.

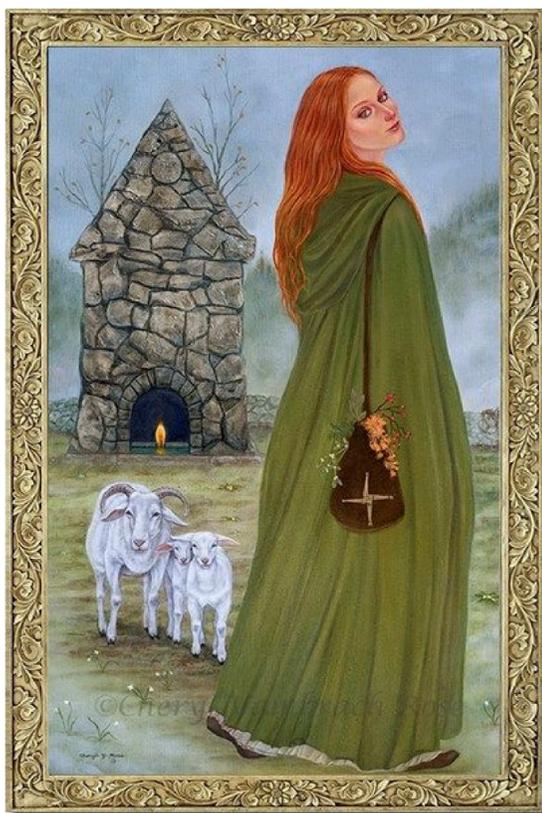
There are many variations, pronunciations, and spellings of Her name, including:

- Scotland: Bhrìghde, Brìghid, Bride
- Ireland: Brigid, Brigit, Brìghid, Brìd, Brìgh
- Manx: Breeshey
- Wales: Ffraid
- England: Brigantia, Britannia
- France: Brigandu

The name Brigit itself means either 'Fiery Arrow', 'Bright One', or 'High One' in the ancient Celtic language, referring to her solar aspect. In the old Celtic language, she was Briganti, which is connected to the old Indo European word, Bhrìghnti. In Sanskrit, bhrati, or brihati means 'exalted one'.

The following comes from the website Learn Religions and explains the origin of one of Brigid's common symbols, her green mantle or brat Bhride in Gaelic.

Legend has it that Brigid was the daughter of a Pictish chieftain who went to Ireland to learn from St. Patrick. In one story, the girl who later became St Brigid went to the King of Leinster, and petitioned him for land so she could build an abbey, The king, who still held to the old Pagan practices of Ireland, told her he'd be happy to give her as much land as she could cover with her cloak. Naturally, her cloak grew and grew until it covered as much property as Brigid needed, and she got her abbey. Thanks to her roles as both a Pagan goddess and a Christian saint, Brigid is often seen as being of both worlds; a bridge between the old ways and the new.



Brigid's mantle is supposed to carry with it blessing and powers of healing. One custom is to place a piece of cloth upon you hearth at Imbolc, Brigid will bless it in the night. The cloth is then used as a mantle for the following year, and will grow in power each time Brigid passes by. The mantle confers comfort, healing and protection of women in labour. Wrapping a newborn in the mantle will stop them fussing through the night.

And what about St. Brigid? If you have gone to primary school in Ireland, you may have heard all the stories of this holy woman, and maybe even made a St. Brigid's cross. It is widely accepted among neo pagans that Brigit herself was a goddess prior to the arrival of Christianity, but there is scholarly debate as to whether she was actually a goddess. She is identified in Lebor Gabála Éirenn as a daughter of the Dagda and a member of the Tuatha Dé Danann.



She was associated with spring, fertility, healing, poetry and blacksmithing. The 10th century Sanas Chormaic says that she was “the goddess whom poets adored” and that she had two sisters: Brigit the healer and Brigit the smith, suggesting that she may have been seen as a triple deity.

Brigit is also associated with the teinntean (the domestic hearth) especially in Gaelic Scotland, which is why Brigit dolls are placed near the hearth on her feast day. The doll is usually dressed in white, with ribbons, lace and even jewellery added. A slat geal (white wand) is often placed in the leabe Bride (Brigit's bed) with her image, as a fertility charm. She is the patron of agricultural, pastoral, and domestic fertility and abundance. An offering of grain and milk products is left for her – bannocks, cheese, cream, butter, milk. The Bridie doll is kept throughout the year near the hearth, hung on a wall, or near the door, as a talisman of protection, then burnt in the next year's.

In one tradition, the older women of each household made a cradle called the bed of Bride. They made a figure of her from a sheaf of oats decorated with ribbons, shells and crystals. The woman would go to the door and call softly in Gaelic “Brighde’s bed is ready” or “Brighde, come in, thy welcome is truly made”. In so doing, they invoked the spirit of Brigit and she was truly present in the figure they had made.



They then placed Brigit in the bed with a straight stick beside her (the slachdan Brighde). Then they smoothed over the ashes of the hearth, protecting them from draughts. In the morning they would eagerly examine them. They were very pleased if they found the mark of Brigit’s wand, but were overjoyed if they found her actual footprint, as that proved she was truly with them that night and they would have good fortune throughout the coming year.



STORY OF BRIGIT AND THE CAILLEACH

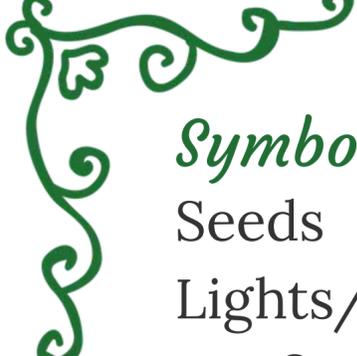
Traditional folktales tell how the Cailleach kept Brigit prisoner, making her life wretched with harsh labor. None of this was known to the beautiful Angus, who was the son of the Cailleach. He lived in the land of Everlasting Youth.



Angus saw Brigit in a vision and fell deeply in love with her at once. He set his heart on finding her and marrying her. His mother the Cailleach knew if Brigit were freed, Cailleach would no longer rule the world with her harsh winter storms and cold. She would lose her power of sovereignty.

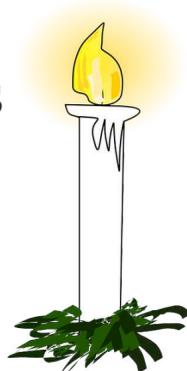
Although it was still winter, Angus borrowed three days from the summer months so that the sun appeared in a clear sky to melt the bitter snow. He searched hard and long, eventually arriving in the Grampian Mountains of northeastern Scotland where his mother the Cailleach lived. After a time, he heard a sweet, sad voice singing in the forest. Following her song, Angus found Brigit, the maiden of his vision. As he approached she looked at him and fell as deeply in love with him, as he was with her. According to the story, the day was February 1st. The date has been known as Bride's Day from that day forth. Released from the harsh cold service of the Cailleach, Brigit's warmth brought spring to the land. As she walked with Angus, snow drops, the flowers that herald the coming of spring, emerged from her footprints in the snow.

Her fire melts the deep snows and ice created by the touch of the Cailleach. Freed, the waters flow once more, nourishing the earth, filling rivers, streams, springs and wells. They soak deep into the earth giving new life to the soil and nourishing the seeds, buds and roots that lay hidden under the white mantle of the Cailleach. They spring to life under the gentle warmth of Brigit's sun. Water as a mist, becomes the veil of Bride, her cloak alight with the light of her flame, creating a rainbow mist.



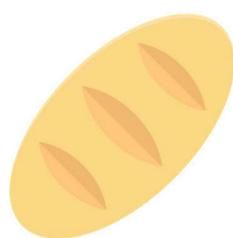
Symbols

Seeds
Lights/Candles
Bonfires
Brigit's Cross
Bridey Dolls
Brooms/Besoms



Colours

White
Gold
Silver
Green
Yellow
Pink



Foods

Milk and dairy products
Leeks
Potatoes
Bread and Cakes
All seasonal fruit and veg



Plants

Angelica
Bay
Chamomile
Primrose
Primulas
Violets
Wattle
All white flowers



Crystals

Amethyst
Calcite
Malachite
Moonstone
Turquoise Bloodstone



Goddesses

Athena
Brigit
Persephone
Hestia
Aradia
Triple Goddess in
Maiden form

Ritual Elements: White candles, burning the Yule greenery, broom, ritual cleansing bath, making a Brigit's Cross, feasting - particularly foods of milk and honey



Gardening

Goddesses

If you're lucky enough to be blessed with green thumbs and garden space, then here is list of vegies, herbs etc. to plant now in the mid north coast region of NSW. This list is not exhaustive, and there are many other fabulous plants you could add to it. Remember that much of the region is on the cusp of temperate and sub-tropical zones, so you may need to experiment - if you don't already know your garden well. Have fun and happy planting.



Primulas



While most of us here would associate Wattle with this time of year, people from Europe would see primulas or primroses as signs of early spring.

The passage below comes from a post which includes a recipe for *Primrose and Pansy Coconut Oatballs*. Follow the link below to see the full post.



Aside from their health-promoting benefits, I just love the sheer romance and old world magic associated with these flowers. The primula (commonly called the primrose) derived its name from the Latin *primus* (meaning first or first rose) because it is the first flower to bloom each spring. In the British Isles, they were reputed to be particularly loved by the faeries. A large patch of primroses was considered a gateway or portal into the faerie realms. Placing primroses on a doorstep was said to encourage the faeries to bless the house and all who lived there. And if you ate the blossoms of a primrose you would see a fairy! - [Gather Victoria](#)



- Asparagus
- Beetroot
- Broad Beans
- Cabbage
- Carrots
- Chamomile
- Garlic
- Lettuce
- Marigold

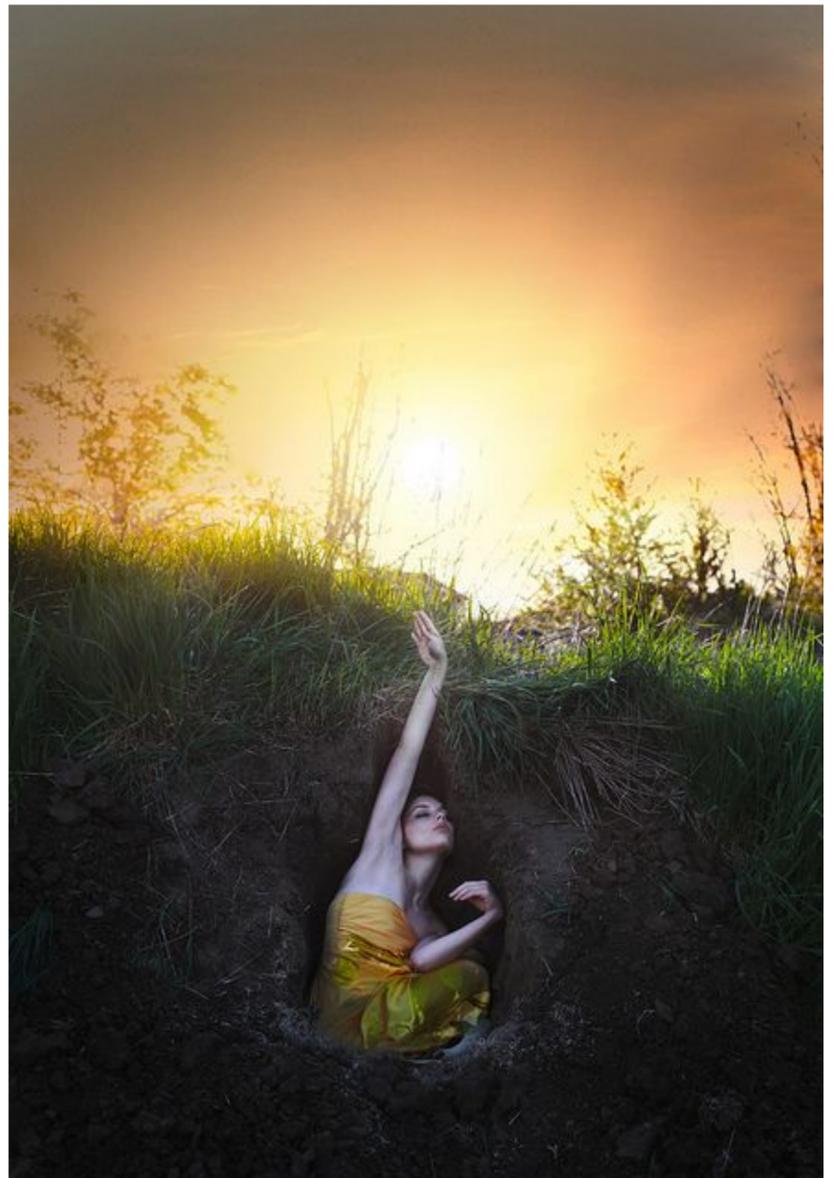
- Mustard
- Nasturtium
- Parsley
- Peas
- Potato tubers
- Radish
- Silverbeet
- Strawberry runners
- Tomatoes



Other Spring Deities

Dziiewanna (Eastern European) the Goddess of Spring and agriculture. She was especially honoured by local farmers.

Jarylo: Slavic God of the Spring. His name, which derives from an older Proto-Germanic word, translates to "Spring". He is the god of fertility, vegetation and all things that come with the Vernal Equinox. His sacred animal is the horse.



Artist unknown

Beiwenn (Finnish) A Sammi Goddess associated with the fertility of plants and reindeer. Together with her daughter Beiwe-Neia, they turned the hill green so the reindeer could eat.

Artio (Swiss), the bear Goddess who hibernates during the Winter. Her return heralds the beginning of Spring.

Sita (Hindu) Spring Goddess and Goddess of agriculture and the earth.

Hare Ka (West African) Goddess of the sweet waters fed by the Spring rains that brought fertility back to the land.

Green Man, A Forest Deity. Whether Green Man is his own entity or a manifestation of other forest gods like Cernunnos or Pan is up for debate.

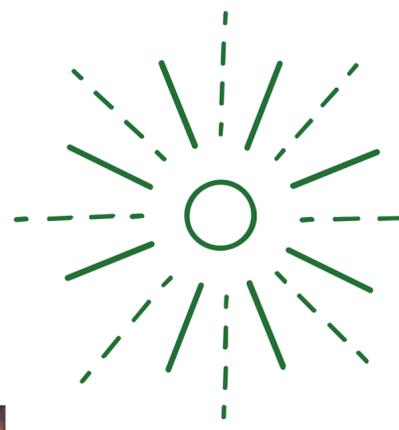
Kono-Hana-Sakuya-Hime (Japanese) She is associated with the Springtime and cherry blossom as her name means "Lady who makes the trees bloom." She is also Goddess of the sacred site Mount Fuji



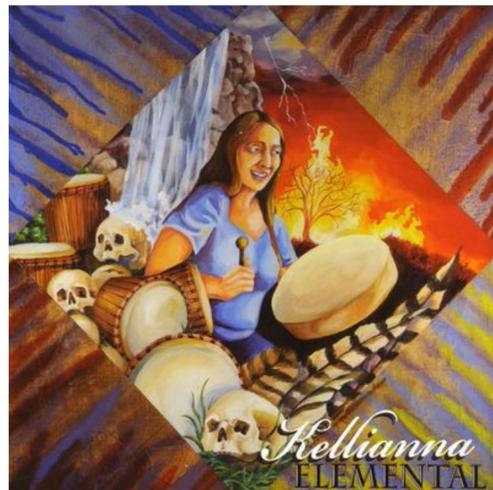
Music for the Season



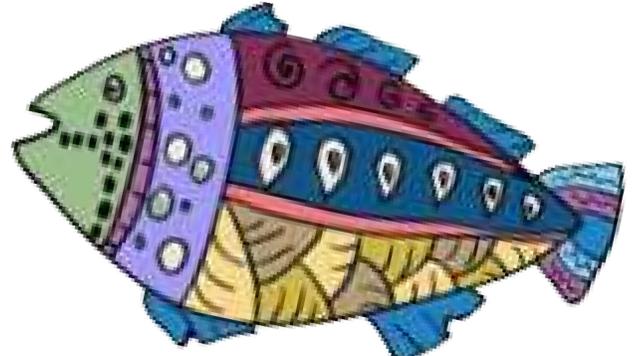
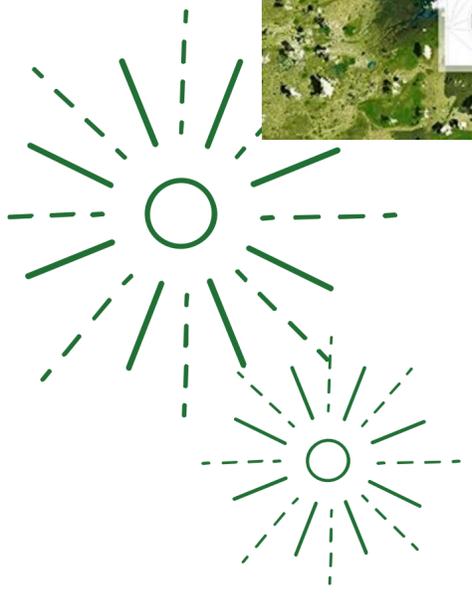
Mother I Feel You
By AleviDreamtime



Brigid's Flame
By Kellianna Music
From album *Elemental*



The Creation Codex
By Deya Dova
Single



Rosemary and Lavender Lemon Curd "Tassies"

This recipe comes from the magical [Gather Victoria](#) website and the very talented Danielle Prohom Olson.

"The word Tassie is believed to be derived from the old Scottish & French words for small cup."



Makes about 2 cups.

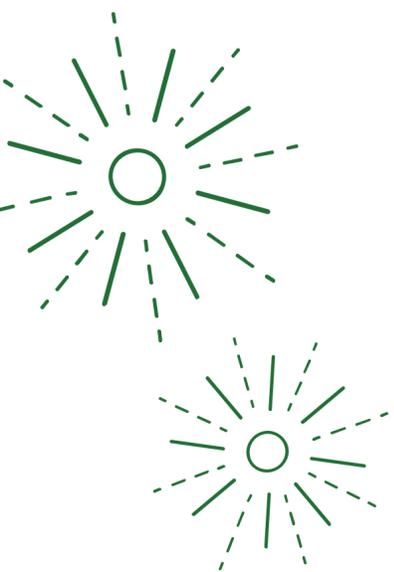
INGREDIENTS

- ½ cup fresh lemon juice
- Zest of 2 medium lemons
- 3 large eggs
- ¾ cup organic cane sugar
- Pinch of salt
- 4 4-inch stems of fresh rosemary
- Teaspoon of dried lavender buds
- 5 tablespoons butter



INSTRUCTIONS

- Put butter in small sauce on low heat. Once butter is melted, add your rosemary and lavender. Let infuse on lowest setting for an hour. Strain herbs from butter. Set butter aside.
- In a large bowl, whisk together the eggs, sugar, lemon juice, zest and salt until frothy and light.
- Pour the mixture into a medium saucepan and place over medium low heat. Stir constantly, until the curd thickens, about 5-7 minutes or so. When you can run your spoon through and it leaves a clear path without running back together in the pan, remove from heat.
- Press the cooked curd through a strainer to filter out any cooked zest pieces and/or tiny lumps.
- Then turn the heat all the way to low and stir in the butter. Cook and stir until the butter is melted and fully incorporated.
- When the curd is cooked, allow to cool on the counter to room temperature before refrigerating overnight, or at least 4 hours. This will allow the curd to fully thicken to its proper consistency.
- Once cool spoon into small pre-baked mini-tarts and adorn with blossoms of rosemary and lavender.



Last Word

May the life stirring
underground stir new
dreams to life within you.

May the flames of
inspiration and passion be
ignited in your soul.

'Til next time, stay warm
and well. Blessed be!



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