

Winter Solstice



Cover Art: Emily Balivet

On Gumbaynggirr Country

Winter Solstice

Winter Solstice can occur from June 20 - 23. It marks the longest night. The longest night was also called "Mother Night" as it was during this time that the Goddess worked her magic to nurture the seeds laying dormant in the dark womb of earth so that new life could emerge in spring. It is a time to celebrate the eternal cycle of life, death and rebirth.



This festival celebrates the journey from darkness to the return of the light. The solstice is the moment when the sun stands still, it is the pause between the in-breath and the out-breath. It is from this void that we begin our slow turning to face the outer world again, even if we are not quite ready to move toward it just yet. It is the time of the Great Mother birthing her son/sun/divine child. The season continues with the theme of hearth and home, it is a time to celebrate, with family and friends, the start of the lengthening of days; the hope that comes with the renewal of light; happiness; healing the world; and world peace. Feasting, music, gift giving are traditional at this time, all of which help to lift the gloom that can often settle with short days and cold weather. In the northern hemisphere Winter Solstice occurs just prior to Christmas. As well as those traditions just mentioned, others associated with this season are the Yule log; hanging mistletoe in the house and the kisses stolen beneath it, bringing holly and evergreens into the house; and the ancient tradition of Wassailing...more about that later.

Celebrating WINTER SOLSTICE

Host a winter solstice party.
Use the mulled wine recipe
from our previous newsletter,
and prepare the Chestnut
Roast found in this issue.


Use Frankincense; scientific evidence suggests that the aroma of frankincense can help regulate anxiety and depression. Please be careful using the oil as many people react to skin contact with undiluted oil. Alternatively, burn some resin. Frankincense is also known as 'dhoop'. It is often used as a purifier in magical rituals and ceremonies. It is the perfect incense to use during meditation, energy work, or chakra exercises such as opening the third eye. In some belief systems, frankincense is associated with good fortune in business—carry a few bits of resin in your pocket when you go to a business meeting or interview.

In Australia people may use native plants like Mallee roots, Tasmanian oak, and eucalyptus to make a family Yule log - choose a log about 45cm in length; collect some pine cones, dried berries, such as cranberries, cuttings of mistletoe, holly, pine needles, and ivy, feathers and cinnamon sticks, and some festive ribbon - use paper or cloth ribbon, not the synthetic or wire-lined type.


Start by loosely wrapping the ribbon around the log, loose enough so that you can insert cuttings and feathers. With a hot glue gun, stick the collected natural items on your log. Once finished, you can display it or you can burn it as our ancestors did so many centuries ago. A simple but meaningful tradition is to, before you burn your log, have each person in the family write down a wish on a piece of paper, and then insert it into the ribbons.



Celebrating **WINTER SOLSTICE**




The ancient Romans celebrated Saturnalia around the winter solstice. It was a time of role reversal – slaves could dress as their masters and be as impertinent as they liked. In wealthy households a slave would be chosen as lord of the festival. Similar to the custom of the Lord of Misrule in Britain, who appears around the Yule season, this person was responsible for organizing merrymaking and mischief during the celebrations. He was seen as the ruler of chaos, in direct contrast to the normal orderly manner of Roman life. Why not hold your own Saturnalia. We may not have slaves, but we can still have fun mixing it up in our households, play dress up and muck up.



Traditionally, Yule is also a time of gift giving. At a time when our ancestors would be starting to wish for longer days, the return of the sun marked at winter solstice would have been seen as a gift of nature worth celebrating. Choose whether your gift is for a loved one, or a gift offered to Mother Earth, or a donation of money or goods to charity.

On the night of the winter solstice, gather around a fire with blankets, mittens, and mugs full of warm drinks and burn a yule log. As you watch the flames consume it, discuss how thankful you are for the good things that have come your way this year. It's a perfect time to talk about your hopes for abundance, good health, and happiness in the next twelve months.



Wassailing is a very ancient custom that is rarely done today. The word 'wassail' comes from the Anglo-Saxon phrase 'waes hael', which means 'good health'. Originally, the wassail was a drink made of mulled ale, curdled cream, roasted apples, eggs, cloves, ginger, nutmeg and sugar. It would be served from huge bowls often made of silver or pewter.



One legend about how the Wassailing was created, says that a beautiful Saxon maiden named Rowena presented Prince Vortigen, with a bowl of wine while toasting him with the words 'waes hael'. Over the centuries, a great deal of ceremony developed around the custom of drinking wassail.

Wassailing the Apple Tree

The goal of this pagan tradition is to ensure a good harvest in the year to come by enticing good spirits to come to the orchard with music, song and dance, and to frighten away bad spirits that might wreak havoc and ruin this year's crop!

Find the biggest and best tree and pour cider on its roots. Pieces of toast soaked in apple cider can be gently hung on the spurs of the dormant apple trees, as a way of attracting the friendly spirits. And to scare away the baddies, wassailers are encouraged to make lots of noise with whatever noisemakers are to hand, be that drums or saucepan lids, or horns and whistles, or just loud and lively music, because ancient lore suggests that bad energies prefer a peaceful, quiet environment!

Take your cue from Freya, spin some wool, and as the wool twists speak your wishes for the next year into the twists. When you have sufficient yarn, create something with it that you can put on your altar or keep under your pillow, or hang in the window.

folklore



Mistletoe: Because mistletoe could blossom even during the frozen winter, the Druids came to view it as a sacred symbol of vivacity, and they administered it to humans and animals alike in the hope of restoring fertility. Mistletoe was long regarded as both a sexual symbol and the "soul" of the oak. In Scandinavia, mistletoe was considered a plant of peace, under which enemies could declare a truce or warring spouses kiss and make-up. Later, the eighteenth-century English bestowed a certain magical appeal to it, calling it a kissing ball. Every time a kiss was bestowed a berry was plucked from the plant. The kissing would cease when all the berries were picked.



Holly was regarded as a sacred plant by the Druids and a symbol of fertility and eternal life. Hanging the plant in homes was believed to bring abundance and protection. But be careful not to cut down the tree lest you bring bad luck upon yourself. Romans associated holly with Saturn, the god of agriculture and harvest, and decked the halls with its boughs during the festival of Saturnalia which was held around the winter solstice.



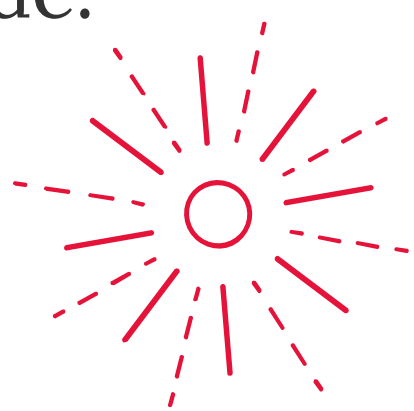
folklore



The tradition of the Yule log began in Norway, where a giant log was hoisted onto the hearth to celebrate the return of the sun each year. The Yule log was never bought but acquired some other way - it may have been a gift, or taken from a nearby forest. It was lit using a taper from the previous year's Yule log. Depending on the region, it was burned for a period of between 12 hours or 12 days, and was not allowed to go out until deliberately extinguished at the appointed time. Ashes from the Yule log were often used as protection around the property. In Cornwall, England, the log is called the Christmas Mock, and it is stripped of its bark before being brought inside for the fire. Some towns in Holland still follow the old custom of storing the Yule log beneath the bed.



Krampus has close ties to the kindly Saint Nicholas who morphed into Santa. Some believe that Krampus figure is the demonised pagan horned god. Krampus festivals are held all over the world on the evening of December 6, also known as Krampusnacht, in the season of Yule in the northern hemisphere. Legend has it that this is the night Krampus goes after bad children. Accordingly, young men dress in fur suits and horned masks and flock to the streets, snarling and shaking their chains at anyone who stops to watch the scary parade.





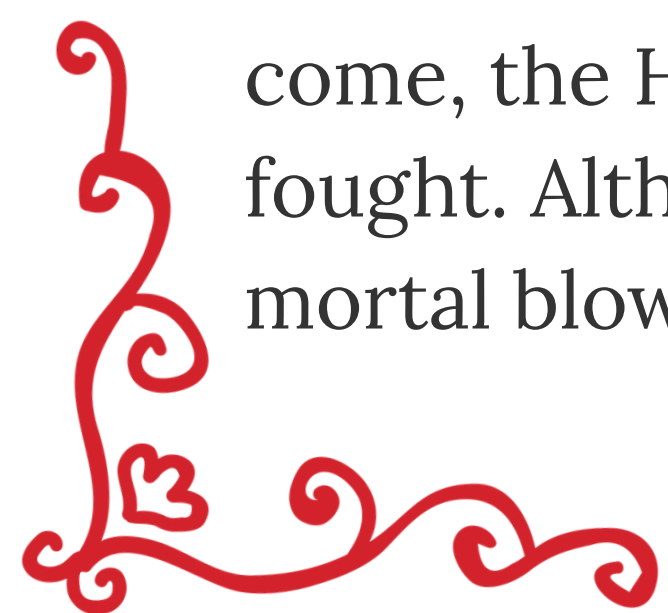
The Oak King and the Holly King

Long ago the land of our ancestors was ruled by two Kings, who were brothers. The younger brother wore oak leaves as a crown, and was known as the Oak King. The older brother wore holly leaves as a crown, and was known as the Holly King.

The brothers each felt they knew the best way to rule the land, and they quarrelled over it all the time. The Oak King wanted the land to be bright and hot and sunny for the entire year. The Holly King wanted the land to be dark and cold sleeping for the entire year.

Both Kings loved The Lady and She loved them both. She hated to watch them fight and bicker. Knowing the wisdom of balance, She told them to share the land between them—one half of the year for the Oak King and one half of the year for the Holly King.

The brothers couldn't be persuaded to stop their fighting. One hot day, when the sun was high in the sky and it seemed that night would never come, the Holly King drew his sword against his brother and they fought. Although the Oak King fought bravely, the Holly King struck a mortal blow, and the Oak King fell.





"My brother!" cried the Holly King holding the bleeding body of the Oak King in his arms. The Lady bundled up the body of the Oak King and told the Holly King he must rule the land, and She took the Oak King away.

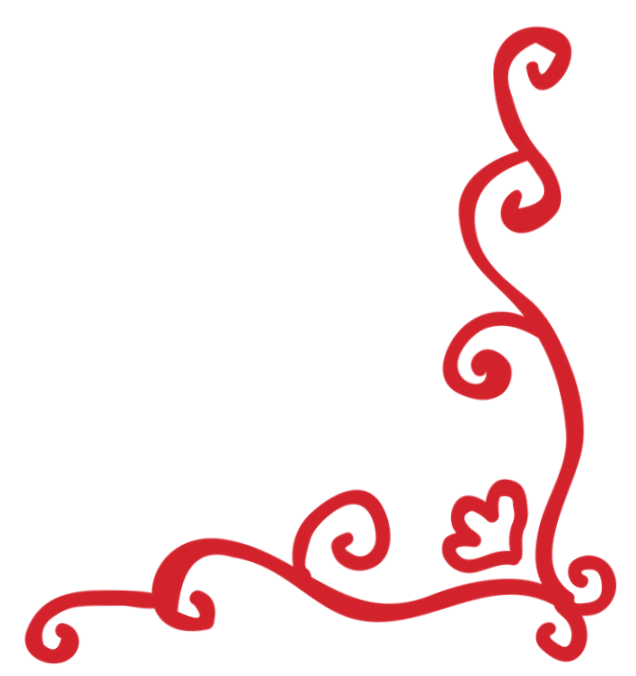
Each day, the hours the sun shone grew shorter. Each night, the moon rode in the sky for a bit longer days grew shorter. The days grew shorter and cooler. Snow started flying. The Holly King could think of nothing but his brother.

Finally, the land was bare and all the plants slept. Many animals slept through the cold times, and those that didn't sleep had a hard time finding food and shelter. One night when it seemed like the sun would never rise again, The Lady came to the Holly King and said, "Don't despair for your brother isn't dead. Here he is to take his turn at ruling." And there stood Oak King young again, and healthy, and the Holly King happily stepped aside for his brother to take his place as King of the land.

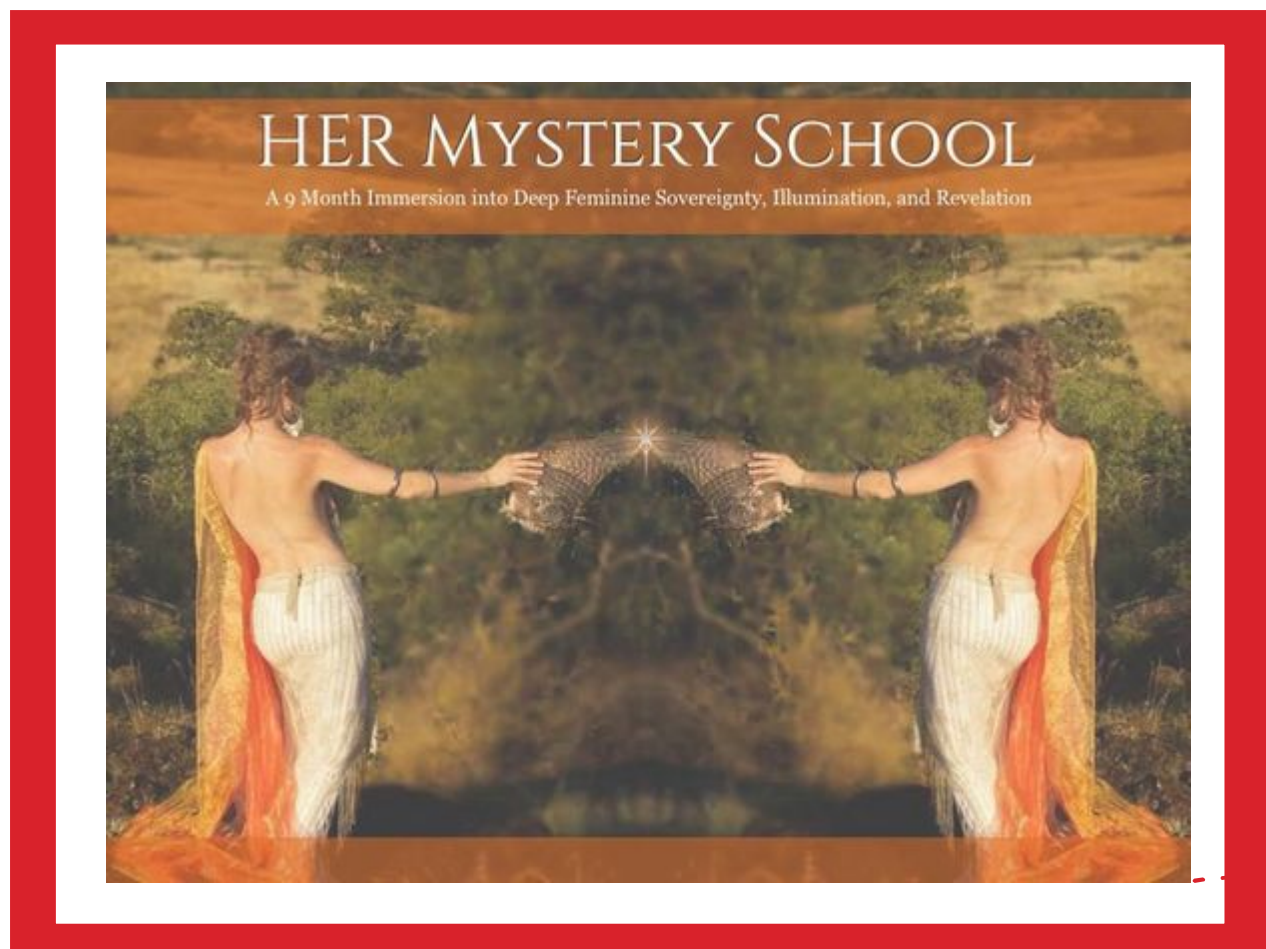
The days grew longer and warmer, the moon rode in the sky for less and less time. The land grew green again, and the plants and animals awoke.

Each year the cycle continued, one brother ruling the green time, and one the dark time. And this is the story our ancestors told to explain how our seasons were created.

A more dramatic adaptation...



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For all genuine inquiries regarding the local study group phone 0457 457 867

Introduction To Winter Goddesses



Many of the elements associated with Christmas (winter solstice season in northern hemisphere) have their origins in our Goddess worshipping past: evergreen trees, holly, mistletoe, the wreath, lighting candles, and yes even our favorite Santa Claus and his reindeer who both have their origins in Northern European Sun Goddesses.

Saule, the Lithuanian and Latvian goddess of light and the sun, took to the skies on the Winter Solstice in a sleigh pulled by horned reindeer. She journeyed with the aide of her smith, who forged a golden cup in which to catch her tears which then transformed into amber. During her flight through the heavens she threw these pebbles of amber, like little bits of sun, and apples down to the world of humans below. She was a spinning Goddess who used her skill to spin the rays of sunlight onto the world.



During the Winter Solstice the Egyptian goddess Isis delivered Horus whose symbol was the winged Sun. Ameratsu, the Japanese Goddess of the Sun was born during the solstice. Rhea gave birth to Saturn (the Father of Time), Hera conceived Hephaestus, and Qetzalcoatl, Lucina ("Little Light") also celebrate birthdays at this time. Lucia, saint or Goddess of Light, is honored from Italy to Sweden, crowned with candles to carry us through the darkness. Sarasvati, Queen of Heaven in India, is honored during Yuletide.



The goddess Holda or Bertha, the original Mother Goose (causing it to snow when she shook out her bedding) would sit at her spinning wheel weaving the fates, she was also a goddess of divination and credited with the creation of runes.

Introduction To Winter Goddesses



In ancient Europe, this night of darkness grew from the myths of the Norse goddess Frigga (also known as Freya) who sat at her spinning wheel weaving the fates, and the celebration was called Yule, from the Norse word Jul, meaning wheel. The Christmas wreath, a symbol adapted from Frigga's "Wheel of Fate", reminds us of the cycle of the seasons and the continuity of life.

Horned Goddesses are found in the Celtic world also. Elen of the Ways, in Her most ancient form was the Guardian of the Leys, the ancient track ways. In Her guise as the Horned Goddess, She led the way on the migratory tracks of the reindeer.

Beiwe is a Sun Goddess of the Sàmi, the indigenous people of the Nordic countries. The Sàmi are reindeer herders who rely on the reindeer for their survival. In Sàmi myth, Beiwe nourishes them and their herds and helps her people maintain mental health during the difficult months of darkness. In their stories of her, she flies through the heavens on the Winter Solstice with her daughter, Beavi-nieida (sun maiden) in a ring of reindeer antlers flinging fertility and life back onto the land. Beiwe, like Saule is associated with spinning. Spinning wheels and flax are left as offerings on her altars.

Gardening Goddesses

It's been cold. Hopefully frost hasn't been a problem for your gardens

If you're lucky enough to be blessed with green thumbs and garden space then here is a list of vegies, herbs etc. to plant now in the mid north coast of NSW area. 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 between temperate zone and sub-tropical zone, so you may need to experiment if you don't already know where the warm and cool parts of your garden are situated. Have fun and good luck with your gardening.



Mother's Night

The Christian scholar Bede wrote that in earlier times the Germanic ritual year began on the 25th of December and that this night was called *Modranecht *(Mother's Night).



This was a pagan festival that was absorbed into the celebration associated with Christmas. The same is true for Giuli (Yule), the English name for the season that ran from December to January. As a mid-winter festival, Mothers' Night may have acknowledged the Earth Mother in order to ensure abundance in the upcoming spring season. Traditional Yule festivities included the gathering and hanging of evergreen boughs and the burning of a Yule log...in this annual ritual cycle, Christmas (or Mothers' Night) was associated with a group of divine female figures. The plural reference to the divine "mothers" may be similar to the *Matronae *(Mother Goddesses) who were depicted during Roman times and venerated in the later Celtic and Germanic worlds. Stone sculptures of these figures portray them in single, double and triple form. They are often shown holding babies or baskets of fruit, and were probably associated with fertility, abundance and childbirth.

~ Sharon Paice MacLeod, *The Divine Feminine in Ancient Europe *

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

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

Doe, A Deer, A Female Reindeer: The Spirit of Winter Solstice

Written by Danielle Prohom Olson & originally published on [Gather Victoria](#)

*Oh wondrous headed doe... Amongst its horns it carries
the light of the blessed sun..." ~ Hungarian Christmas
Folk Song*

Long before Santa charioted his flying steeds across our mythical skies, it was the female reindeer who drew the sleigh of the sun goddess at winter solstice. It was when we “Christianized” the pagan traditions of winter, that the white bearded man i.e. “Father Christmas” was born.



Today it is her beloved image that adorns Christmas cards and Yule decorations – not Rudolph. Because unlike the male reindeer who sheds his antlers in winter, it is the doe who retains her antlers. And it is she who leads the herds in winter. So this season, when we gather by the fire to tell children bedtime stories of Santa and his flying reindeer – why not tell the story of the ancient Deer Mother of old? It was she who once flew through winter’s longest darkest night with the life-giving light of the sun in her horns.

Ever since the early Neolithic, when the earth was much colder and reindeer more widespread, the female reindeer was venerated by northern people. She was the “life-giving mother”, the leader of the herds upon which they depended for survival, and they followed the reindeer migrations for milk, food, clothing and shelter. And from the British Isles, Scandinavia, Russia, Siberia, across the land bridge of the Bering Strait, she was a revered spiritual figure associated with fertility, motherhood, regeneration and the rebirth of the sun (the theme of winter solstice).





Top right to left: Siberian Deer Tattoo 2nd century BCE., Shamanic Headdress found in Düsseldorf Burial, Scythian Deer figurine, Mesolithic Burial of two women in France, Scythian Rod, Iron Age

The reindeer was often shown leaping or flying through the air with neck outstretched and legs flung out fore and aft. Her antlers were frequently depicted as the tree of life, carrying birds, the sun, moon and stars. And across the northern world, it was the Deer Mother who took flight from the dark of the old year to bring light and life to the new.

For the Sami, the indigenous people of the Nordic countries, Beavi is the name for the Sun Goddess associated with motherhood, the fertility of plants and the reindeer. At Winter Solstice, warm butter (a symbol of the sun) was smeared on doorposts as a sacrifice to Beavi so that she could gain strength and fly higher and higher into the sky. Beavi was often shown accompanied by her daughter in an enclosure of reindeer antlers and together they returned green and fertility to the land.

And from the British Isles, Scandinavia, Russia, Siberia, across the land bridge of the Bering Strait, she was a revered spiritual figure associated with fertility, motherhood, regeneration and the rebirth of the sun (the theme of winter solstice).

Her antlers adorned shrines and altars, were buried in ceremonial graves and were worn as shamanic headdresses. Her image was etched in standing stones, woven into ceremonial cloth and clothing, cast in jewellery, painted on drums, and tattooed onto skin.





Many winter goddesses in northern legends were associated with the solstice. They took to the skies led by a bevy of flying animals. One tells of the return of Saule, the Lithuanian and Latvian goddess of the sun. She flew across the heavens in a sleigh pulled by horned reindeer and threw pebbles of amber (symbolizing the sun) into chimneys.

Mary B. Kelly's book Goddess Embroideries Of Eastern Europe explores images of the horned deer mother in the sacred textiles of women. The image of the mother goddess Rohanitsa is often shown with antlers and gives birth to deer as well as children. For her feast day in late December (most likely solstice) white iced cookies shaped like deer were given as presents or good luck tokens, and red and white embroidery depicting her image were displayed.



Ceremonial Embroidery of Rohanitsa, Image Source from Mary B. Kelly



Russian Kozuli are similar cookies baked during winter celebrations, Christmas and New Year. Often called Roe these cookies were originally small three-dimensional figures, most often shaped in the form of reindeer (and birds, fish, bears, flowers, stars and trees – images associated the ancient goddesses of the land). These magical talismans brought wealth, prosperity, good fortune to the family and were also gifted to relatives, friends, neighbours, even the animals and pets! They were displayed in the home as charms to protect from evil spirits and were used for Christmas divination by girls and young men on Epiphany evenings.



Kozuli Varieties, Russian Craft Guide, CC BY-SA 3.0 Note the horned goddess symbols!

Today Kozuli are often defined as meaning “she-goat” in Russian, but in the northern White Sea region where they originate, the word kozulya means “snake” or “curl”. This is believed to refer to the spiral of life and the curling antlers of the reindeer whose twisted horns had different meanings; friendship, love, health and longevity. Sometimes the horns carry apples, birds, or depictions of the winged sun. They were traditionally coloured white and pink, obtained with the juice of lingonberries or cranberries.



Image sources: <https://ru.russianarts.online/3282-kozuli/> <https://irina-sinukova.wixsite.com/kozuli/blank-dl49n> <https://www.livemaster.ru/kozuli/profile>



This year I finally made my own version of these traditional cookies, a simple shortbread made with dried cranberry powder. (recipe is up on Gather Victoria Patreon). They aren't nearly so fancy, who has the time – or the skill? But they were made in the spirit intended and it did take a little work making the cranberry powder! They came out gloriously red and the icing sugar, of course, is the white.

These colours are thought to descend from Siberian legends, in which the reindeer took flight each winter after ingesting the hallucinogenic Amanita Muscaria mushroom, the archetypal red toadstool with white spots. Shamans would join them on a vision quest, by taking the mushrooms themselves. Climbing the tree of life in her horns, they would take flight like a bird into the upper realms. Other folktales tell how shamans, dressed in red suits with white spots, would collect the mushrooms and then deliver them through chimneys as gifts on the winter solstice. Talk about a wild night.



While many historical explorations of the pagan origins of Christmas observe the link between Santa's garb and the red and white amanita mushroom ingesting shaman, few mention that it was the female shamans who originally wore red and white costumes trimmed with fur, horned headdresses or felt red hats! The ceremonial clothing worn by medicine women healers of Siberia and Lapland, was green and white with a red peaked hat, curled toed boots, reindeer mittens, fur lining and trim. Sound familiar?



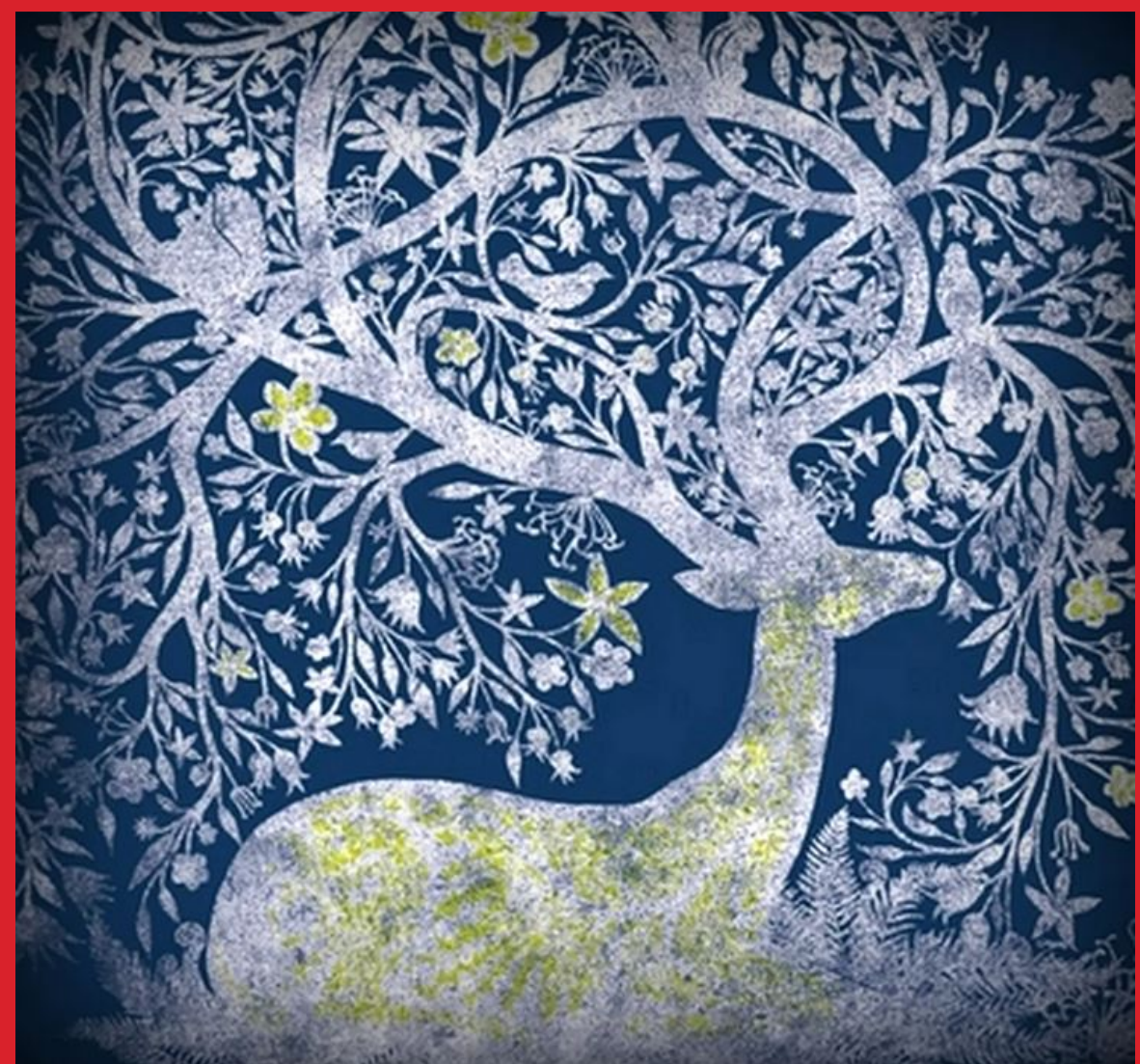


Horned Kichko, ancient Russian shaman females sacred hat.

So this solstice, take a moment to remember the forgotten winter goddesses of old and their magical reindeer. Look out from your warm cosy home into the cold of the darkening eve. And on the sacred night when the sun is reborn, look for the Deer Mother flying across starry skies, carrying the tree of life in her horns.

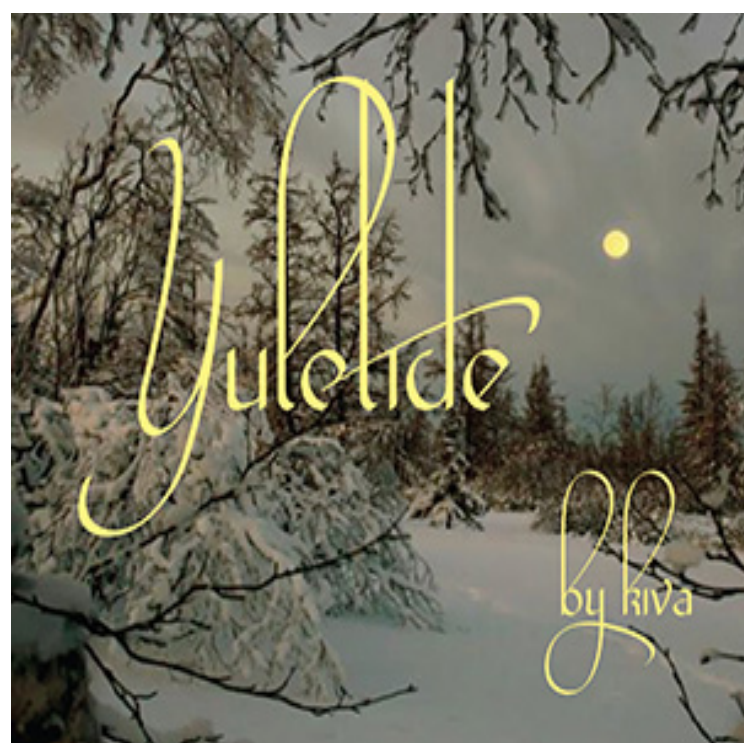
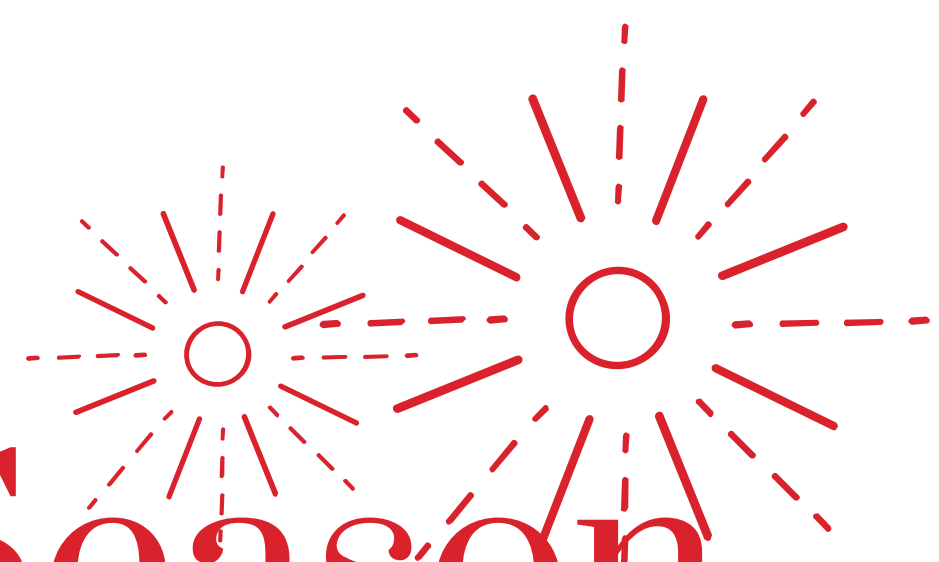
Considering that most of the shamans in this region were originally women, it is likely that their traditional wear is the true source for Santa's costume. And it is also very likely that they were the first to take shamanic flight with the reindeer on winter's darkest night.

And while these women are largely forgotten today, the Deer Mother still lives in our Christmas cards, seasonal decorations and tales of Santa's flying reindeer. And while we may not recognize her, I believe some deep, old part of ourselves still remembers the original "Mother Christmas" who brought light and new life to the world.





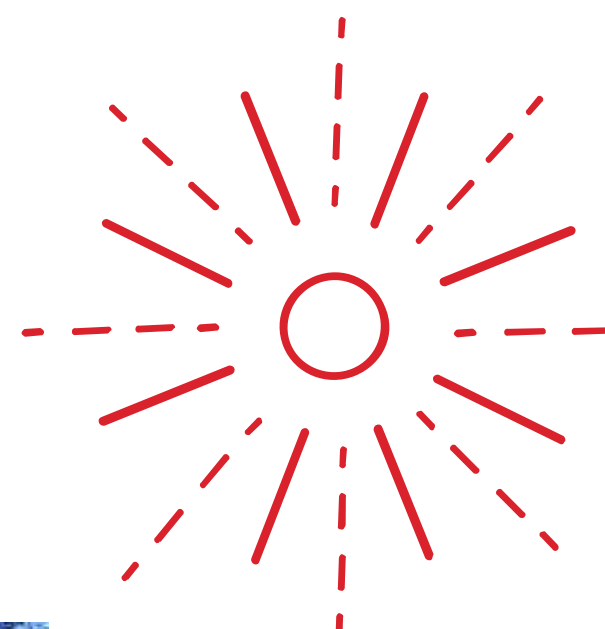
Music for the Season



Winter Solstice Sunrise

By KIVA

From album *Yuletide*

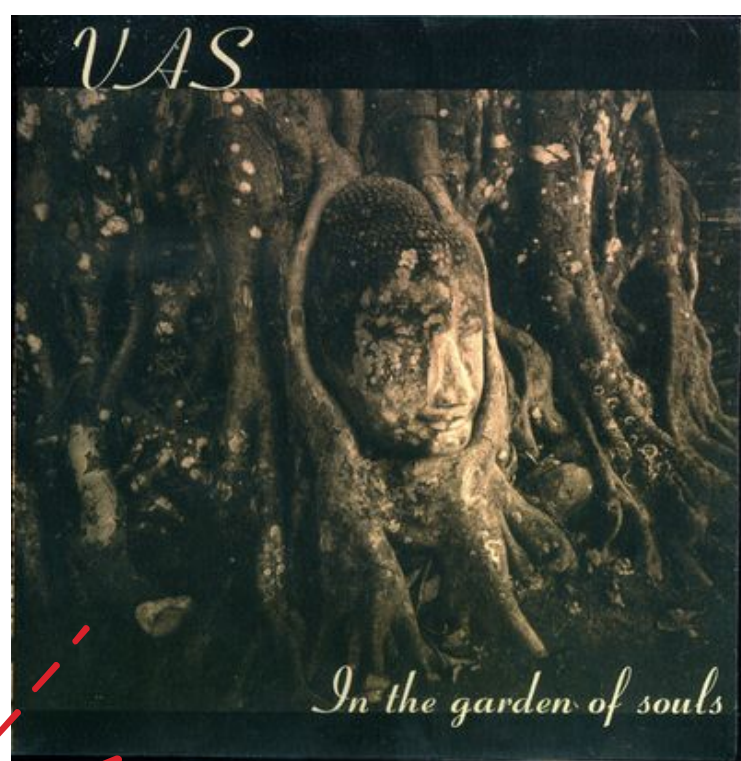


Soul Cake

By Sting

From album

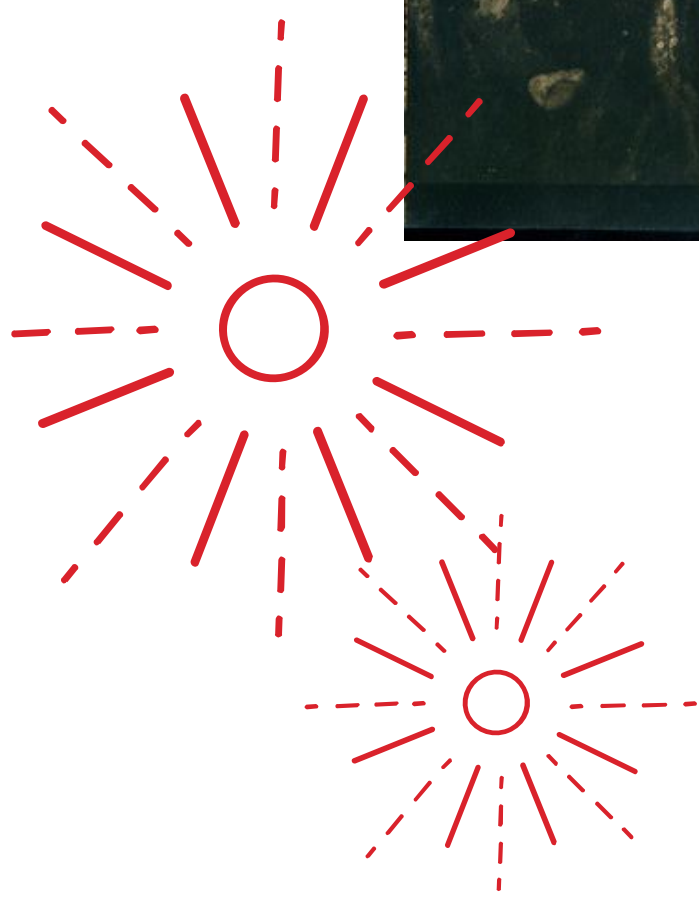
If On A Winter's Night



Ceremony of Passage

By Vas

From album *In the Garden of Souls*



Chestnut Roast

This is the ultimate nut roast. The mix may be altered and extended ad infinitum. You can fill mushrooms with it, wrap it in pastry, or fry it as burgers. It freezes well so it can be cooked well in advance. This recipe is fiddly and time consuming but I promise the end result is worth every bit of effort.

Ingredients:

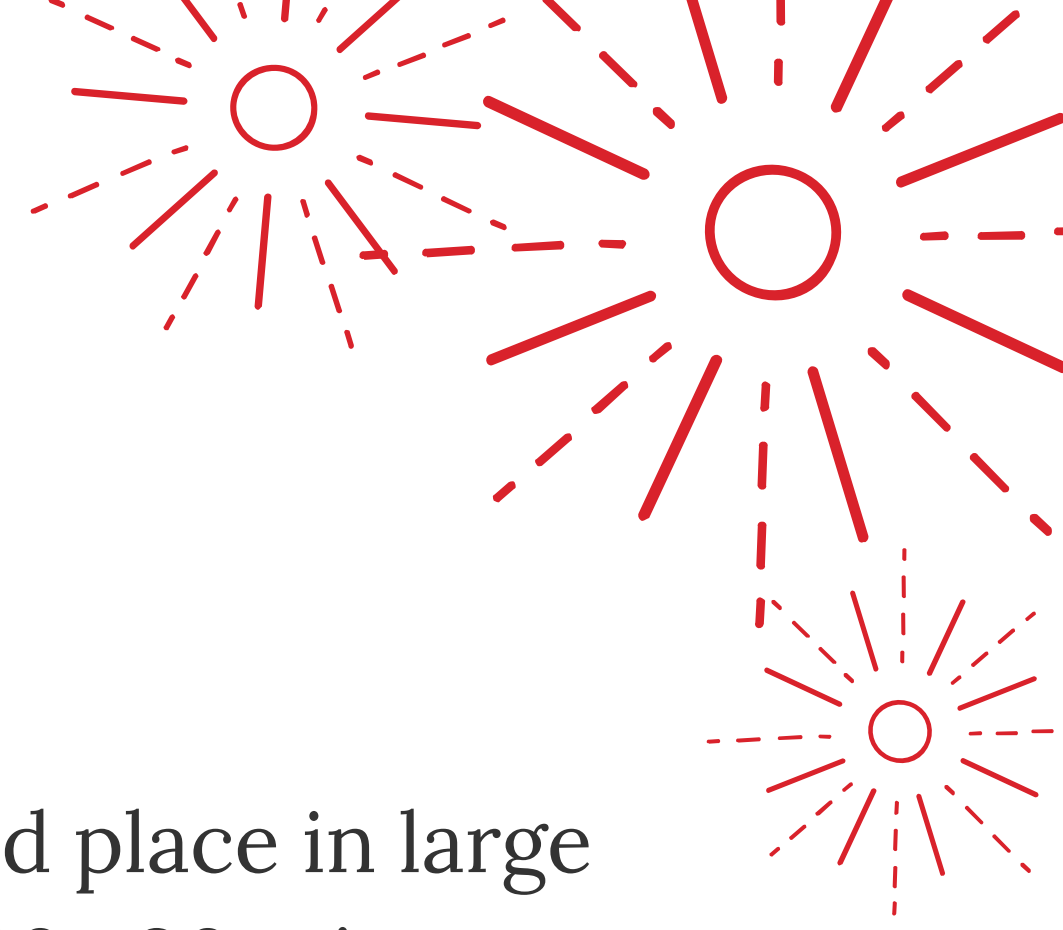
688g fresh chestnuts (or 250g dried chestnuts)
250g walnuts (or your choice of nut) roasted
2 tbs vegetable oil
175g onion, finely chopped
250g mushrooms, finely chopped
2 tbs parsley, finely chopped
3 tsp herbes provencales
150 ml red wine
Freshly ground black pepper
Fine sea salt
100g organic breadcrumbs or rice crumbs
1 tbs tamari or soy sauce
Parsley and orange slices for garnish

Method:

1. If using dried chestnuts, soak in water overnight, place in a heavy pan and cover with salted water. Bring to the boil and simmer for about 1 1/2 hours or until the chestnuts are tender. This will vary according to the length of time soaked and the age of the chestnuts. When they are ready, drain and cool. Retain the chestnut water.



Chestnut Roast



Method:

2. If using fresh chestnuts, cut a slit in the shell and place in large saucepan of water. Bring to the boil and cook for 20–30 minutes. Remove the shell from the chestnuts. Alternatively, vacuum packed cooked chestnuts can be sourced from Cheznuts.
3. Keep a handful of chestnuts aside and finely grate the rest.
4. Roast the walnuts in a hot oven or under the grill, being careful not to burn them. Grate these too.
5. Heat the oil in a deep pan and add the onions. Cook until softening, then throw in the mushrooms with herbs, wine and seasoning.
6. Fold in the chestnuts and walnuts and continue to cook for a further 2 minutes.
7. Fold in some of the breadcrumbs. The texture of the mixture now needs adjusting. If it's too wet, add more breadcrumbs. If too dry, add chestnut water or more wine. Stir continuously to avoid burning.
8. When you are happy with the texture, mix in the remaining chestnuts, remove from the heat and adjust the seasoning with tamari, salt and pepper. Set the oven at 180C / 350F
9. Oil a 900g loaf tin and spoon the mixture into it. Place the tin in the oven and cook for about 40 minutes or until it has set. Serve hot (can be used cold as sandwich filling too).

To serve: Gently ease the sides of the roast from the sides of the tin with a spatula. Choose a favourite serving plate and place on top of the tin. Invert it and 'hey presto!' there's Yule lunch. Decorate with parsley and a few slices of orange with peel removed.

Serve with Black Cherry and Red Wine Sauce.

(If frozen, allow to thaw and then heat for 40 minutes at 180C / 350F)

Black Cherry and Red Wine Sauce



This rather decadent sauce is the perfect accompaniment to a rich roast. It is essentially sweet and sour and so cuts across the tastebuds like a razor. This sauce can be made well in advance and frozen, or it can be made the day before and left for the flavours to develop.

Ingredients:

1 tbs extra virgin olive oil
1 large shallot, finely chopped
275ml red wine of your choice
2 tsp cornflour
2 tbs madeira (optional)
350g tin pitted black cherries (or fresh if available)
Fine sea salt
Freshly ground black pepper
Lemon juice and soy sauce or tamari (optional)
Brown sugar (optional)
Chopped parsley and coriander for garnish



Method:

Heat the oil in a saucepan. Add the shallot and cook till softening (about 10 minutes).

Pour in the red wine and bring to the boil. Cook until reduced to 150ml. Mix the cornflour to a paste with the madeira (if not using madeira, just water). Pour into the wine and stir until it has thickened slightly.

Add the cherries and bring to the boil.

Adjust the seasoning. If too sweet add a little lemon juice and tamari or soy sauce; if too sour, add a little sugar.

To serve: When the sauce is hot, transfer it to a sauce boat and sprinkle with chopped parsley and coriander.



Last Word

May you find peace in the promise of the solstice night, that each day forward is blessed with more light, that the cycle of nature unbroken and true, brings faith to your soul and well-being to you. Rejoice in the darkness, in the silence find rest, and may the days that follow be abundantly blessed.

'Til next time, take care and be well!



www.goddesstemplebellingen.org

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