

THE WONDER CLUB™



August: Lughnasadh & Lammas





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Hello, beautiful.

We begin the month of August with the celebration of Lughnasadh (pronounced *loo-nuh-suh*), also celebrated by Anglo Saxons in the past and many modern pagans today as Lammas. This Celtic solar festival celebrates first harvest, crafts and skills of all kinds, fair arbitration, and the blessings of this time of abundance and plenty. We step into August with this beautiful festival from antiquity and its inspiration for our own lives today.

Lughnasadh

Lughnasadh, a celebration of the first harvest of the year, usually falls between July 31st and August 2nd in the northern hemisphere but it can vary a bit. Some celebrate it on the fixed date of August 1st and others observe the holiday on the astrological midpoint between the Summer Solstice and the Autumn Equinox.

In Celtic tradition, Lughnasadh marks the midpoint of the light (*sam*) half of year, lying opposite of Imbolc on the Wheel of the Year. It was considered in the Celtic seasonal cycle as the first of the autumn months, which included August, September, and October, and concluding at Samhain at the Celtic New Year. This is a different start date for autumn than most of us are accustomed to in the modern Western world; for us autumn typically begins either September 1st or at the Autumn Equinox (Mabon) on or around September 21st.

Whereas the dark (*gam*) half of the year we enter on Samhain is presided over by feminine, lunar energies, the light half of the year that began at Beltaine on May 1st is dominated by masculine, solar energies. Thus, celebrations and observances for Imbolc (February 1st or 2nd) often focus more on the divine feminine, especially Bridgit, and those for Lughnasadh focus more on the masculine. Ah, but the earth goddess still plays an important role at Lughnasadh all the same. For without her blessings, the harvest would be poor, leaving families to hunger through the long, cold winter ahead.

Celebrating the First Harvest of the Celtic Year



In Celtic Ireland, the third high holiday of the year (after Imbolc and Beltaine) was the first harvest festival, Lughnasadh (spelled in modern Ireland as Lunasa)¹, which means “the assembly of Lugh” or “the commemoration of Lugh.” The festival was named in honor of Lugh, one of the primary deities of the Tuatha Dé Danann and husband (or consort depending on the source) to Rhiannon, a Celtic earth goddess. Lugh was attributed with gifting the people with the knowledge and skills of agriculture and animal husbandry, among other crafts, skills, and knowledge.

¹ “In modern Irish the month of August is known as Lunasa....” Danu Forest in *The Magical Year*.

One of the things that struck me the most in reviewing a variety of sources about Lughnasadh was the wide diversity of traditions, names, beliefs, and lore associated with the holiday. It's not surprising though given that celebrations of the first harvest of the year crosscut cultures, geography, and spiritual beliefs in ancient agricultural societies the world over, each imbued with their own local histories, landscapes, and lore.

It appears that the first harvest was celebrated throughout the ancient Celtic realm, although under different names and with different regional expressions. In Irish Gaelic, the festival was called Lughnasadh. It was Lùnasdal in Scottish Gaelic, Luanyis in Manx, Gwl Awst (the August Feast) in Welsh, Goel Est in Cornish, and Gouel an Eost in Breton.² An earlier Gaelic name for the holiday was *Bron Trogain*, which Danu Forest notes in *The Magical Year* as meaning:

... 'the sorrows (or sacrifice) of the earth' – a term connected with the labour pains of childbirth, and suggesting that the life-giving abundance of nature was honored at this time, together with the precious agricultural skills that transform this abundance into crops and livestock.

In some parts of Ireland such as Croagh Patrick, the first-harvest celebration was known as Domhnach Chrom Dubh (Crom Dubh's Sunday). Crom Dubh (or Crom Dugh), "the Crooked Dark One," is a pre-Christian (and likely pre-Celtic) god associated with agriculture and the harvest. Like Lugh, Crom Dugh was said to have gifted wheat (or barley) to the people of Ireland and imparted the knowledge for its growing.

In a fascinating blog post, "Is it Lughnasadh or Crom Dubh's Sunday?"³ author Felicity Hayes-McCoy notes the different ways Crom Dubh is portrayed in the old tales and sagas:

Depending on which team you batted for in pre-Christian Ireland, he was either Lord of The Harvest or The Bringer of Famine. And a thousand years later, depending on whether you

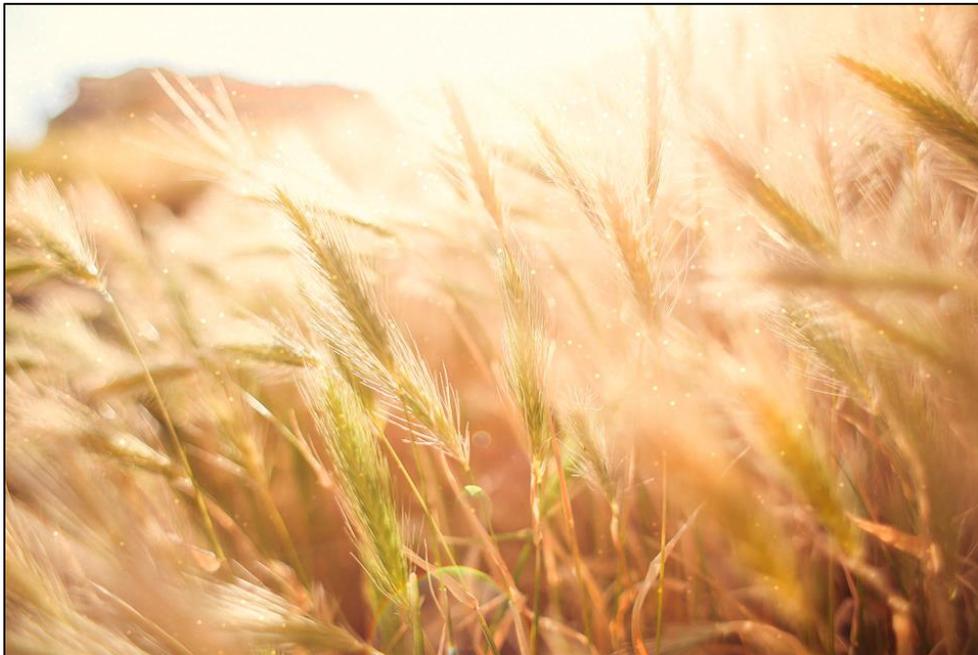
² *Kindling the Celtic Spirit* by Mara Freeman, pp 233.

³ <http://felicityhayes-mccoy.blogspot.com/2013/07/is-it-lughnasa-or-crom-dubhs-sunday.html>, July 23, 2013

were a Christian convert or a stubborn adherent to the old gods, he was either a pagan wizard banished by holy St. Brendan or a dark and evil deity defeated by the sun god, Lugh.

Likewise, Celtic first-harvest celebrations shifted in content and focus through time as stories, beliefs, and new ways of doing things moved between people in different regions through trade, exploration, religious conversion, or conquest. Unsurprisingly, the spread of Christianity had a transformative influence on how and when the holiday was celebrated as well.

Lugh's Feast



The god who initiated the August feast in early Ireland reveals himself less clearly than Brigit, who in her guise as saint remained a living presence in people's lives long after the advent of Christianity. We have to go further back in time to discover Lugh, but Julius Caesar gave us a clue as to his identity and function when he wrote that the god worshipped by the Gauls was Mercury, whom they declared to be "the inventor of all arts,"

the guardian of roads and travelers, and a patron of moneymaking and commerce. The Gauls called this god Lugus, and his name was given to many European cities, such as Leiden, Liegnitz, and Lyon (Lugdunum), where a great festival was held on August 1 in Roman times. In Ireland Lugus became Lugh, a renowned hero of the Tuatha Dé Danann.
~ Mara Freeman, *Kindling the Celtic Spirit*

Early tales of Lugh tell of how he started the harvest festival and games of Lughnasadh at the behest of his foster mother, Tailtiu, who died from exhaustion after clearing forest in County Meath, transforming it into Ireland's most fertile farmland. As Tailtiu was dying she asked Lugh to hold the festival games at first harvest in her honor. Doing so each year, she said, would ensure a rich harvest for the people. Mara Freeman notes in *Kindling the Celtic Spirit* that an abundant harvest in Celtic tradition, "could not be won without the cooperation of the earth goddess, of whom Tailtiu is a local manifestation."

Lugh was known as "the bright and shining one" whose solar rays ripened the crops and as "the long-armed" for his warrior prowess and reputed use of a magic spear that wielded thunderstorms. He was referred to in an 11th-century Irish tale "Cath Maige Tuired" and other legends as the "Many Skilled" but perhaps a more accurate translation of his nickname *Samildanach* is "The Many-Gifted One."⁴ He bears the name after demonstrating his mastery of all arts (many of which he invented), including crafts, magic, and warfare, at a feast in King Nuaga's court.

Throughout the Celtic realm the August feast of Lughnasadh marked the beginning of the autumn harvest months. According to *The Celtic Book of Living and Dying*⁵, "Traditionally, celebrations begin two weeks before the actual day and go on for a further two weeks afterwards. It is a time of feasting and revelry. Games are played – ball games and *fidchell* (a type of Celtic chess) being particularly popular." The festivals celebrated first fruits, as well as the people's talents in skilled crafts. At the early Celtic

⁴ *The Celtic Spirit* by Caitlin Matthews, pp. 204.

⁵ *The Celtic Book of Living and Dying: An Illustrated Guide to Celtic Wisdom* by Juliette Wood, pp. 38.

Lughnasadh festivals there was feasting, singing, dancing, and courting, as well as an emphasis on commerce, horse racing, athletic contests, and settling legal matters.

As well as providing an arena for resolving important social issues and sanctioning laws, they were an opportunity for a lavish display of all the arts under Lugh's patronage—athletics, craftsmanship, ball games, and horse racing, the last two of which he was supposed to have invented. The original Lugus-Mercury was patron of commerce, so it followed that there would also be a market, where different tribes, isolated for most of the year, could trade goods. The Celts who always loved colorful costumes and finery, no doubt came dressed in their best. Artists and entertainers displayed their talents, and there were storytelling recitations and music contests, with prizes of gold or jewels awarded to the best performers by a chieftain, queen, or other person of high rank. In other parts of the fair riders on horseback delighted audiences with feats of skill and acrobatics, while crowds gathered around showmen, jugglers, and clowns sporting grotesque masks and painted faces or watched conjurers perform fantastical magic tricks. The entertainment was accompanied by all the cacophony of the modern fairground, according to an eleventh-century poem about the Fair of Carman.

~ Mara Freeman, Kindling the Celtic Spirit

The Lughnasadh festivals were also a place where couples could enter marriage for a year and a day through handfasting. In some areas this was practiced as a pragmatic way of deciding whether the pairing would be a sound one. If it wasn't a good match, the couple could part at the festival the following year and be free to seek a different partner. Sirona Knight notes in *Celtic Traditions: Druids, Faeries, and Wiccan Rituals* that the "mock weddings" (or ceremonial weddings) on Lughnasadh were a symbolic coupling of the Earth/Goddess (Rhiannon) and Sun/God (Lugh).

Lammas



Lughnasadh was also commonly referred to as Lammas in the Christian era, deriving from the Anglo Saxon's Hlaef Mass (loaf mass) observed on August 1st. The holiday included both a celebration of the first harvest and the ritual blessing of a loaf of bread made from the first grains reaped from the field. [An article](#) on the Gathering Victoria blog shares a beautiful historical ritual involving Lammas bread after its blessing at the church:

... it was also used in a little old-world food magic to ensure a prosperous harvest. A book of Anglo-Saxon Charms advises the Lammas bread should be broken into four bits placed at the four corners of the barn, to protect the grain.

Sharing the bounty with those in need was also a large part of the Lammas observances, which isn't often mentioned in the literature about the holiday today. As part of the arbitrations and contracts traditionally overseen on that day, Lammas Rights were also granted:

But Lammas Day served another forgotten function, it marked the occasion when “Lamas Rights” were granted. This allowed “commoners” the right to hunt, pasture and forage on crown land, church or other lands they did not have legal rights to. This tradition of Common land or Common Ground granted the public the use of the “commons”—woods, ponds, fields and grazing grounds—to feed themselves.

~ Danielle Prohom Olson on [Gathering Victoria](#)

As with Lughnasadh traditions, Lammas rituals and offerings were often made for protection and to ensure continuing good harvests throughout the autumn months. In *The Magical Year*, Danu Forest notes the name Lammas “refers to the importance of the grain harvest and signals the change from honouring the earth goddess and her gifts of wild foods to revering the ‘masculine’ skills of taming the land with agriculture, the sacrifice of John Barleycorn.”⁶

In some areas of the old Celtic realm today, first harvest is celebrated as Lughnasadh and in others it is celebrated as Lammas, Crom Dubh’s Sunday, or other local names for the first-fruit festivals. Those celebrations evolved through time and the church’s influence, but they never lost their spirit of joyful celebration and gratitude for a bountiful first harvest and the opportunity to come together in community.

“Lammas,” or “Gooseberry,” Fairs were usually held on the Sunday nearest to August 1 so that a whole day could be set aside from work. Booths and stalls sprang up, like mushrooms over night at well-known holy wells and other places of summer pilgrimage, until the Victorians banned the airs for being too rowdy. They were colorful, noisy gatherings where people came from miles around to sell farm animals, local produce, or horses. Tinkers and trick-of-the-loop men hawked

⁶ To read more about John Barleycorn, check out Wikipedia’s article and some of the sources it references: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Barleycorn

their wares at booths and sideshows. Stalls were piled high with silks and homespuns, pots and pans, while gooseberries, currants, and cherries lay heaped like jewels Musicians and dancers competed for prizes under a decorated pole called a craeb, while in other areas the air resounded with the whacks and blood-curdling yells of faction fighters engaged in the ancient art of stick fighting. An Irish folktale calls this season the "little lunacy week in August."
~ Mara Freeman, *Kindling the Celtic Spirit*

Ellen Dugan in *Seasons of Witchery* notes, "From the traditions of this old community first-harvest tradition came one of the modern eight sabbats that we celebrate today." Many modern pagan traditions such as Wicca celebrate the holiday as one of the high cross-quarter fire festivals. The role of the earth goddess is often highlighted in their Lammas rituals and celebrations of first harvest.

Even today some aspects of those earlier fairs remain in practice both in the lands of the ancient Celts and across the ocean in the United States and Canada where many of their descendants later settled. State fairs and agricultural shows traditionally held at this time of year keep that spirit alive and vestiges of many of the old traditions are still apparent today.

How would you like to celebrate Lughnasadh/Lammas?

When considering how you'd like to celebrate Lughnasadh, consider the major themes that are woven through this holiday:

- Harvest
- Grain & Bread
- Revelry
- Abundance
- Security & Good Fortune
- Community
- Gratitude
- Games & Contests
- Feasting
- Arts & Hand Crafts
- Skills, Gifts, and Achievements

What are some ways you can work with those themes creatively to come up with a personalized Lughnasadh celebration of your own?

Here are a few ideas to spark your creative spirit:

Craft your intention What is your intention for the next month (or the next six weeks until the Autumn Equinox?⁷ What do you want to focus on? What do you want to do or accomplish? What support do you desire? You can write out your intention in your Wonder Year Book and then copy it out on a piece of paper for your altar if you wish (more about that below). Using gold ink to write it would be perfect to honor the solar energies of summer and Lughnasadh (psst...[gold Gelly Roll gel pens](#) are fabulous for writing beautiful gold text).

Set up a Lughnasadh altar and place items on it that represent the bounty of the first harvest and the sun, including one or two yellow or gold candles (beeswax candles are a great touch for your Lughnasadh altar). Also, representations of abundance, prosperity, and good fortune you desire in the days to come are perfect for a Lughnasadh altar. Images or figurines of bees are also a great addition. Green, gold, yellow, orange, and bright colors of blossoms, fruit, and berries all carry the energy of early August and the first harvest and are delightful possibilities you can weave into your altar. Include a copy of your intention on your altar too!

If you already have an established altar, you'll want to clean it and give it a good smudge before resetting it for Lughnasadh. (This is also a great time to clear and set the energy throughout your home.) Once you've set up your altar with what you'd like it to include, sit in front of it for a few minutes.

Light a candle, close your eyes, and meditate on the blessings that you've received this year so far, what good things your efforts have yielded, and any help that's come your way when you needed it. Which of your magic beans or projects have you made progress on thus far? Which have you completed? Which remain that you'd like to bring to fruition this year?

⁷ You can find the dates for all the equinoxes and solstices by searching [The Old Farmer's Almanac online](#). Or grab yourself a physical copy; it's a fantastic resource I get every year and keep on my desk for frequent reference.

Then open your eyes. If you crafted a new intention, read your it aloud and place it on your altar. Ask your guides and spiritual helpers to aid you in moving your intention and desires into reality. Once this feels complete, send your gratitude to your spiritual guides and helpers for their support and wisdom, and douse the candle with a smile and a grateful heart.

Make a Lammas Loaf. If you enjoy baking bread, making a Lammas loaf that you bless and share with your loved ones is a beautiful way to bring that ancient tradition into your celebrations this year. I'm not a bread baker, as I can't have gluten or eggs, but I dug into the interwebs to see what inspiration I could find for Lammas breadmaking. There are several Lammas bread recipes shared [on the UK's Guardian website](#) that look fantastic, especially the traditional Lammas braided bread loaf and bread wreath. Also, [the recipe](#) for herbed Lammas load biscuits on the Gathering Victoria blog post about Lammas I mentioned earlier also looks wonderful! There are also other recipes and delightful rituals and celebrations shared in *Lughnasadh: Rituals, Recipes & Lore for Lammas*.

Why stop at bread? Cook up a feast for yourself, friends, and family with locally grown produce and home baked treats. Visit the local farmers market and buy grains and flours, fresh berries, organic produce, and honey⁸ to use in preparing the meal. Take the opportunity to express your gratitude to the farmers you meet for their hard work in bringing all that nourishing goodness to share with you and others in your community. If you have a garden of your own, you can include your own homegrown fruits, herbs, and veggies in your feast. And how about infusing it all with the spirit of the old Lughnasadh and Lammas fairs with games of skill and chance for you and your guests to enjoy?

Share the bounty of the season. Donate fresh produce from your own garden or the farmers market to the local community kitchen, mission, or homeless shelter to share the bounty with those in need. Do you know anyone in your own neighborhood that is

⁸ Yep, honey! Support local beekeepers efforts by buying their products. Bees have a crucial role in nature and in agriculture, pollinating all the plants we and the birds, animals, and other creatures need to survive.



having financial difficulty or has trouble getting out of the house due to age or illness? You could bring them a basket of fresh goodies from the farmers market, too.

Visit the State or County Fair in your area. These fairs are a continuation of the ancient harvest festivals and a wonderful way to celebrate with your community. Go with open curiosity and look for aspects of the celebrations, contests, music, food, and crafts that carry the spirit of the Lughnasadh festivals and Lammass Fairs from long ago.

Revel in your accomplishments and cast forward with your desires. Lughnasadh is a wonderful time to consider where you are now, what you've accomplished, and what you'd like to focus on for the remainder of the year. I talked a bit about this with the ideas for your altar but you can also document this in your Wonder Year Book by creating lists or simply words and images in artwork or collage. Bringing your creative spirit and heartfelt gratitude, joy, and desire to it also gives it all an expressive boost of energy which helps to fuel your steps forward.

The Many-Gifted One (Yep, that would be you)

When we follow our authentic path with love, embracing our creative impulses, we live truth even if what we think we're doing is just planting a flower bed, cooking a meal, nurturing a child, editing a book, producing a television show, sewing a curtain, writing a brief, painting a picture, teaching a craft, composing a song, or closing a deal.

~ Saran Ban Breathnach

Our journey through Seasons of Wonder is not just focused on the wonders that surround us every day but also the wonders within us, our own gifts, skills, and beautiful uniqueness. Thinking of Lugh, the Many-Gifted One, makes Lughnasadh a perfect time to reflect on our own gifts and bring them into the light. For many of us this may feel a bit awkward, even downright uncomfortable. We may be aware of our own natural talents and special gifts but naming them can feel like boasting. I beg to differ.



Taking an internal inventory to remind ourselves of our gifts and fully claim them is important soul work. How else can we honor those gifts we've been given and bring them most authentically to our life and those around us? Hiding our light under a barrel serves no one, not least ourselves. We're given our gifts for a reason: to express them and share them with others in our lives. I fully believe that by exploring and acknowledging our gifts big and small, as well as expressing them in our own unique ways, we illuminate our true path forward. It certainly has been a game-changer for me.

I shared some ideas with you about ways to celebrate Lughnsadh/Lammas this year. And here's another: **create a list of your gifts in your Wonder Year Book.**

If you're having trouble coming up with a solid list of your gifts, see if thinking of them as strengths, things you're good at, or natural talents helps. Try meditating or flow-writing about it and see what emerges for you. You can also ask someone close to you to reflect back to you what they see as your gifts and strengths. Sometimes our gifts seem so normal and effortless, we don't fully grasp that they are indeed our unique gifts, those special aspects of ourselves we bring to the world through our work, relationships, and creative acts of all kinds.

Also, if you compiled an inventory of your accomplishments for the year thus far as part of your Lughnasadh celebration, look it over. What is it about **you** that made you able to do the things you accomplished? What was easy for you in doing them? What was more challenging or felt outside of your gifts or skills? What talents and strengths did you bring to those endeavors yourself that helped you accomplish them? Which of those accomplishments feels the best to you, the one(s) that give you the greatest feeling of satisfaction and pride? Why? You may find there are some common threads between some of those most satisfying accomplishments that point toward your natural gifts.



You are the Magic and Medicine the world needs most. Please don't ever doubt it nor your own unique gifts. I wish you all the beauty and blessings of Lughnasadh and Lammas with love and gratitude.