

Spring Equinox celebrates the renewed life of the earth that comes with the Spring. It is a solar festival, celebrated when the length of the day and the night are equal (this happens twice a year, at Spring and Autumn Equinox).



This turn in the seasons has been celebrated by cultures throughout history that held festivals for their gods and goddesses at this time of year. Aphrodite from Cyprus, Hathor from Egypt and Ostara of Scandinavia to name a few.

Today, Pagans continue to celebrate the coming of Spring. Paganism encompasses a diverse community with some groups concentrating on specific traditions, practices or elements such as ecology, witchcraft, Celtic traditions or certain gods.

Wiccans, Druids, Shamans, Sacred Ecologists, Odinists and Heathens all make up parts of the Pagan community. Most Pagans share an ecological vision that comes from the Pagan **belief** in the organic vitality and spirituality of the natural world.



Due to persecution and misrepresentation it is necessary to define what Pagans are not as well as what they are. Pagans are not sexual deviants, do not worship the devil, are not evil, do not practice 'black magic' and their practices do not involve harming people or animals. The Pagan Federation of Great Britain have no precise figures but estimate that the number of Pagans in the British Isles is between 50,000 and 200,000 (2002).

Pagans attribute the changes that are going on in the world to an increase in the powers of their God and Goddess (the personifications of the great force that is at work in the world). At the time of Spring Equinox the God and the Goddess are often portrayed as The Green Man and Mother Earth. The Green Man is said to be born of Mother Earth in the depths of winter and to live through the rest of the year until he dies at Samhain.

To celebrate Spring Equinox some Pagans carry out particular rituals. For instance a woman and a man are chosen to act out the roles of Spring God and Goddess, playing out courtship and symbolically planting seeds. Egg races, egg hunts, egg eating and egg painting are also traditional activities at this time of year.

The spring equinox is also called Ostara. The word *Ostara* is just one of the names applied to the celebration of the spring equinox. For early Pagans in the Germanic countries, this was a time to celebrate planting and the new crop season.

Many cultures celebrate spring festivals and holidays around the March equinox, like Easter and Passover. However, there are also a few more unorthodox celebrations - some of which date back thousands of years. Here are five different traditions:

- **Balance an egg** There is an ancient Chinese belief that you can stand an egg on its end on the first day of spring. The theory goes that, due to the sun's equidistant

position between the poles of the earth at the time of the equinox, special gravitational forces apply.

- **Throw some coloured powder** Holi is an ancient Hindu festival celebrating the victory of good over evil. It takes place each year around the time of the vernal equinox. Known as the "festival of colours", it is celebrated by tossing vibrant coloured powders onto each other and dancing in the streets.



- **Wear a shamrock** The symbolic plant of the equinox in Druidry is the trefoil or shamrock, which is also customarily worn on St. Patrick's Day. The three leaves shaped like hearts were associated with the Triple Goddess of Celtic mythology, otherwise known as the "Three Morgans". The shamrock is thought to be symbolic of the regenerative powers of nature.



- **Plant seeds** The spring equinox is symbolic of rebirth, renewal, and growth, and in ancient Italy, it was traditional for women to plant seeds in the gardens of Adonis on this day. The custom persists in Sicily, where women plant seeds of grains - lentils, fennel, lettuce or flowers - in baskets and pots. When they sprout, the stalks are tied with red ribbons and the flowers are placed on graves on Good Friday, symbolising the triumph of life over death.
- **Visit an ancient monument** Many of the world's ancient monuments were built as astrological calendars, to map the movement of the Sun over the course of the year. The equinox is therefore a great time to visit these monuments, as they are often aligned to make the most of the Sun's unique position in the sky. At Stonehenge in Wiltshire, the sun can be seen rising precisely between two stones, while at Chichén Itzá in Mexico, the rising sun transforms one edge of the giant pyramid into a blazing serpent, representing the Mayan god Kukulcan.

