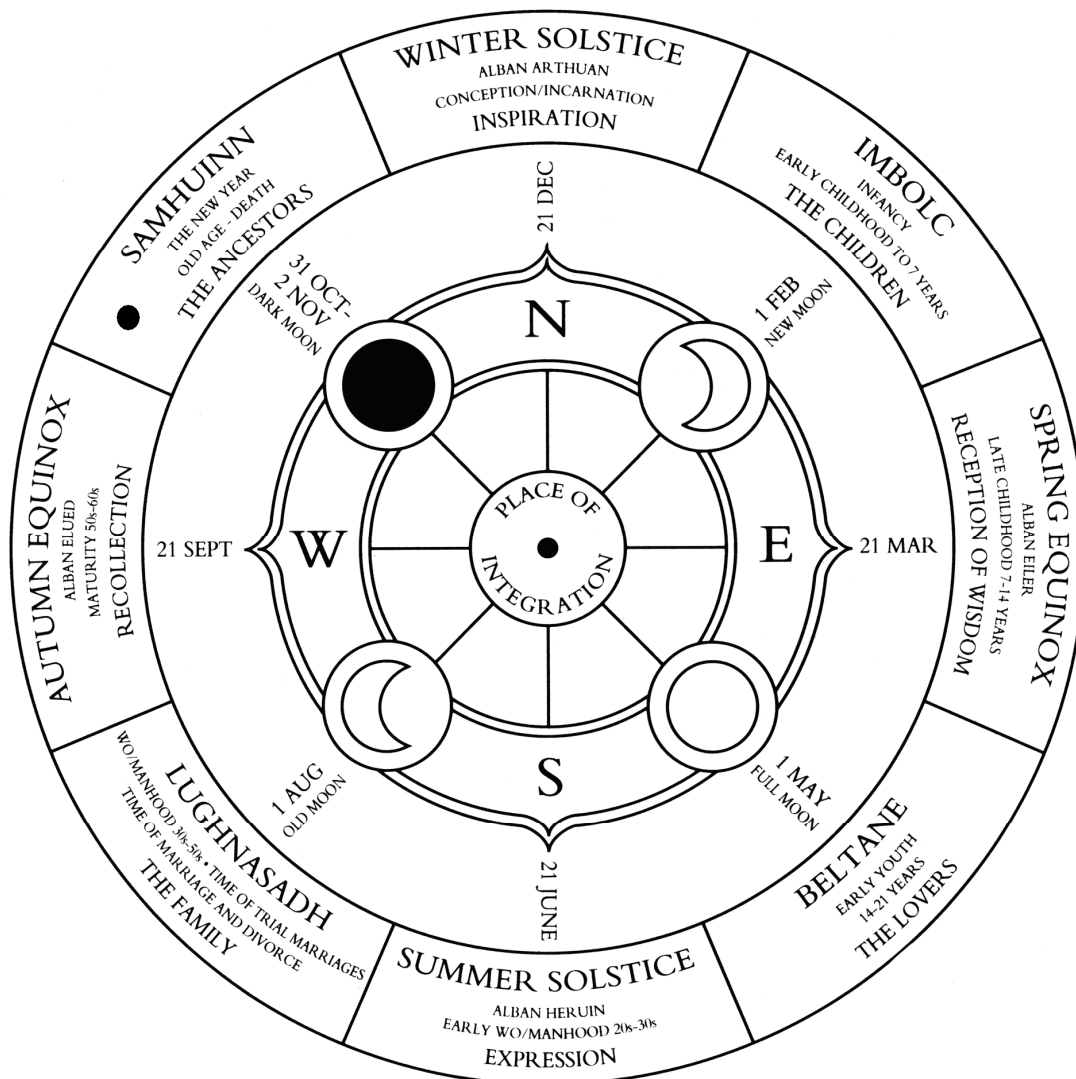


Samhain/Samhuinn – October 31st/November 1st

This is sometimes described as the Celtic New Year

At Samhain (which corresponds to modern Halloween), time lost all meaning and the past, present, and future were one. The dead, and the denizens of the Other World, walked among the living. It was a time of fairies, ghosts, demons, and witches. Winter itself was the Season of Ghosts, and Samhain is the night of their release from the Underworld. Many people lit bonfires to keep the evil spirits at bay. Often a torch was lit and carried around the boundaries of the home and farm, to protect the property and residents against the spirits throughout the winter.

Now, modern Druids celebrate the turning of the year and honour their ancestors. They choose this time to let go of something that they do not like about themselves and try to make a new beginning.

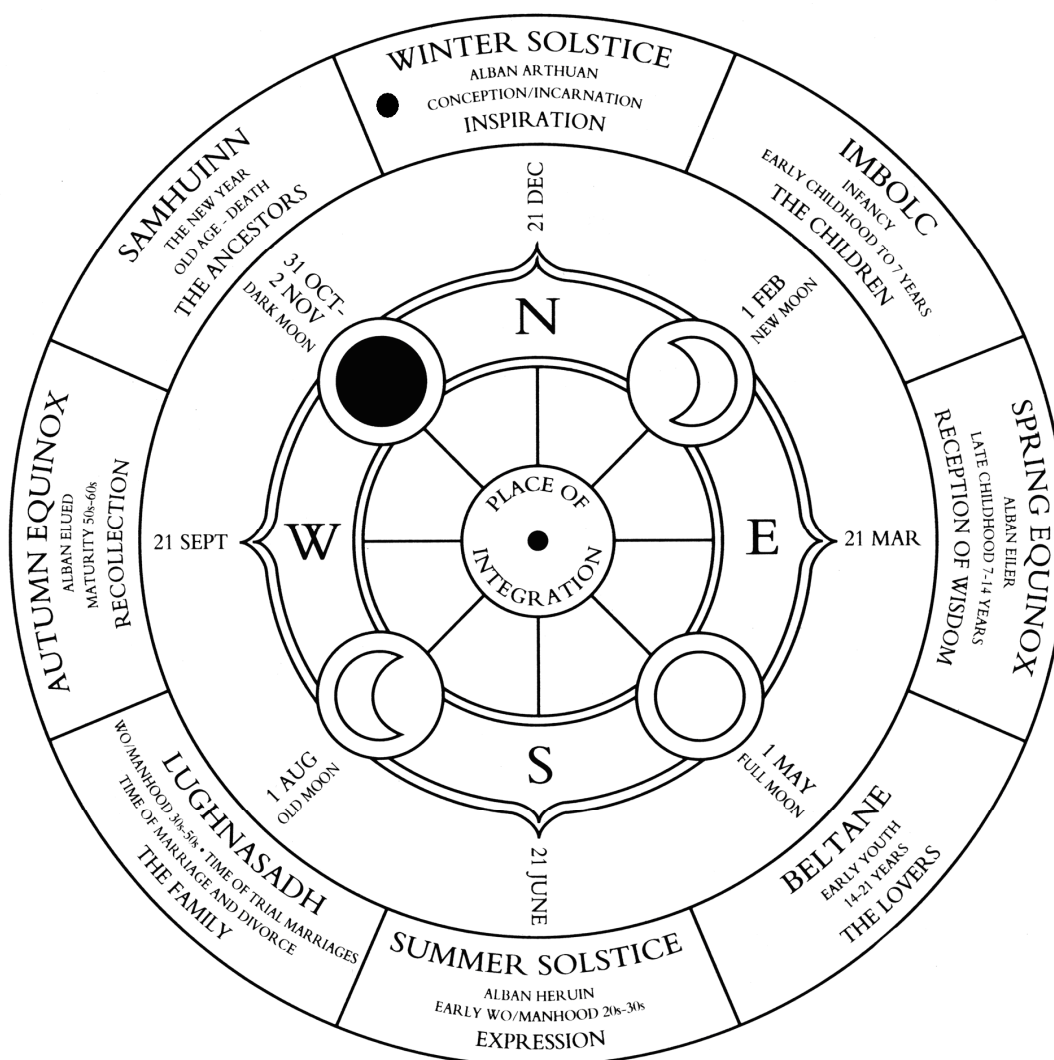


Alban Arthan (Winter Solstice) – December 21st

In this darkest time of the year we celebrate the return of the Divine Child, the Mabon, the rebirth of the golden solstice Sun, who will bring warmth, light and life back to Earth again. The Wheel of the Year revolves beyond death and towards new light and new life.

In the Druidic tradition the name of this festival is "Alban Arthan", Welsh for "Light of Winter". According to an older and more poetic interpretation, the name is "Alban Arthuan", meaning "Light of Arthur". In this poetical image, Arthur is symbolized by the Sun. The Sun dies and is reborn, just as the mythical Arthur is sleeping deep inside a mountain and will wake up again when the people need his help.

Modern Druids think of this time as the moment when winter turns a corner and the sun begins to get stronger again, bringing hope for the year ahead.

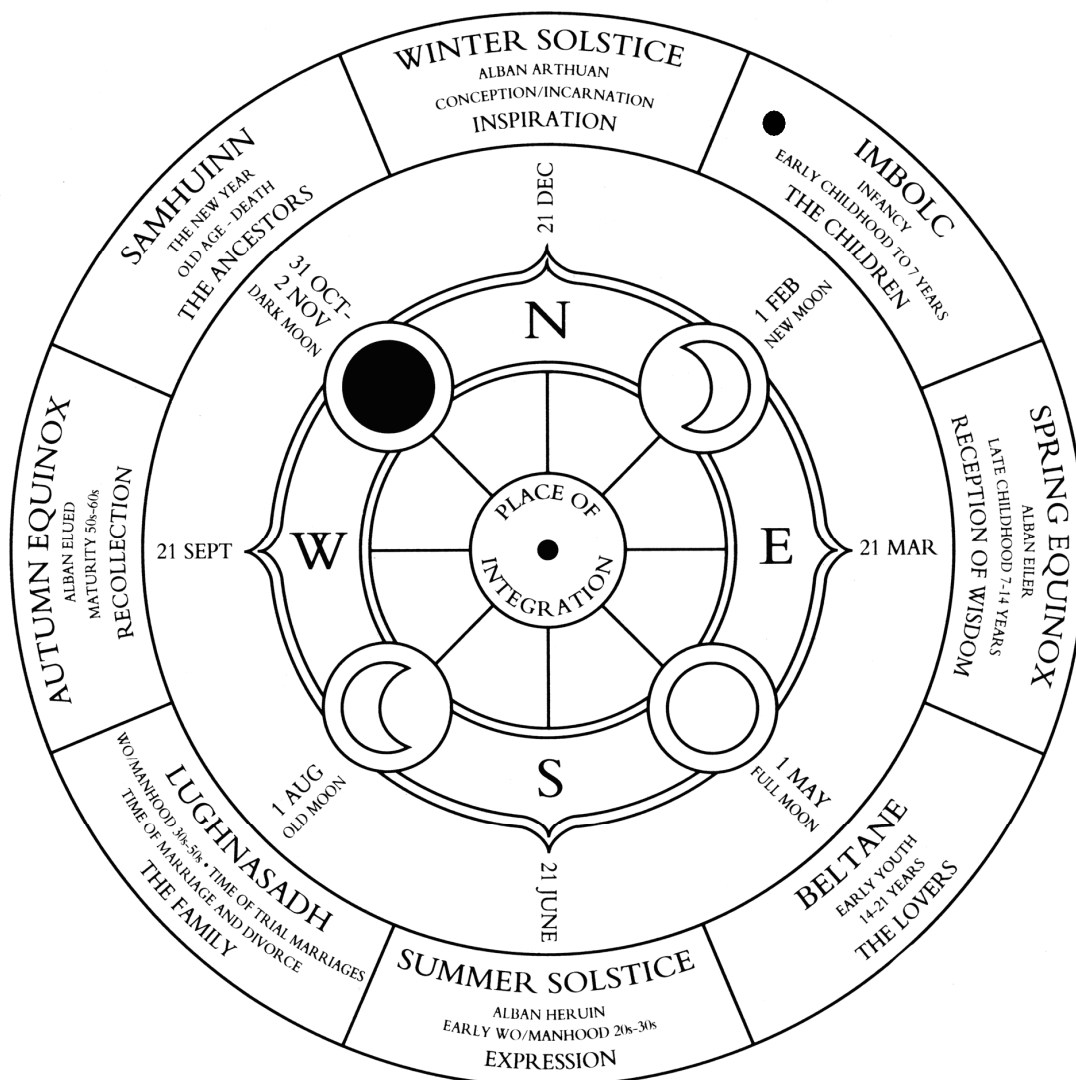


Imbolc – February 1st

This is a time of hope and preparation. At this time, our ancestors saw the Sun, the weak and helpless Child of Light, grow stronger day by day. The land still lies in darkness, but the rule of the darkness is challenged by the infant Lord of Light. Little by little, the skies grow light and the blessed Earth gives forth her first flowers, snowdrop and crocus, as promise of the summer that is to be when all creation will rejoice.

This Feast of Imbolc is sacred to the Lady, the Goddess Brighid. As we see the Child of Light grow stronger day by day in the arms of the Mother, so do we understand that we ourselves will grow under the protection of the Mantle of the Lady, and the Light that shines within us will bring forth a great harvest in the ground that She has prepared.

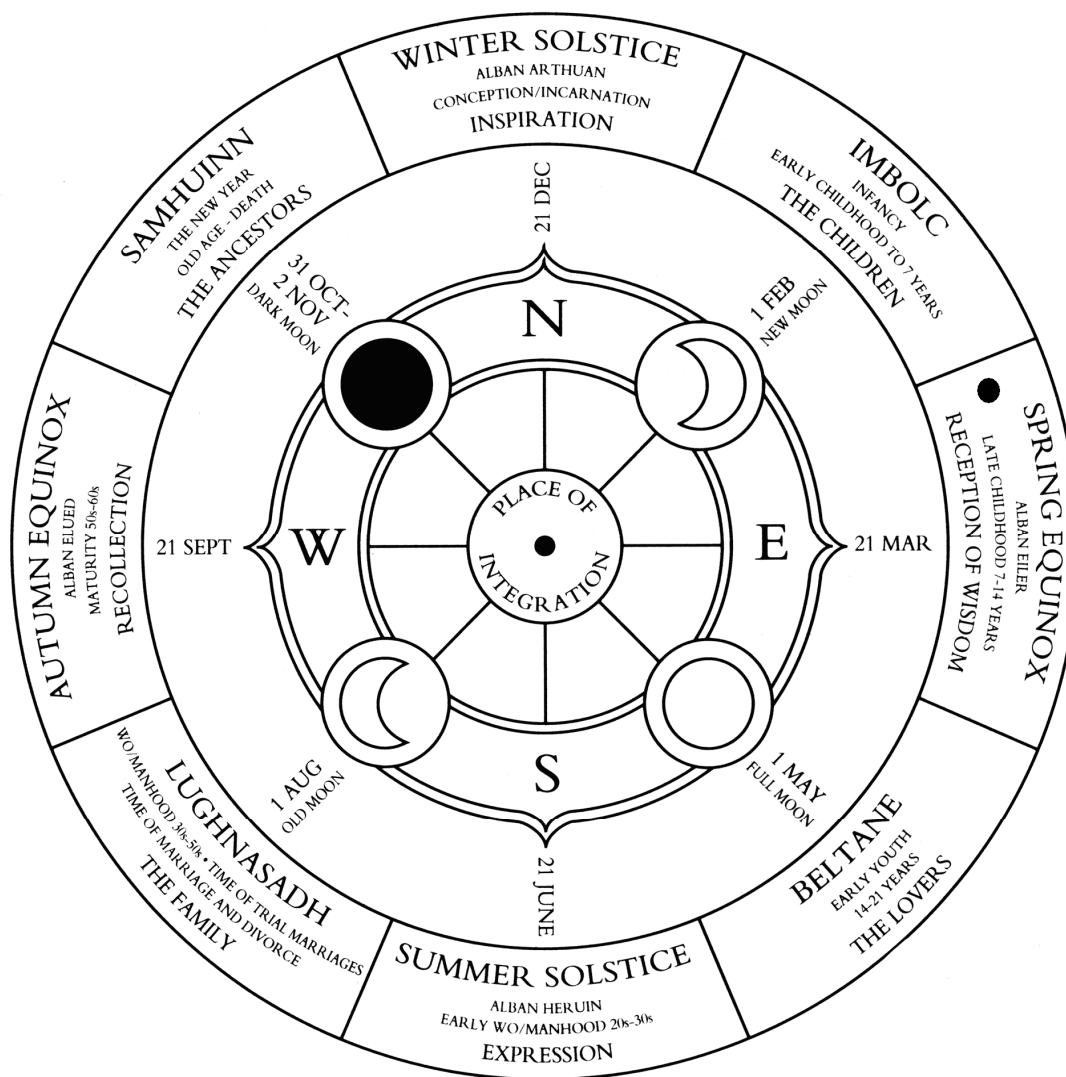
For modern Druids, this is the first of three spring festivals, when poetry and creativity are celebrated.



Alban Eilir (Spring Equinox) – March 21st

Winter sometimes seems so long, that we could be for-given for wondering whether spring will ever return. But the Goddess of Spring is merely sleeping through the darkness of winter, and while she stirs at Imbolc, she is truly awake by the time of the Spring Equinox. The forces of light are equally balanced with the forces of darkness at this time, but light is on the increase - and will reach its height at the Summer Solstice three months later.

For modern Druids, this is the second of three spring festivals, when the balance between light and dark is celebrated and we look for balance in our own lives.

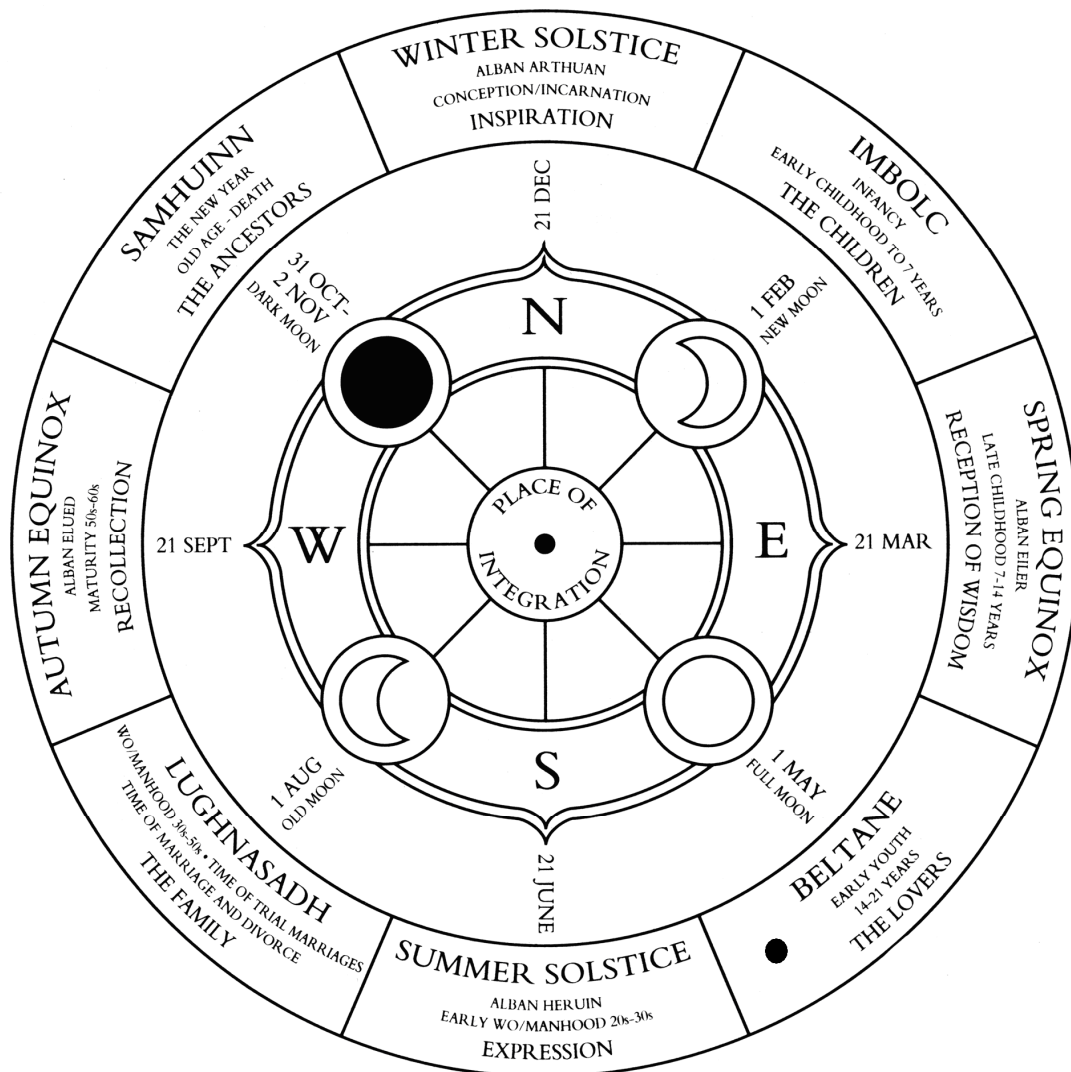


Beltane – May 1st

This is the third spring festival and heralds the beginning of summer. The sun now pours its light and warmth onto the earth, and all her creatures bask in the joyous tide of sensuality, fertility and abundance. The bright procession of summer days last longer than the nights, and the seemingly endless winter nights of being cooped up inside are but a faint memory of long ago.

The major feature of Beltane in many lands was jumping over the fire. Young people jumped over it to bring themselves husbands or wives; intending travellers to ensure a safe journey; pregnant women to ensure an easy delivery, young women to ensure their fertility etc.

Modern Druids focus on relationships at this time – between men and women, between the inner masculine and inner feminine, and between all beings.

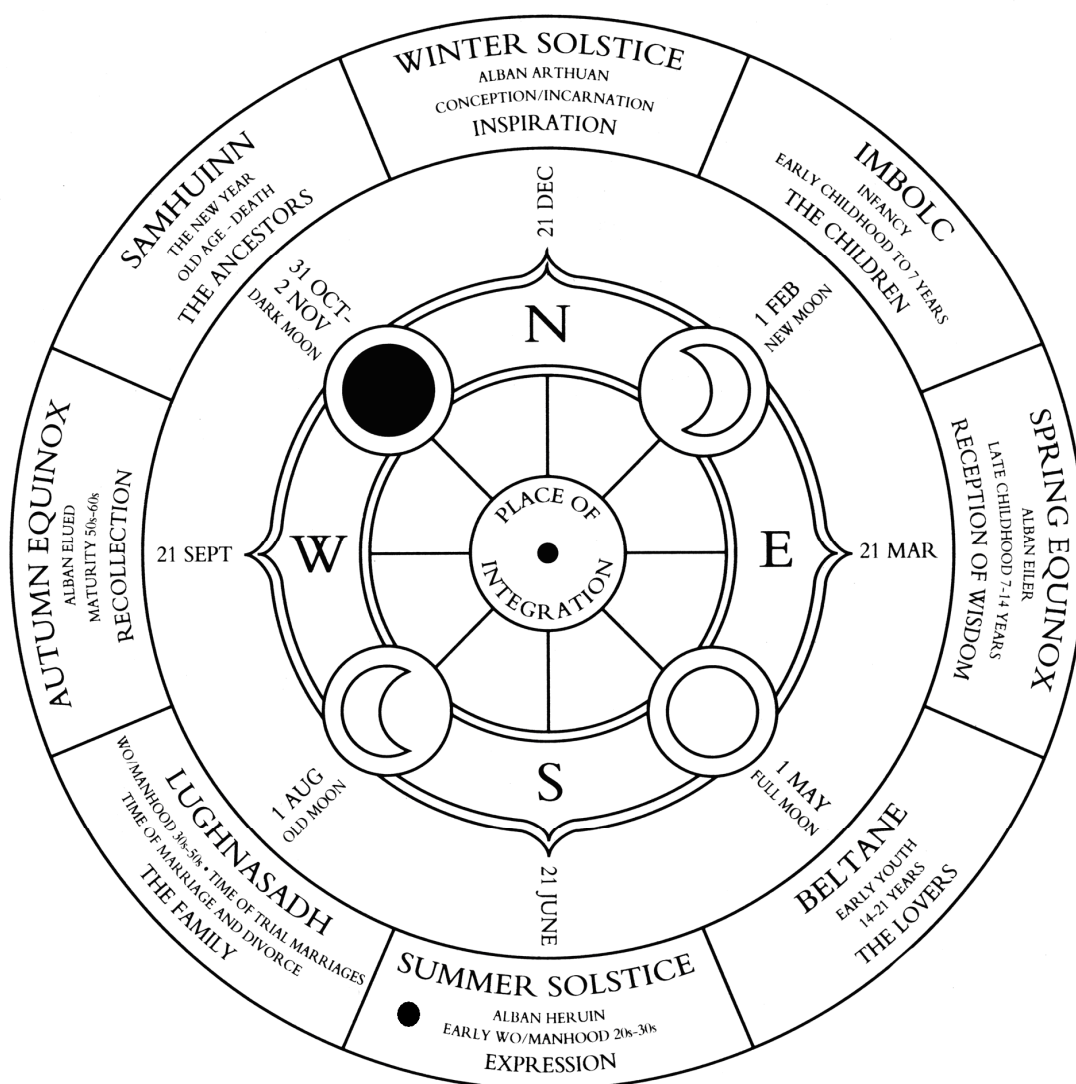


Alban Hefin (Summer Solstice) – June 21st

This is the time of maximum light - when the countryside around us revels in colourful and fragrant splendour. This time is known in the Druid tradition as that of Alban Hefin - 'The Light of Summer' or 'The Light of the Shore'.

At Alban Hefin the spiral of the year has expanded to its widest point and now the hours of light are as long as they will ever be. After 21st or 22nd June, the sun's power will begin to wane and the days grow shorter. The sun has touched the northernmost point along the horizon and is about to embark upon the long journey back south, ending at Alban Arthan, the Winter Solstice, in mid-December.

The Summer Solstice time was an event of tremendous importance to ancient Britons, who built a number of magnificent megaliths aligned to the sunrise on this day. In southwest England, the thread of tradition connects the 5,000-year-old temple of Stonehenge with ritual activities through the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, and into modern times. Today many modern druid orders, including The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids, gather here to watch the first rays of the sun shine above the 'hele stone.'

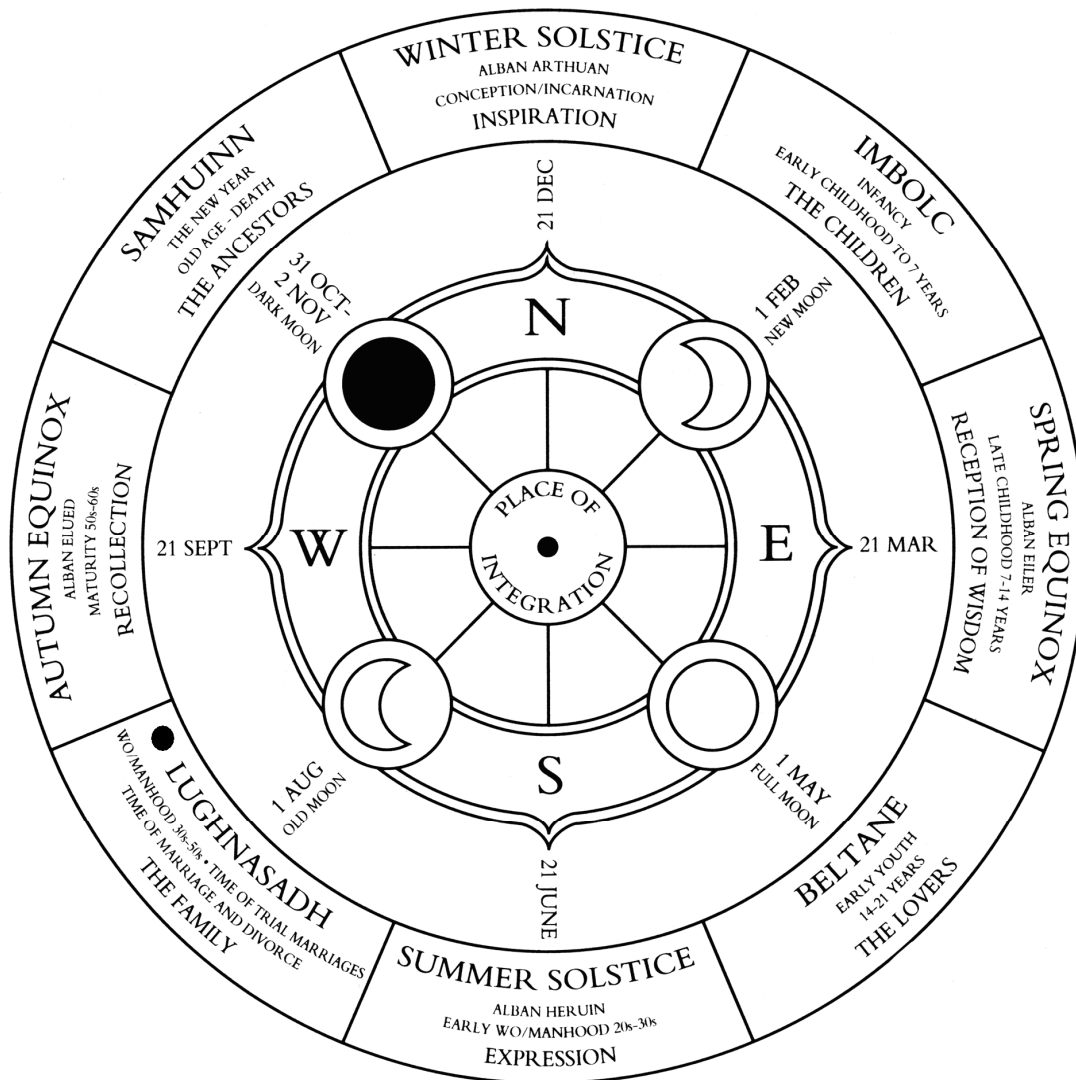


Lughnasadh – August 1st

Also known as Lammastide, the First Harvest. The name of this festival is Irish Gaelic for "Commemoration of Lugh". Some authors give the meaning as marriage, gathering or feast (in the name of) of Lugh. The meaning remains basically the same: Lugh is the Deity of Lughnasadh, and there is a feast.

The essence of Lughnasadh is the joy of life under the knowledge that darker times are moving in. We take in the warming rays of the Sun and store their power for the times coming. At the time we celebrate the next festival, Alban Elfed, it will be autumn and the warm summer days will already be a memory.

For modern Druids, the meaning of Lughnasadh is the start of the harvest of the fruits that we have sown in spring. Which things in our life or projects do we want to reap? What would we like to finish, what to start anew? Do we have the insight that to every harvest there is a necessity of preparation?



Alban Elfed (Autumn Equinox) – September 21st

At this time, our ancestors saw the Sun, for the first time in half a year, be unable to outshine the Dark. Although he still shines with strength, his strength grows weaker as the days grow shorter. Today he holds the Darkness in equal measure to the Light, but he is struck in his season with the wound of Time and from day to day the darkness will grow as the Lord of Light sinks into his Age, for the wound is grievous and will not heal. This is a time of farewell and gratitude for the summer that has been.

At this time, our ancestors saw the Lady who is the Spirit of the Land stand before her people with the full bounty of her Harvest. Here is the reward of labour and reverence of the Land. This is the fulfilled promise of the days of spring and summer. This is the Reckoning of the Year, for Harvest is now complete and the portions are set to feed folk and animals through the cold dark days that lie ahead. This is a time of wonder and gratitude for the gifts the Lady showers down upon her people.

For modern Druids, this is a time of reflection and contemplation, of thanksgiving for the fruits of the earth and the experiences of the previous year.

