

FESTIVAL INFO

FESTIVAL.COM

BELTANE

Beltane (/ˈbɛl.teɪn/)^{[5][6]} is the [Gaelic May Day](#) festival. Most commonly it is held on 1 May, or about halfway between the [spring equinox](#) and [summer solstice](#). Historically, it was widely observed throughout [Ireland](#), [Scotland](#), and the [Isle of Man](#). In [Irish](#) the name for the festival day is *Lá Bealtaine* ([ˈlʲaː ˈbʲalˠtʲɐnʲə]), in [Scottish Gaelic](#) *Latha Bealltainn* ([ˈlʲaː ˈbʲalˠtʲɪn]) and in [Manx Gaelic](#) *Laa Boaltinn/Boaldyn*. It is one of the four Gaelic seasonal festivals—along with [Samhain](#), [Imbolc](#) and [Lughnasadh](#)—and is similar to the Welsh [Calan Mai](#).

Beltane is mentioned in some of the [earliest Irish literature](#) and is associated with important events in [Irish mythology](#). Also known as *Cétshamhain* ("first of summer"), it marked the beginning of [summer](#) and it was when cattle were [driven out](#) to the summer pastures. Rituals were performed to

protect the cattle, crops and people, and to encourage growth. Special [bonfires](#) were kindled, and their flames, smoke and ashes were deemed to have protective powers. The people and their cattle would walk around or between bonfires, and sometimes leap over the flames or embers. All household fires would be doused and then re-lit from the Beltane bonfire. These gatherings would be accompanied by a feast, and some of the food and drink would be offered to the [aos sí](#). Doors, windows, byres and livestock would be decorated with yellow May flowers, perhaps because they evoked fire. In parts of Ireland, people would make a May Bush: typically a thorn bush or branch decorated with flowers, ribbons, bright shells and rushlights. [Holy wells](#) were also visited, while Beltane [dew](#) was thought to bring beauty and maintain youthfulness. Many of these customs were part of May Day or Midsummer festivals in

CONTENT

- ABOUT THIS EVENT
- HISTORIC CUSTOMS

other parts of Great Britain and Europe.

Beltane celebrations had largely died out by the mid-20th century, although some of its customs continued and in some places it has been revived as a cultural event. Since the late 20th century, [Celtic neopagans](#) and [Wiccans](#) have observed Beltane or a related festival as a religious holiday. Neopagans in the Southern Hemisphere celebrate Beltane on or around 1 November.

HISTORIC CUSTOMS

Beltane was one of four Gaelic seasonal festivals: [Samhain](#) (~1 November), [Imbolc](#) (~1

February), Beltane (~1 May), and [Lughnasadh](#) (~1 August). Beltane marked the beginning of the pastoral summer season,

when livestock were driven out to the summer pastures.^{[7][8]} Rituals were held at that time to protect them from harm, both natural and

supernatural, and this mainly involved the "symbolic use of fire".^[7] There were also rituals to protect crops, dairy products and people, and to encourage growth. The [aos sí](#) (often referred to as spirits or fairies) were

thought to be especially active at Beltane (as at Samhain)^[7] and the goal of many Beltane rituals was to appease them. Most scholars see the *aos sí* as remnants of the pagan gods and nature spirits.^[9] Beltane was a

"spring time festival of optimism" during which "fertility ritual again was important, perhaps connecting with the waxing power of the sun".^[1]