

# Wicca

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## RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Wiccan festivals follow the seasonal Sacred Wheel of the Year. Four of these festivals, the minor festivals, represent the solar festivals of solstices and equinoxes; the remaining four, known as the major festivals, represent agricultural and pastoral festivals. The latter four occur on points halfway between the solstices and equinoxes and are called Cross-Quarter days.

The annual cycle known as the Sacred Wheel of Year includes eight Sabbats (solar festivals). In addition, there are lunar observances, called Esbats. These center around the four phases of the moon: new, waxing, full, and waning. Observances generally occur from about three days before until about three days after each phase of the moon.

In many denominations the moon is associated with symbols of the Goddess and represents the feminine aspect of the divinity. The sun is often a symbol of the masculine aspect of the divinity.

Festivals are not concerned with historical figures or founders, but with the mysterious elemental forces inherent in nature and the psyche.

Wiccans meet in sacred circles where rituals are held. Rituals usually include a combination of meditation, invocations, movement, music, and prayer. Wiccans honor the elements of nature – earth, air, fire, water, and spirit and their associated directions of north, east, south, west, and center. It is recommended that congregant ceremonies be held outdoors.

**Required Daily Observances.** There is no universal standard across traditions. Most Wiccans develop a set of personally unique rituals for daily devotion. Examples include greeting the day, prayers before meals, prayers to close the day.

**Required Weekly Observances.** No universal standard exists. It is appropriate to provide a weekly study time on topics related to nature-based spirituality.

### **Required Occasional Observances**

Eight Sabbats are celebrated in the Sacred Wheel of the Year. Each occurs on or near the date identified. These dates fall on the solstices, equinoxes, and points halfway in between, called “Cross-Quarter days.” The following names may have variants:

October 31	Samhain.
December 21	Yule (Winter Solstice).
February 2	Imbolc.
March 21	Ostara (Spring Equinox).
April 30	Beltane.
June 22	Litha (Summer Solstice/Midsummer).
August 2	Lughnasadh.
September 21	Mabon (Fall Equinox).

**Holy Days.** Most Wiccan traditions do not have work proscription in association with holy days. When work proscription is observed, it is usually connected with Samhain.

## **RELIGIOUS ITEMS**

### **Personal Religious Items**

- **Book of Shadows** (a spiritual journal).
- Divination tool (Tarot Cards, Rune Cards, or Rune stones. Rune stones are plastic or wood).
- Items to honor the elements of nature:
  - ▶ Salt – Earth.

- ▶ Feather/(Herb) – Air.
- ▶ Wood Wand – Fire.
- ▶ Water – Water.
- ▶ Picture of Divine Unity/Divinity – Center.
- Religious medallion, usually a pentacle, and chain.

**Security note:** The Wood Wand need be no larger than a pencil.

## Congregate Religious Items

- Altar.
- Altar Cloth.
- Anointing Oil.
- Bell.
- Book of Shadows.
- Candle.
- Chalice.
- Drum.
- Feather.
- Herbs (sage, cedar, lavender, frankincense, myrrh, rosemary, chamomile).
- Icon (picture/statue of the sacred).
- Incense.
- Pentacle.
- Pentagram.
- Quartz crystal.
- Rattle.
- Tarot or Rune cards.
- Salt.
- Tabard (Hoodless Poncho).

**Security note:** An Athame, a ritual dagger, is used in community observances and rituals. In a correctional setting, the use or display of daggers is not authorized.

**Searches.** A Book of Shadows is considered very sacred. Any required examination of such religious objects or other spiritual articles shall normally be done by having the owner display them for visual inspection by the examining officer. Where owner display is not feasible, the chaplain should be called to inspect or manipulate the contents for inspection. Religious articles are not to be mishandled, thrown, placed on the floor, or brought into the bathroom and placed on the toilet or basin.

## REQUIREMENTS FOR MEMBERSHIP

**Requirements.** Since there is understood to be growth in the ability to enter into the balance that flows from being at one with Nature and Nature's forces, there are different perspectives within the Wiccan body about initiation. For some, self-initiation is possible through the simple commitment to follow a Wiccan path; for others, membership has to be the fruit of having received training from an elder within coven-centered rituals. Many forms of Wiccan religion are initiatory; others are not. Some require membership in a coven; others are sole practitioners.

<p><b>Security note:</b> Covens are not permitted inside Bureau facilities because of their organization/hierarchal structure.</p>
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**Total Membership.** Due to the eclectic and decentralized nature of the movement, as well as a well-grounded fear of publicity and harassment, it is difficult to arrive at any realistic estimate of how many follow the Wiccan way of life. Membership is probably in the hundreds of thousands.

## MEDICAL PROHIBITIONS

No universal standard exists. A healing service conducted by a community member may be requested.

## DIETARY STANDARDS

No universal dietary standard exists for Wicca. Self-selection from the mainline, including the no-flesh option, generally meets Wiccan dietary requirements.

## BURIAL RITUALS

**Ministering to the Dying.** When possible, a "Crossing Over" ritual is done just prior to death, with loved ones circled around the bedside of the dying person and at least one lighted candle present. "Crossing Over" rituals are usually conducted by the dying person's own minister, but can be conducted by someone else of the dying person's choosing, including a chaplain or minister of another religion who has a respect for the dying person's religious orientation. When circumstances permit, counseling and discussions are done by a minister with the dying person to assist personal spiritual preparations for the transition as well as to incorporate the dying person's ideas and beliefs into funeral and memorial service planning. When death happens suddenly and at a distance, the deceased's home spiritual community should be notified so that members can engage in individual and group meditations to mark the passing.

**Post-Death Rites.** Following death, it is common to have both a wake (especially for those of

