

# Samhain Cheat Sheet

**In Ireland - Samhain, in Scotland - Samhuinn, from Old Irish Samain (forms include: samna, samnae, samhain), literally ‘summer’s end... from sam ‘summer’ + fuin ‘end’. In Modern Irish it’s still Samhain, now meaning the month of November.**

## **When?**

- The question of when to celebrate Samhain seems to be a modern point of contention. I have it on good authority that our ancestors didn’t care. This is a season, like all the Fire Festivals, and technically Samhain is all of November in Ireland!
- Still, some argue for the astronomical cross-quarter day, which shifts every year. For instance, in 2022, it falls on November 7th. Others find it more convenient to stick with the calendar date of October 31st. And others still are trying to say that there’s no ‘ancient tradition of Samhain’ in Ireland... which is definitely not the case.

## **What?**

Pastoral people - Gaelic Irish (and possibly Prehistoric) would have kept the Summer and Winter division, driving herds upland at Bealtaine and returning them at Samhain. (Transhumance)

Moving, Protection, Vulnerability

Vital turning, transition, liminal points.

*Oíche na hAimhleasach* - Night of Mischief!

## Traditional Activities

Samhain in Ireland is a time of significant cultural practices, not merely a holiday for costumes and sweets. During this period, fires are lit on hills as part of longstanding festivals and community gatherings. These events serve a dual purpose: they are both social and practical, preparing for the winter ahead.

Livestock are brought closer to homes, and older animals are selected for culling. The bones from these animals often end up in bonfires, serving both a practical need for disposal and possibly a spiritual one. The term 'Bone Fire' may indeed have roots in this practice. Additionally, Samhain is rich in mythological and folklore references, emphasising its importance in Irish tradition. Ancestors were honoured with such practices as a supper laid out for their return, with a place at the table and the doors remaining unlocked... just for one night.

## Main Themes

- Gathering, assemblies
- Preparing for darkness, winter is coming
- Moving, shifting, liminality, sites opening
- Heightened supernatural activity/danger
- Return of the ancestral dead
- Mischief, tricks, ritual disguise, dress up
- Suspension of normal rules of behaviour
- Divination magic

## Gods

There is no particular Deity associated with this festival traditionally, but in our personal practice we honour the Mórrígan here. One of the Tuatha Dé Danann, she is portrayed as a goddess of battle, prophecy, sorcery, and even death.

*“This [her meeting with the Dagda at the ford of Unshin] was a week before Samhain and they all scattered until all the men of Ireland came together the day before Samhain... She was afterwards among them prophesying the years at the end of existence, and further promising each evil and lack in those years, and every plague and every vengeance: so that there she chanted her poem”.*

- *Cath Maige Tuired*, trans. Morgan Daimler.

If you'd like to learn more about the Irish Goddess Mórrígan, you can easily connect with our free 5 Day Challenge here - <https://www.morrigan.academy/challenge>

## **THINGS TO DO AND THINK ABOUT...**

What do you think will be your biggest challenge as you move into celebrating this festival in an authentic Irish way?

- What needs to move?
- What are you culling?
- How will you protect yourself, your home? (Guardian turnip, fire)
- Cooking - Potatoes, Bairín Breac, Meat
- Apples, Nuts
- Ancestral work
- Clean & Tidy, get ready for Winter.
- Games, Stories
- Saucer Game
- Yarrow Divination
- Check Dúchas!
- Regular divination, trance prophecy.

**LEARN MORE - <https://IrishPagan.School/Samhain>**