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Lammas History: Welcoming the Harvest

By [Patti Wigington](#), About.com Guide

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The Beginning of the Harvest:

At Lammas, also called Lughnasadh, the hot days of August are upon us, much of the earth is dry and parched, but we still know that the bright reds and yellows of the harvest season are just around the corner. Apples are beginning to ripen in the trees, our summer vegetables have been picked, corn is tall and green, waiting for us to come gather the bounty of the crop fields. Now is the time to begin reaping what we have sown, and gathering up the first harvests of grain, wheat, oats, and more.



Lammas is the first of three Pagan harvest festivals, and takes place on August 1, right around the time of the early grain harvests.

Image (c) Dougal Waters/Getty Images

This holiday can be celebrated either as a way to honor the god Lugh, or as a celebration of the harvest.

Celebrating Grain in Ancient Cultures:

Grain has held a place of importance in civilization back nearly to the beginning of time. Grain became associated with the cycle of death and rebirth. The Sumerian god Tammuz was slain and his lover Ishtar grieved so heartily that nature stopped producing. Ishtar mourned Tammuz, and followed him to the Underworld to bring him back, similar to the story of Demeter and Persephone.

In Greek legend, the grain god was Adonis. Two goddesses, Aphrodite and Persephone, battled for his love. To end the fighting, Zeus ordered Adonis to spend six months with Persephone in the Underworld, and the rest with Aphrodite.

A Feast of Bread:

In early Ireland, it was a bad idea to harvest your grain any time before Lammas -- it meant that the previous year's harvest had run out early, and that was a serious failing in agricultural communities. However, on August 1, the first sheafs of grain were cut by the farmer, and by nightfall his wife had made the first loaves of bread of the season.

The word *Lammas* derives from the Old English phrase *hlaf-maesse*, which translates to *loaf mass*. In early Christian times, the first loaves of the season were blessed by the Church.

Honoring Lugh, the Skillful God:

In some Wiccan and modern Pagan traditions, Lammas is also a day of honoring [Lugh, the Celtic craftsman god](#). He is a god of many skills, and was honored in various aspects by societies both in the British Isles and in Europe. [Lughnasadh](#) (pronounced Loo-NAS-ah) is still celebrated in many parts of the world today. Lugh's influence appears in the names of several European towns.

Celebrating Lammas Today:

Honoring the Past

In our modern world, it's often easy to forget the trials and tribulations our ancestors had to endure. For us, if we need a loaf of bread, we simply drive over to the local grocery store and buy a few bags of prepackaged bread. If we run out, it's no big deal, we just go and get more. When our ancestors lived, hundreds and thousands of years ago, the harvesting and processing of grain was crucial. If crops were left in the fields too long, or the bread not baked in time, families could starve. Taking care of one's crops meant the difference between life and death.

By celebrating Lammas as a [harvest holiday](#), we honor our ancestors and the hard work they must have had to do in order to survive. This is a good time to give thanks for the abundance we have in our lives, and to be grateful for the food on our tables. Lammas is a time of transformation, of rebirth and new beginnings.

Symbols of the Season

The [Wheel of the Year](#) has turned once more, and you may feel like decorating your house accordingly. While you probably can't find too many items marked as "Lammas decor" in your local discount store, there are a number of items you can use as decoration for this harvest holiday.

- Sickles and scythes, as well as other symbols of harvesting
- Grapes and vines
- Dried grains -- sheafs of wheat, bowls of oats, etc.
- Corn dolls -- you can make these easily using dried husks
- Early fall vegetables, such as squashes and pumpkins
- Late summer fruits, like apples, plums and peaches

Crafts, Song and Celebration

Because of its association with Lugh, the skilled god, Lammas (Lughnasadh) is also a time to celebrate talents and craftsmanship. It's a traditional time of year for craft festivals, and for skilled artisans to peddle their wares. In medieval Europe, guilds would arrange for their members to set up booths around a village green, festooned with bright ribbons and fall colors. Perhaps this is why so many modern Renaissance Festivals begin around this time of year!

Lugh is also known in some traditions as the patron of bards and magicians. Now is a great time of year to work on honing your own talents. Learn a new craft, or get better at an old one. Put on a play, write a story or poem, take up a musical instrument, or sing a song. Whatever you choose to do, this is the right season for rebirth and renewal, so set August 1 as the day to share your new skill with your friends and family.

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How To Hold a Lammas Harvest Ritual

By [Patti Wigington](#), About.com Guide

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In some Wiccan traditions, Lammas is the time of year when the Goddess takes on the aspects of the Harvest Mother. The earth is fruitful and abundant, crops are bountiful, and livestock are fattening up for winter. However, the Harvest Mother knows that the cold months are coming, and so she encourages us to begin gathering up what we can. This is the season for harvesting corn and grain, so that we can bake bread to store and have seeds for next year's planting.

Difficulty: Average

Time Required: Varied

Here's How:

1. This ritual celebrates the beginning of the harvest season and the cycle of rebirth, and can be done by a solitary practitioner or adapted for a group or coven setting. Decorate your altar with symbols of the season -- sickles and scythes, garden goodies like ivy and grapes and corn, poppies, dried grains, and early autumn foods like apples. If you like, light some [Lammas Rebirth incense](#).
2. Have a candle on your altar to represent the Harvest Mother -- choose something in orange, red or yellow. These colors not only represent the blaze of the summer sun, but also the coming changes of autumn. You'll also need a few stalks of wheat and an un-sliced loaf of bread (homemade is best, but if you can't manage, a store-bought loaf will do). A goblet of ritual wine is optional.

If your tradition requires you to [cast a circle](#), do so now.

3. Light the candle, and say:

*The Wheel of the Year has turned once more,
and the harvest will soon be upon us.
We have food on our tables, and
the soil is fertile.
Nature's bounty, the gift of the earth,
gives us reasons to be thankful.
Mother of the Harvest, with your sickle and basket,
bless me with abundance and plenty.*

Hold the stalks of wheat before you, and think about what they symbolize: the power of the earth, the coming winter, the necessity of planning ahead. What do you need help planning right now? Are there sacrifices you should be making in the present that will be reaped in the future?

4. Rub the stalks between your fingers so a few grains of wheat fall upon the altar. Scatter them on the ground as a gift to the earth. If you're inside, leave them on the altar for now -- you can always take them outside later. Say:

*The power of the Harvest is within me.
As the seed falls to the earth and is reborn each year,
I too grow as the seasons change.
As the grain takes root in the fertile soil,
I too will find my roots and develop.
As the smallest seed blooms into a mighty stalk,
I too will bloom where I landed.
As the wheat is harvested and saved for winter,
I too will set aside that which I can use later.*

Harvest

→ add a cast away

5. Tear off a piece of the bread. If you're performing this ritual as a group, pass the loaf around the circle so that each person present can take off a small chunk of bread. As each person passes the bread, they should say:

I pass to you this gift of the first harvest.

When everyone has a piece of bread, say:

*As the grain dies, it transforms to bread,
and brings us life through the winter.
We bless this bread, and it blesses us in return,
and we are thankful for the gift of the harvest.*

6. Everyone eats their bread together. If you have ritual wine, pass it around the circle for people to wash the bread down. Once everyone has finished their bread, take a moment to meditate on the cycle of rebirth and how it applies to your own life - physically, emotionally, spiritually. When you are ready, if you have cast a circle, close it or dismiss the quarters at this time. Otherwise, simply end the ritual in the manner of your tradition.

What You Need:

- A candle to represent the Harvest Mother
- Stalks of wheat
- A loaf of bread
- Ritual wine (optional)

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