



MAGICAL
CELEBRATION
of the
WINTER
SOLSTICE

by Hannah and Yve

Magical Celebration of
the Winter Solstice

words by Hannah Althea
art by Yve Lepkowski

welcome, solstice blessings!

This zine was created with love for the interaction between seasonal shifts when interplayed with magical craft, and how this can serve in creating intentional relationship to the self and our community, as well as weave luminescent threads of tradition in our lives, torches with which to engage with our gratitude for the land and rhythms of the earth.

Magical celebrations are a way of engaging with that place-time reverence. They feel like salve for the lulls of waiting for what's next to come...like when winter still drags on, and the sun of February just starts to warm. We can do this through working with the wheel...practiced by many modern pagans, drawn up from indigenous European traditions that were erased (or reworked into the modern, typically Christian, holidays as we know them today).

I hope that this zine provides comfort and inspiration all winter long. Merry Yule!

celebrating the turn



Celebrating the Turn of the Wheel

The Winter Solstice is one part of the annual cycles in the Pagan (and other adjacent traditions') Wheel of the Year. This Wheel begins with Samhain (pronounced Sow-en) the same day as Halloween, or Day of the Dead, on October 31st, the Pagan New Year. With the next turn of this seasonal Wheel of the Year, we meet Yule, or the Winter Solstice.

Turn of the wheel

And each following revolution of the wheel brings with it very obvious transformations: in Autumn's transformation into winter we can smell the decomposing leaves and cooling temperatures, scrape the night's frost from our windshields, sense the edges of the days closing in around us. There are also energetic shifts, how we ease into movement and action with the first warm weeks of early Summer, or turn inward with the shifting evening light.

This change can feel inviting to some, or uncomfortable to others, and perhaps quite often, both.

Celebrating each turn has allowed me to practice intentional change, to soak in its gradualness so in its best manifestations I can be grateful for these shifts (vibrant leaves, longer days), and in its worst, be mentally prepared (the dreariness of another grey day, the hottest days of the summer).

It provides consistency in a changing world, tender points of opportunity for aliveness in my body and community. I engage with these turns in myriad ways: through tending to the seasonal altar, home-tending magic, creating or cooking, and simply sitting in the soup of it all.

Celebrating the Winter Solstice/Yule

There are many long standing, ancestral, and global Winter Solstice traditions, more than I have the ability to portray in this short zine.

These traditions have deep mycorrhizal roots, long tendrils running deep deep into the wet damp groundwater earth, documented since the late stone age.

This year (2021) in the Northern Hemisphere, the Winter Solstice will occur on Tuesday December 21st.

Yule is a symbolic death and rebirth of the sun, the sun's partial absence resulting in the Global North's shortest day. Where I live, the day is 6 hours shorter than the peak of the Summer!

What results after that Shortest Day, is the Longest Night, when we can gather to burn a fire in gratitude for the Sun's ever-giving vitality, and when the day breaks, give it power and thanks for its solar return.

Like gathering star-flowered and yellow St John's Wort in the height of Summer's heat to turn it into a vibrant deep red oil for winter's lowest lows...we can tend to the Sun on that first winter's day, in hopes that its return at dawn will carry us through to sunnier and warmer days. In a climate that is changing, meeting extremes, this is just one way to notice what we now have, and say "thank you" to forces seen and unseen, all of whom facilitate this winter magic.

Winter is a time when most of the world - often excluding our own species - settles into this time of year with rest.

After the trees retreat their chlorophyll back into their root reservoirs and drop their leaves to then be decomposed by bacteria and fungi alike, they wait quietly for warmer days while animals lay dormant or rely on reserves from Autumnal abundance. The citrus fruits are at peak ripeness, in alignment with cooling temperatures that leave us susceptible to communicable illness.

How can we support our own human bodies and spirit in the energetic limitations that come with this time of year, after the celebrations meet their end?

How do we find and soften the edges? Maybe this can come in the form of buying Vitamin D supplements, making warm food and drinks (and sharing them), allowing rest, noticing the season as it is unfolding in front of you.

Working with the Wheel of the Year, and this time of year, can be a language and tool with which to seek out self-healing, self transformation.

Magic is real, but what we consider real life also carries its own magic.

Magical Traditions of the Winter Solstice

Yule Log magic:

I first learned about this magical practice when a friend at the time (thanks Emma!) invited me to her family holiday party, a mix of Norwegian traditions and Pagan practices blending to form a slew of magical family traditions much different from the traditional Christmas I grew up with. I was most inspired by their version of the Yule log, a large piece of firewood sitting on the table, that invited guests to write on pieces of paper what they wish to rid themselves of in the next year, and tie them to the log. Later, chime candles placed in a barrel filled with sand were lit in honor of what we hope to come. The practice of a burning yule log stems from the ancient tradition of gathering around a large bonfire or the fireplace hearth and letting it burn all through the night, and staying up alongside it.





If you're like me, you likely don't have access to large all-night bonfires of ancient tradition, or likely even a fireplace. If you have the ability to have a fire, you can have your own version of my favorite tradition: picking a log to feed the fire, with the intention of using it specifically for Yule.

You can carve figures on it, or have yourself and/or loved ones write winter intentions on paper and tie them to the log, then burn it, mimicking the Solstice bonfires of the Neolithic celebrations of century's past.

Gathering around the hearth, eating, playing games, engaging in magical or creative space, are also winter tend-ings.

yule log tarot spread!

A fun alternative I found (thanks Reddit user @CarneyVorous!) is a Yule Log Tarot spread. I included the original themes as articulated by them with my own shifts to reflect my own interpretation based on my magical practice, and I hope you feel empowered to do the same!



Log



Flame

Log: What to kindle now. I might ask: What is worth my time? What is worth investing my limited winter-time energy? What is serving me? I would possibly follow up to get even clearer.

Flame: What will provide warmth and light. Because warmth and light are interpretable in a number of ways, I might ask: what will honor compassion, love, and healthy boundaries in my life? How can I best honor myself and my relationships (that bring me energetic warmth and light)? Warmth and light can feel energetically opposite to the sometimes harshness of winter. Consider: what winter darkness do you struggle with (if any)? How can you support yourself and call in support from wise and loving ancestors, friends, etc. during this time?

Yvès beautiful tarot decks! "Anecdotes" deck here was inspired by Joanna Newsom's music!



Ash

Embers

Ash: What to leave behind. This one speaks for itself, but I might ask: what habit/relationship/practice hasn't been in service to my wisest¹ self?

Embers: What to (re)ignite in the New Year. The original author wrote "reignite" which I appreciate as a means of what might have been forgotten or useful practices in the last year. For me, these practices tend to ebb, flow, build, and spiral upwards. I'm a pretty consistent journal-keeper, particularly around magical milestones, so it's helpful to return to my previous curiosities about the upcoming year when beginning or ending these kinds of tarot check-ins. You could also seek to ignite something that hasn't been in regular practice before.

¹ Or whatever else you want to call in: your most creative, bravest, kindest, resonant of your ancestors or future generations to come

more magical traditions of the winter solstice

Altar-Tending Magic

Creating and tending to an altar is a long-standing tradition in magical practices, particularly in reverence to the seasons. This is one of my favorite ways to be present with the Solstice, to clean and renew my altar, with found and made objects (acorn tops, juniper, rosemary, dried flowers galore). I've included a picture of my winter altar from this season below!

Turning Inward

The instinct to turn inward during winter feels less like something I have to intentionally do, and a natural result of this time of year. Following my rhythmic desire to turn inward - not necessarily to be alone, but to spend time inside and be warm. Maybe this is why my magical and creative practice flows more easily this time of year.

Snow magic

Snow doesn't show up where I live until January or February, and it's usually light - barring the every-few-years giant snowstorm. Incorporate a handful of clean fresh snow & epsom salts & if you'd like, an herb satchet (try chamomile, lavender, rose but avoid mint) or lavender essential oil.

Bringing home the Evergreen tree!

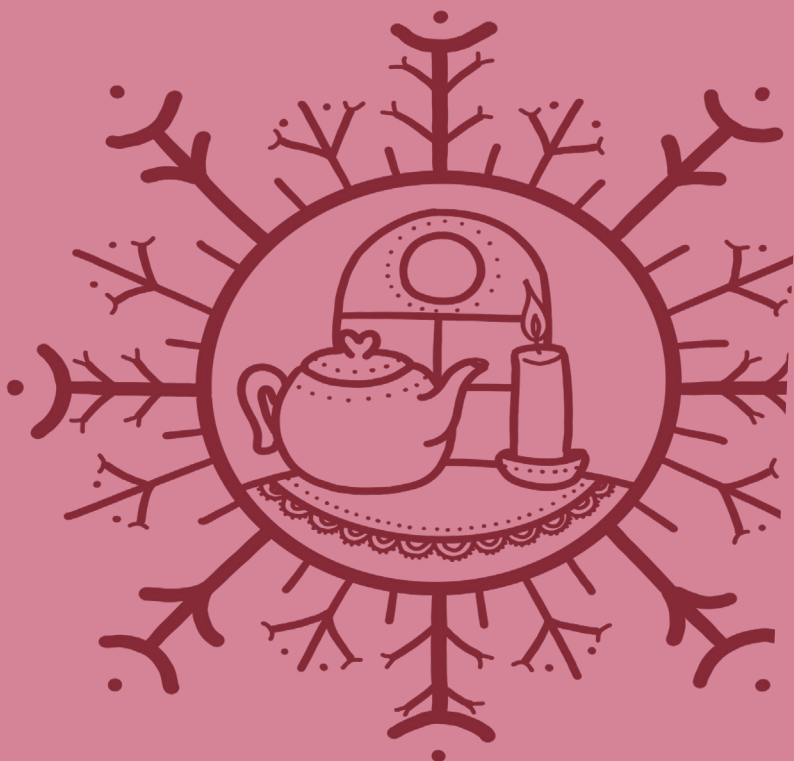
This practice is recognized in every household that celebrates Christmas. An originally pagan ritual that was condemned then eventually folded into the holiday (like many others). The Evergreen tree - or boughs of evergreen - was brought in the house as a symbol of life, of greenery that would return in the Sun's stronger months of summer. They would sometimes decorate these trees with objects that symbolized their New Years' wishes: like corn, coins, and nuts.



Winter-time Ritual

Ritual is an integral part of my magical practice and a tool for my own engagement with self and spirit, the wheels behind magical inertia.

Ritual for me, is defined by *Intention* (the motivation behind the ritual)² plus *Energy* (the power behind the practice of ritual) , it's working with time and/or place, with meaning through objects. It can look like meditating, like prayer (a loaded term, I engage with prayer in a non-Christian way, a means of articulating deepest felt desire or intention).



² Ritual described as energy plus intention is derived from Maenna Welti's Healing Wheel Workbook, as well as teachings by Daniel Foor

This Winter Solstice, a ritual for me might look something like:

1. Waking up before sunrise the morning after the longest night with tea in hand, walking to the wetlands preserved in the middle of the urban space I live in.
2. Walking with friends, with tea, in warm clothes, to greet the Sun with sleepy eyes, thank Sun's return after the Longest night.
3. Drinking tea, sitting on the land.
4. Depending on the ritualist practice (if any) of my friends, we may exchange blessings, food, or be in quietude together.

Or, if I were to do ritual by myself alongside the burning yule log of the night, I might dress in clothes I love that shift my focus, cast a circle, light a candle, burn some rosemary, do a tarot spread and journal, bring an offering of tea or food for passing and wise ancestors.

Whatever you do, if anything, it can be as simple as lighting a candle. For me, rituals are touch-points for self and spirit, and another way of engaging in the seasonal changes.

GINGERBREAD HOUSE ♡

Ingredients

3 tbsp shortening
1/2 cup brown sugar
3/4 cup dark molasses
1/4 cup cold water
3 1/2 cups flour
1/2 tsp allspice
1/2 tsp ginger
1/2 tsp cloves
1/2 tsp cinnamon
1 tsp baking soda,
dissolved in 1/2 tbsp
cold water

I learned this recipe from a lady named Rosemary in an evening class,

It was my first successful house! The trick is to use a gentle slope for the roof..



1. Sift the **flour** and **spices** together (helps make sure the spices are evenly distributed). Set aside.
2. In another bowl, thoroughly mix the **shortening, sugar, and molasses**.
3. Stir the **water** into the molasses mixture.
4. Add the flour mixture to the molasses mixture—slowly, if you don't want it to fly everywhere! An electric mixer is recommended, it gets very stiff in the end.
5. Stir in the **dissolved baking soda**.
6. Chill the dough for about an hour. It helps to divide it into smaller disks and wrap them individually.
7. Roll dough to 1/4" thick. Start in the middle, and stop just before the edge to help the thickness stay even.
8. Place dough on a sprayed or parchment-covered baking sheet, and cut out pieces for the house.
9. Bake at 350 F for 10-15 minutes.
10. If needed, trim while still hot—use a big knife to straighten edges while cookies are still on the trays.

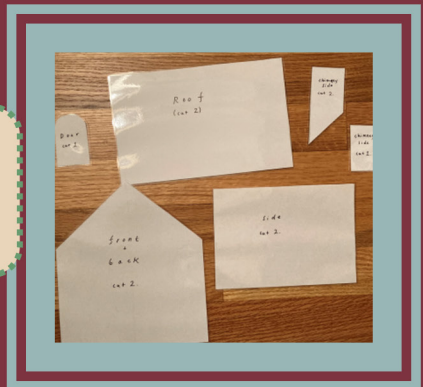
STAINED GLASS

1. Put some **colorful hard candies** in a bag.
2. [The fun part!] Smash with a mallet until in coarse pieces.
3. Place your fully-baked house pieces with windows on a baking sheet covered with parchment or foil.
4. Put a single layer of candy pieces in each window [try mixing different colors!].
5. Bake at a low temperature until the candy melts down flat. Let it cool thoroughly before removing from sheet.

ROYAL ICING (a.k.a., glue)

1. Beat **2 large egg whites** until stiff.
2. Add **2 teaspoons of lemon juice**.
3. Gradually beat in **up to 4 cups of powdered sugar**. Test the stiffness as you go. You want it to be firm enough to glue the house together, but not too stiff to pipe.
4. Divide icing and seal what you aren't immediately using—it hardens VERY quickly.
5. Pipe a line of icing to attach a wall of the house to a cardboard base. Add the other walls, one by one, then the roof, and so on.
6. Decorate!

Basic pieces for the house. A template wouldn't fit in this zine, but hopefully this gives an idea of the relative sizes!



Recipes for all winter long!

Hannah's Chicken Soup for a Cold Day and a Long Night

This is a recipe that came from tips from New York Times Cooking, my dear friend and soup-artist Frances, and trial and error. Like most soups, you can add and take away anything you'd like, and it's (mostly) not an exact science. I make it harder or easier on myself depending on how I'm feeling. I'm not putting exact numbers on most ingredients because it's more about ratios of how much of everything you like!

Grocery list:

2 Bone-in chicken thighs (you can do boneless too but bones might impart more flavor) - unless you don't eat meat!

Carrots

Potatoes

Mushrooms

Ginger

Celery (if you want, but I don't like celery)

Yellow or white onion

Garlic

A green like Kale, Collard Greens

Herbs (Like rosemary, sage, thyme)

Chicken stock - maybe you made it, maybe you get it in the carton (if so, get two 32 oz cartons). I have also had success with just adding water and the chicken juice and veggies imparted their own flavor!

And you can add whatever else you like in soup but that's all I generally get (although adding lemon or something with a lil spice after the soup is done can be yummy)

How I make it:

1. Get your soup pot or dutch oven. Add about a tablespoon of oil, put in the chicken thighs, and GENEROUSLY salt & pepper.
2. Cook chicken for 20ish minutes in the pot on medium heat (adjust heat as necessary, flip halfway through and keep an eye out for burning). Cover with lid.
3. While the chicken is cooking, cut up all your produce!
4. Once the chicken has cooked, take it out and let cool just enough for you to debone (if needed) and tear into pieces.
5. After taking the chicken out, add your aromatics: garlic, onion, and herbs on low-medium heat.
Let cook until onions are soft and sweaty and aromatic.
6. Add your veggies and soup stock! 7 cups for a stew-like experience, 8 cups for a soupier-soup.
7. Let it simmer for 45 minutes to an hour (or as long as you want) with the lid on! Taste as you go.
8. Add back in the chicken about 15 minutes before soup time.
That's it! Add lemon or more salt if you'd like! Get some tasty bread, and celebrate your soup success!

Herbal Oxymels for Brightening Winter Spirits

If you've ever drank some Fire Cider, you've had an oxymel! Oxymels are simple, friendly herbal tonic made of honey (or agave) and vinegar.

They are often warming and support the immune system* during seemingly long and illness-prone winters, and easy to make. It's an excellent manifestation of "food as medicine". I've included two recipes, one for the beginner and one for the more experienced herbalist. Enjoy!



A batch of fire cider and a nervine tincture I made!

* A note on herbs: Most of the listed herbs are generally considered safe, if you're ever unsure, check in with a trusted medical professional or consult some herb books for contraindications first!

For the beginner, Rosemary Gladstar's Famous Fire Cider:

INGREDIENTS:

One bottle of apple cider vinegar (I go for the Bragg's brand)

Equal parts Honey to ACV, or more, to taste

½ cup grated fresh horseradish root

½ cup or more fresh chopped onions

¼ cup or more chopped garlic

¼ cup or more grated ginger

Chopped fresh or dried cayenne pepper 'to taste,' meaning it should be hot, but not so hot you can't tolerate it. It is better to make it a little milder than too hot (you can always add more pepper later if necessary!)

Cut (and/or chop in a magic bullet/blender) your plant matter!

Put them in a standard size glass canning jar

Fill with apple cider vinegar, enough to cover the herbs

Place in a room-temp place, where you'll remember to occasionally shake it (shaking aids the maceration process)

After 3-4 weeks, strain & compost plant matter

Warm your honey, add to taste (a tablespoon or so? And go from there)

Put in a new bottle! Store in fridge/or cold pantry

Done! Should last quite a while. Take when you're feeling susceptible to catching a cold/flu, or while actively sick. For adults, take 1-2 tablespoons 2-3 times per day. Don't give to babies, please.

Hannah's Oxymel to Calm & Balance the Nerves

*(For the more experienced herbalist, or who is used to Fire Cider/
hates spicy stuff)*

INGREDIENTS:

1 bottle of Apple Cider Vinegar

Equal parts Honey (or more, to taste)

Herbs (amounts should be enough to fill the jar $\frac{1}{4}$ full:)

Lemon Balm

Nettles

Oat straw

Ginger

Hawthorn Berry (credit to my brilliant herbalist friend Frankie @
pashtushkaherbals for this addition)

Rosehips (and this one)

Lemon Peel

Follow the above instructions for the fire cider, with this plant matter instead! Feel free to adjust or omit anything (except for the ACV and honey). You can drink this whenever you want a mood pick-me-up or before bed or first thing in the morning, for adults, take 1-2 tablespoons 2-3 times per day. Don't give to babies, please.



Fire Cider Workshop hosted during City Repair's Permaculture Design Course that used to take place at the house I live in Portland, Oregon, October 2019.

PAPER DOLLS

Cut, mix, and match.

Attach clothing with tabs, or with glue—your choice!



SNOW MAIDEN

The Snow-Maiden (*Snegurochka*) is the daughter of Grandfather Frost (*Ded Moroz*) and Spring Beauty (*Vesna-Krasna*). She helps bring in the New Year.

HARLEQUIN

In the Winter, Harlequin leads the Wild Hunt across the stormy night skies. Listen for their parade, but be careful not to be swept away.





About Yve: I am a mixed media artist from Northern New Jersey, and I tried to channel the things I love most about Winter into the pictures for this zine. In general, I am inspired by folk art and tales, tapestries and textiles, iconic and religious art, and playing cards. I've made three tarot decks (Clown Town Tarot, Anecdotes Tarot, and Tarocchino Arlecchino), and I'm halfway through my MEd in Learning Design and Technology. Find me at stolen-thyme.com!

About Hannah: I did the writing for this zine, with the exception of Yve's wonderful Gingerbread House recipe! I'm excited and curious about how creative and magical craft can be tools for individual and collective liberation, how we can foster communities of mutual care, and how we can be deeply imaginative about deconstructing systems and weaving them into safe, just, healthy futures. I live with my sweet partner in Portland, Oregon. I like making things with my hands, getting mail, Joanna Newsom, a well steeped pot of tea, and Tuesdays. Send me an email if you wish: hannahjalthea@gmail.com.



