

OCTOBER

HEALTH HUB

2024

Halloween

CONNECT TO THE ENVIRONMENT

CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

A HISTORY OF HALLOWEEN

Connect to the cultures of the past and present. Delve into the history of Halloween and how the traditions of Halloween can prompt you to connect with your environment and maybe even the spirits from beyond.

THE ORIGIN STORY

Samhain (pronounced SAW-win) is where our story begins. Samhain is the Celtic New Year, signaling the end of the harvest and the ushering in of winter. It is observed from sunset on October 31st to sunset on November 1st. It was originally celebrated by the Celtic Pagans but is now most commonly celebrated as a Wiccan Holiday. While there are many types of Wiccans, they share the common belief that one should try to live in harmony with nature and 'Harm none' including, humans, animals, and nature. Nonetheless, the tradition of Samhain is the Halloween origin story.

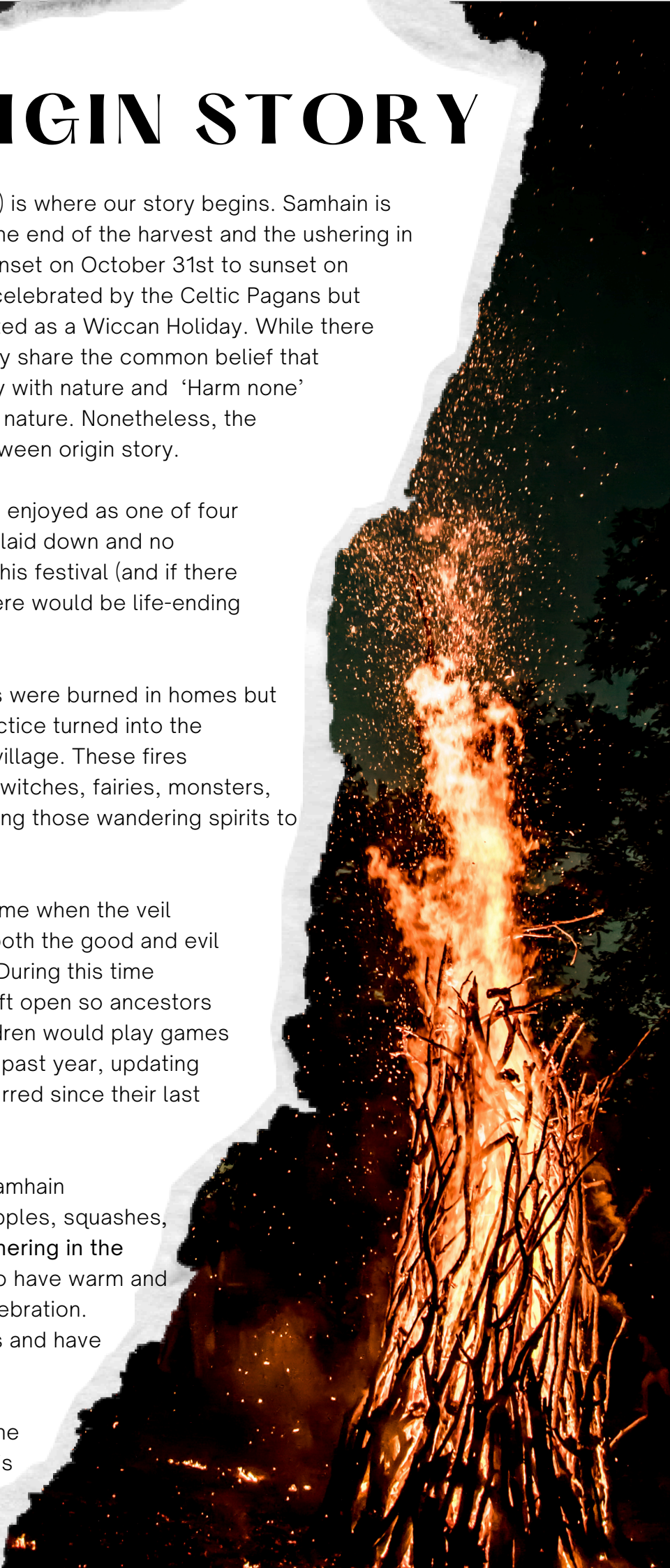
The celebration of Samhain was enjoyed as one of four fire festivals. All weapons were laid down and no crimes were committed during this festival (and if there were any crimes committed, there would be life-ending consequences).

In the early years, personal fires were burned in homes but during the Middle Ages that practice turned into the burning of large bonfires in the village. These fires were believed to help keep the witches, fairies, monsters, and evil spirits away, while guiding those wandering spirits to the afterlife.

Samhain was believed to be a time when the veil between worlds were thin and both the good and evil could walk freely among them. During this time doors and windows would be left open so ancestors could join in the festivities. Children would play games and adults would talk about the past year, updating the ancestors on what had occurred since their last visit.

Let us not forget all the good Samhain celebration food. A bounty of apples, squashes, and ciders would be served ushering in the winter months. It was tradition to have warm and yummy harvest foods at the celebration. It was also a time to bake cakes and have some sweet treats.

But what is Halloween without the pumpkin carving? Never fear, this tradition also has its roots in Samhain.



Jack-o-Lanterns

The tradition of Jack-o-lanterns began in the Middle Ages when Samhain participants would carve out turnips and string them up to ward off evil spirits. People would carve frightening faces in the turnips and place burning coal inside to give off light and ward the evil spirits away. In the years that followed, turnips would be replaced with pumpkins and instead of being strung up, they would decorate the ground of the community festivities.



“Double, double toil and trouble; Fire burn, and cauldron bubble”
— Macbeth, William Shakespeare

Costumes and Trick or Treating

The tradition of dressing up and going door to door is also derived from the traditions of the Samhain festivities.



In the days leading up to Samhain, community members would don costumes to try and confuse evil spirits. They would go door to door singing songs for their ancestors. Cakes were given as payment for the costumes and singing or ‘mumming’, as it was known.

What is Halloween without a little bit of mischief? During the days of Samhain festivities, harmless and small tricks were performed and then blamed on the faeries bringing the indulgence of mischief during the festival. Thus, we have our history of Trick or Treating.

All Saints Day and All Souls Day

In the 5th century, as Christianity spread and became mandated throughout Northern Europe, the Church attempted to do away with the pagan festival and holidays, Pope

“In masks and gowns we haunt the street and knock on doors for trick or treat.”
—Jack Prelutsky, “It’s Halloween”



Boniface, attempted to move the ritual of Samhain to May, but after that failed the Church took a different approach. In the 9th Century, Pope Gregory decided to simply co-opt Samhain and call it All Saints Day and All Souls Day on November 1st and 2nd, allowing it to become a religious holiday. October 31st came to be known as All Hallows Eve and then eventually, Halloween.

Keeping to similar traditions and beliefs as Samhain, All Saints Day honors the Catholic belief that there is a connection between those in Heaven and those on Earth and gives thanks to those who have passed on. The holiday became a time to renew current faith and beliefs.

Halloween in the United States of America

In the 19th century, as the Irish and Scottish began immigrating to the Americas in larger quantities, they brought with them the traditions of Samhain and All Hallows Eve. For many years, the holiday was only celebrated in certain towns; however, All Hallows Eve began making its way through the country as more people learned of the festival's traditions. American ghost stories became popular, like Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, Halloween would not be celebrated on a large scale until the 1950s with the taking off of Hollywood and the introduction of Halloween horror movies, kids' costumes, and of course mass-produced candy.

“There’s a little witch in all of us.”
—Alice Hoffman,
“Practical Magic”

Halloween and Wellness

So, now that you know the history and cultural aspects of Halloween, what could this possibly do with your wellness? Well, remember that intellectual wellness is an important part of your health journey, not only does it decrease your risk for Alzheimer's and dementia but it also makes for a much more interesting life.

So next time you see a Halloween themed trivia night you might find yourself with some extra knowledge. We also want you to use this new information to encourage you to find new ways to connect.



Halloween is a great excuse to socialize and connect with friends and neighbors. If you don't have kids trick or treating or aren't into the door-to-door hustle, consider trying out a Halloween tradition of the past. You could make some cultural connections by carving out some turnips (or pumpkins), drinking some cider, and eating yummy harvest foods.

Connect to your environment by opening your doors and windows and allow the cool brisk air inside or better yet, join in on Park Rx and get outside and come on some of our walks, hikes and scavenger hunts.

If you want to find ways connecting outside of work, consider hosting a bon fire and connecting with nature and history.

If you need even more ideas to connect with friends and family, try dressing up (no matter your age) and telling stories of the last year. The options are plentiful but our goal is to help you find ways to connect to the environment and to those around you, using the history of the past to spur new ideas for your future.



Homemade Apple Cider



Ingredients

- 10–12 medium apples (assorted types), quartered
- 2 oranges, quartered (also peeled, if you would like your cider less tart*)
- 4 cinnamon sticks
- 1 tablespoon whole cloves
- optional extra seasonings: 1 teaspoon whole allspice, 1 whole nutmeg, and/or 1 inch fresh ginger
- 16 cups water, more or less
- 1/2 cup sweetener (I recommend brown sugar or maple syrup)

Instructions

1. **Combine your ingredients in a stockpot.** Add the apples, oranges, cinnamon, cloves and (optional) extra seasonings to a large stockpot. Cover with water, leaving about an inch or two of space at the top of the stockpot.
2. **Simmer.** Heat the cider over high heat until it reaches a simmer. Then reduce heat to medium-low, cover and simmer for about 2 hours, or until the apples are completely soft.
3. **Mash the apples and oranges.** Using a potato masher or a wooden spoon, take a minute to mash all of the apples and oranges against the side of the stockpot to release more of their flavors. **Then cover and simmer for 1 more hour.**
4. **Strain.** Using a [fine-mesh strainer](#) or a [cheesecloth](#), strain out all of the solids (apples, oranges, spices), pressing them against the strainer to release all of their juices. Discard the solids.
5. **Sweeten.** Stir in your desired amount of sweetener, to taste.
6. **Serve warm.**

Notes

*Oranges: Peeling the oranges first will reduce the tartness of the cider, if you would like.

*credit: www.gimmesomeoven.com