

# Whispers from the Willow



Willow Moon Herbals *Quarterly Newsletter*

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## Winter Solstice/Yule

Perhaps no other earth holiday comes laden with as much baggage as the Winter Solstice ~ more commonly known as Yule ~ because it is both a harrowingly dark time and one that is also filled with radiant splendor. The slow, downward spiral of increasing darkness since Mabon is halted by the re-emergence of the sun. From this point forward, glowing sunlight will increase by precious minutes each day.

For many of us in the weeks and months since Samhain, this can be a 'dark' time because daylight is something that seems merely to be glimpsed through non-opening office windows as we leave for work and return home again in darkness. Undeniably, this is a difficult time of year for many folks who con-

tinuously try to maintain the hectic pace of each day when our bodies and minds yearn to be less active. This is reflective of this fallow time for the Earth ~ the less hardy plants have died back as the roots have withdrawn their vital nutrients, the trees have released their leaves, the earth is mostly barren in a motionless beauty; water becomes stone in a world whitened by ice and snow.

Our bodies and minds instinctively strive to adopt a similar, less active rhythm, so one might try to follow that example and spend some time being quiet, going inside, doing less (!) and conserving energy.

The return of the sun on the Winter Solstice is a joy-filled festival celebrated in almost all cultures and spanning millennia.



White Pine graced with a blanket of new winter snow. Sussex County, NJ

Festive celebrations, and rituals encompass everything from stories about the rebirth of light told by elders around hearth fires where communities huddled for warmth in this dark season to the present-day consumerism of "Holiday/Christmas shopping".

In many of these traditions, the sun is represented by a male or female deity reborn into youthfulness. *"Ancient nativity feasts honored the birth of sun gods and goddesses such as*

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## Pomander Balls

Pomander balls go back to the 15th century, when they served as natural air fresheners for closets or drawers.

For pomanders to hang on the tree, use smaller lemons, apples or limes—larger fruits can be made

and placed in bowls throughout the house. Using a large needle, make holes all over the skin of your fruit about 1/4" apart. Place whole cloves in these holes, then roll the pomanders in a mixture of ground cinnamon, allspice, cloves and orris

root. Place the pomanders in a bowl with spices, turning daily to coat. When dry, place the pomander in a circle of lace, gathered with a ribbon at the top or make a ribbon loop directly on the pomander to hang. ☾



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**Willow Moon Herbals** is a women-owned enterprise dedicated to maintaining wellness, health and healing. We are Certified Herbalists, and our approach is rooted in the Wise Woman Tradition: attaining wholeness through supportive compassion, the use of basic, simple ritual, and the gracious assistance of our common, green plant herbal allies. We offer herbal consultations as well as educational herbal workshops, our ongoing Botanical Awareness Series, and much more. Visit our website for more information about us and our products. ☾

### Winter Solstice/Yule, *continued*

*Attis, Helia and Juno Lucina. Today in Sweden, vestiges of Lucina's worship remain; on Winter Solstice a young girl is chosen as Lussibruden (Lucy Bride), crowned in a headdress of candles, and celebrated as she-who-rekindles-the-sun.*

*The Christian church placed Jesus' birthday on December 25 to link Christ's mass with the solstice nativity celebrations already in place. Prior to the Roman emperor's acceptance of Christianity, Christmas day was observed by the Romans as Juvenalia, "day of the children", in which folks of all ages were given license to behave as mischievously as*

*youngsters. Children were honored as seeds of the future through the bestowing of gifts such as bells, hats, socks and lucky talismans.*

*The Jewish tradition celebrates the miracle and wonder of light in its Hannukah festival, which commemorates the Has-moneans' victory over the Greeks when a single day's worth of oil kept the eternal flame burning bright for eight days.*

*The Pagan tradition centers on the ritual use of trees: during the twelve-day mid-winter festival, the Holly King (Lord of the Waning Year) relinquishes sovereignty to the Oak*

*King (Lord of the Waxing Year). The Yule log, hewn of oak, burns for the whole festival, and the ashes are blended into the newly tilled earth in the spring.*

*Perhaps the most cherished tradition of today's holiday season is the decorating of the evergreen tree. The custom of lighting a living pine tree was brought to England in 1840 by Prince Albert, the German bridegroom of Queen Victoria.\**

*\*Source for "italics quotes" are loosely adapted from Judith Berger's "Herbal Rituals".☾*