

Seasonal Guides

June

MIDSUMMER

Newsletter Subscriber Exclusive Monthly Guide

Seasonal Guide : June 2018

Midsummer

By Jenn Campus

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Midsummer

A Celebration of Life At Its Fullest

Midsummer is the celebration of the summer solstice, which traditional societies have marked with festivities and revelry since the beginning of time.

The word “solstice” is from the Latin word solstitium, which literally means “sun stands still.” The date when the sun reaches its zenith and we experience the longest day of the year usually occurs between June 21-23 (or December 22-23 in the southern hemisphere) but many cultures celebrate Midsummer on June 24 & 25.

Summer solstice is generally recognized as a celebration of the dark giving way to the fullness of light; the triumph of light over darkness and life over death. Usually the eve of the solstice and the day of the solstice are celebrated. Sometimes this holiday is called Litha, from the reconstructed Germanic calendar which corresponds to June and July.

Others say that the monk Bede named “Litha” in his writings as the Latin name for both June and July in ancient times. In catholic countries it is celebrated as Saint John’s Day, after the martyr Saint John the Baptist. It is also celebrated by native north American tribes, and was a major holy day in ancient Egypt.

So no matter what continent your ancestors hail from, it is very likely that they also marked and celebrated this ancient festival day, and many cultures still celebrate it in some form or another.





Cultural Celebrations

Ancient Greece

In ancient Greece the summer solstice marked the start of the new year, and began the one month countdown to the Olympic Games. The ancient Greeks also celebrated the festival of Kronia at this time, to honor the god Cronus, God of agriculture. This celebration included feasts and games, and for once, slaves could participate in the festivities along with everyone else, often being served by their masters, so it was a time of equality and balance.

Roman Celebrations

The Romans celebrated the Goddess of marriage and childbirth, Juno during the month of June, it is fairly obvious that the month is named after her. This is why weddings are so popular in June, it harkens back to the dominion of Juno during this month and so considered an auspicious time for healthy and fertile unions.

Vestalia, a religious festival honoring the Goddess of the hearth, Vesta was also celebrated around the summer solstice. During Vestalia, for a short window married women could enter the temple of Vesta, sacred to the Vestal Virgins to leave offerings to the goddess in exchange for blessings on their families.

Celtic Celebrations

The Celts were were an Indo-European people during the Iron Age and in Medieval Europe who spoke Celtic languages and had cultural similarities. It is a wrong assumption that they only lived in what is known today as the British Isles. The current accepted theory is that the Celtic homeland was actually in modern day Austria, and that their culture actually spread throughout much of modern Europe. However, today most of the Celtic languages and traditions are currently centralized in Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Brittany, Cornwall and the Isle of Mann.



We don't really know how the ancient Celts celebrated this day since their traditions were passed down orally. The only surviving texts about it were written by Christian monks, but all accounts seem to have bonfires in common. However there is also a clear connection to water.

Since the 4th century and well into the 20th century many European traditions, to celebrate the solstice, include setting a wheel on fire and then letting it roll down to a body of water to snuff out the flames. Folklorists believe this may stem from the fact that although the Solstice is the longest day, it also marks the moment that the sun's power begins to wane. The fiery wheel represents the flaming sun and when the water snuffs out the fires, it signifies the sun's waning power. Summer solstice was historically a time to banish evil spirits and open up a path towards light and abundance which for the Celts meant a good harvest. Feasting and dancing took place and bonfires were also lit in celebration to represent the power of the light banishing the darkness.

Northern and Central European Celebrations

Since much of Scandinavia (the areas above the arctic circle) experience full days of light around the summer solstice, in contrast to full days of dark around the winter solstice, it is easy to understand why Midsummer celebrations still hold an important role in those countries since the sun is ever present at this time.

Just as for the Celts, bonfires were (and still are) the main attraction. It was thought that bonfires, boosted the sun's energy which would in turn guarantee a good harvest in the fall by blessing the rest of the growing season.

In Denmark, Estonia, and Finland bonfires are still lit next to large bodies of water on the eve of June 23rd.

Neopagan Celebrations

In many neopagan traditions there is an enduring legend of the battle between the Oak King and the Holly King. These two rulers fight for supremacy as the Wheel of the Year turns each season. The Holly King wins in the dark time of the year, while the Oak King rules the light time. It is commonly believed that the ashes from a Midsummer bonfire can protect one from misfortune and that if the ashes are spread on your garden you can expect a bountiful harvest.

Saint John's Day

In the 4th century the christian church designated June 24 as the feast day of the martyr St. John the Baptist, and the observance of St. John's Day begins the evening before, known as St. John's Eve in many Catholic countries. This date was chosen because it is exactly 6 months before the celebrated birthdate of Jesus Christ.

It is interesting from a pagan perspective that Jesus's conception and birth took place on the 'growing days', and John the Baptist's was during the 'lessening days'. St. John himself proclaims that 'he must increase; but I must decrease' (John 3:30). The sun begins to diminish at the summer solstice and eventually begins to increase at the winter solstice.

Bonfires are lit on the eve of Saint John's Day, and it is a custom in many areas to roll a flaming wheel. It is said that the fires were lit to drive away Dragons who were out on this night poisoning wells and streams, or to protect revelers from witches and other evil spirits.

But it really seems more like a throwback to pagan times and the Oak King and the Holly King.



The Wearing of Flowers

According to pagan folklore, evil spirits would abound on the summer solstice. In order to ward off these malevolent energies, people would wear protective garlands of specific herbs and flowers.

Certain plants, especially St. John's Wort, but also roses, rue, verbena, and lavender when picked on the eve of the Solstice had certain magical and healing properties that they would not have if picked at any other time.

The Fairy Folk

Faeries love music, sweets, drink, and dancing activities which are common during Midsummer, which draws them out and into the fray. Therefore, modern Pagans leave out food and offerings for them on the eve of the solstice. On this evening, if you are very lucky, you might catch a glimpse of the faeries, who often reveal themselves to humans on this night.





How to Celebrate Midsummer

In northern European countries it is common to begin summer holidays at this time, which are generally associated with going to the countryside. So getting out into nature is the most popular way to celebrate no matter what age. Here are some fun ways to get out in nature and enjoy the spirit of ancient Midsummer celebrations!

Host a Bonfire...or a Barbecue

This one is a no-brainer, if you can't do a bonfire, try hosting a backyard barbecue for family and friends. Summer is a great time for grilling and barbecues are always festive. Check out the recipes below for menu inspiration! If you have little ones let them say goodnight to the sun, and celebrate twilight with sparklers, storytelling, music and dancing.

Look for Fireflies

Fireflies are magical creatures and are often believed to be faeries in disguise. Children and adults alike enjoy watching them light up the fields and yards on summer evenings. Encourage your littles to put out an offering of food from your Midsummer feast or something sparkly.

Go For an Herb Walk

Kids love to learn about the nature around them. I started teaching my daughter about the culinary and medicinal plants on our land by the time she was two years old. She didn't understand everything then, but she is not almost five and she always asks me if she can eat a plant we find, or what we can do with it.



Try finding Saint John's Wort which is in full bloom in warmer climates and budding in the colder. We make a Saint John's Wort oil from the red buds called "Monster Repellent". Rub it on your child's forehead at night before they go to sleep if they experience night terrors or are afraid of the dark. (See recipe below).

See if you can find roses flowering, also a prevalent plant this time of year. To learn more about roses, their history and their culinary and medicinal uses, check out my blog post [The Many Uses For Rose Petals](#). The post includes a recipe for and the use of Rose and Cardamom Infused Sugar, as well as a fun ritual that uses the sugar.

Celebrate the Goddesses of the Summer Solstice

June is ruled by the Roman Goddess, Juno. So this is also an ideal festival to celebrate an engagement, handfasting or marriage, since Juno is associated with marriages and family.

Or, if you want to honor Vesta during the time of the Vestalia, bake a cake as an offering and ask the Goddess to bless your family. Do a ritual cleansing of your house, then decorate your home with flowers.

Make an Altar

Create an altar for your home using the symbols of the season- sun symbols, candles, seasonal fruits and vegetables. Use a bright yellow or orange candle to represent the sun on your altar, and hang solar symbols around your house.

Place sun catchers in your windows to bring the power of the sun indoors. Cleanse any of your altar or other magical tools in the bright light of the solstice sun to charge it with that powerful energy.

Recipes

Grilled Salmon

Salmon was an important animal to the Celts, it was regarded as a keeper of knowledge. The secret to perfectly grilled salmon is using the “no-flip” method. Plan on about 6 ounces of salmon per person and grill individual fillets or cook a whole side of skin-on salmon at once.

Ingredients:

Salmon fillets, skin-on (about 6 ounces per person)

Olive oil

Fine sea salt

Freshly ground black pepper

Lemon wedges

Method:

1. Make sure your grill is clean. Heat the grill to medium-high.
2. While the grill heats, prepare the salmon. Rinse each fillet, then pat them dry. Brush the salmon skin with oil and sprinkle both sides with salt and pepper to season.
3. Brush the cooking grate with oil. Place the salmon, skin-side-down, on the grill and cover the grill with a lid. Cook, undisturbed, until the salmon just starts to release its fat and you can see that the whole outside of the fillet is a lighter pink. If you really want to check, stick a knife in the fattest part and see that it is opaque in the center, but not raw.

The internal temperature should be 140 F degrees. It will take about 8-10 minutes for most 1-inch-thick fillets. Use a spatula to remove the fish from the grill. Serve with lemon wedges.



Grilled Vegetables with Sherry Vinegar and Honey Marinade

I like to amplify the natural sweetness of the vegetables by adding sweet elements to my marinade, like sherry wine vinegar and honey. I also add spicy herbs, like mint and oregano and some acidity from lemon juice and za'atar spice to counter the sweet tastes, this creates a flavor that is well rounded but unique.

Ingredients:

For Marinade:

- ¼ cup sherry vinegar
- ⅓ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- 2 teaspoons honey
- 2 tablespoons fresh mint
- 2 tablespoons fresh cilantro
- 1 tablespoons Za'atar
- 1 teaspoon fresh oregano

- 1 large eggplant
- 4 small zucchini
- 4 small yellow squash
- 4 bell peppers

Method:

1. Whisk marinade ingredients together in a bowl and set aside while you slice the vegetables. Slice eggplant, zucchini, and summer squash ¼ inch thick, lengthwise. Cut the bell peppers in half.
2. Preheat grill and wait until it reaches 350 F. While grill is preheating, using a marinade brush, brush both sides of each vegetable slice and place

in a dish to take out to the grill.

3. Once the grill is ready, place as many vegetables as you can on the grill. Keep them orderly so it is easy to flip several slices at the same time. Generally I can only flip one large eggplant slice at a time, and about 3 slices of squash or smaller slices of eggplant. Reserve any marinade in the dish.
4. Grill on the first side for about 2-3 minutes, then flip. Grill on the second side for another 2-3 minutes. Sometimes, the thinner slices are finished by now with lovely grill marks on both sides. If not flip once more for another minute or two. If there are remaining vegetables, repeat the process for these.
5. Place vegetables on a serving platter and pour the remaining marinade on top.

Can be served hot or cold.

Grilled Cantaloupe

Melons are in season, and are fast to cook on the grill. Serve pieces of grilled cantaloupe with honey sweetened yogurt and cinnamon.

Ingredients:

- 1 cantaloupe, seeded, peeled and cut into 8 slices
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ½ cup plain Greek yogurt
- ⅓ cup honey
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon



Method:

1. Preheat grill to medium.
2. Rub melon slices with oil. Grill, covered, for about 4 minutes, turning once after 2 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, combine yogurt and honey in a medium bowl. Top melon with yogurt and sprinkle with cinnamon to serve.

Sparkling Ginger Lemonade

Spicy ginger and bright yellow lemons remind us of the heat and color of the sun. This lemonade is a refreshing drink to enjoy with your grilled party food! Add a shot of vodka or rum for the adults, if you like. Makes 2 quarts.

Ingredients:

- 4** cups water
- 1/2** cup honey
- 4** tablespoons minced fresh ginger
- 4** cups sparkling water or club soda, chilled
- 2** cups freshly squeezed lemon juice

Method:

In a medium saucepan, combine water, honey, and ginger. Bring to a boil, then remove from heat, cover, and let steep for 10 minutes. Place a mesh strainer over a bowl and strain liquid, then discard the ginger. Transfer liquid to a pitcher and cool completely; store in the refrigerator. When you are ready to serve, stir in the sparkling water and lemon juice. Serve over ice.

Saint John's Wort Oil AKA Monster Repellent

How to Forage Saint John's Wort

You must use fresh Saint John's Wort to make this remedy. There are many different species of St. John's wort. Crush the buds or flowers with your fingers and if they turn your fingers red, they are good to use for this purpose. You can find Saint John's wort in sunny fields, but I most often find it where there are damp areas in the field. The yellow flowers look like stars with 5 petals and have many stamens protruding. I prefer to make the oil by using only the reddish buds before they have opened. However you can also use the flowers themselves, if they produce a red stain on your fingertips when crushed.

What You Need to Make the Oil

About 1 ½ cups of Saint John's Wort buds/ and or flowers

Half pint canning jar with lid

Coconut oil (or olive oil)

How to Make the Oil

Pick the buds and/or flowers from the plant and place them in a half-pint canning jar. Pack the buds in the jar, filling it almost to the top. Then fill the jar with oil, put the lid on and lightly shake it. I prefer using coconut oil because it hardens in colder weather and is therefore easier to use as a salve, but olive oil works just as well even though it will remain liquid. Then place the jar in the sun. Check the oil every day for several weeks to make sure all plants parts are below the surface of the oil. After several weeks, and the oil has turned to a brilliant dark red, strain off the flowers. The resulting oil can be used as is. Keep the oil in a dark, cool location.

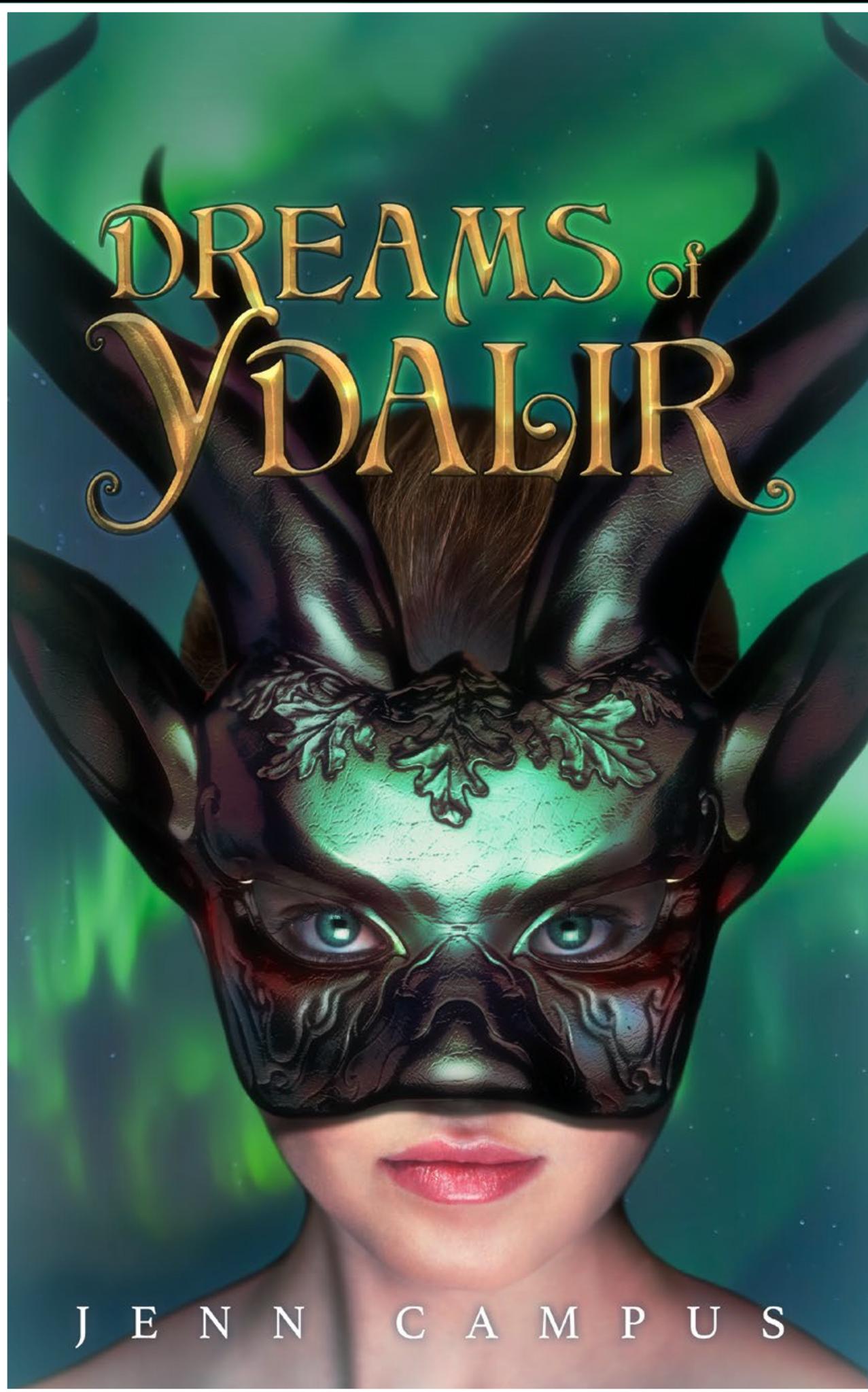
You can also use Saint John's Wort oil for:

Minor burns

As a balm for sore muscles and joints

Cuts and scratches





Dreams of Ydalir

I am in the process of writing (and my husband, world renowned fantasy artist and illustrator is creating art for) [Dreams of Ydalir](#), an illustrated historical fantasy fairy tale based on European folklore.

Although some may look at the genre of fantasy as fluff, this story is far from it.

It is folklore. If you enjoy these guides (and I really hope you do!), you enjoy folklore.



I have been writing this story for the past 4 years and working with the material for the past 8.

It has become a part of me, or maybe better said, comes from a deep place inside of me that I cannot be separated from and it is very steeped in a love and respect for the natural world and the wild places.

MESSAGES FROM THE GODS

There are several sections in the story from the perspective of particular gods from the northern european pantheon of whom not much is known today.

One of them is **Wuldor**, also known as Ullr, God of the Hunt, and the other is **Elen of the Ways**, an ancient pan-european Deer Goddess.

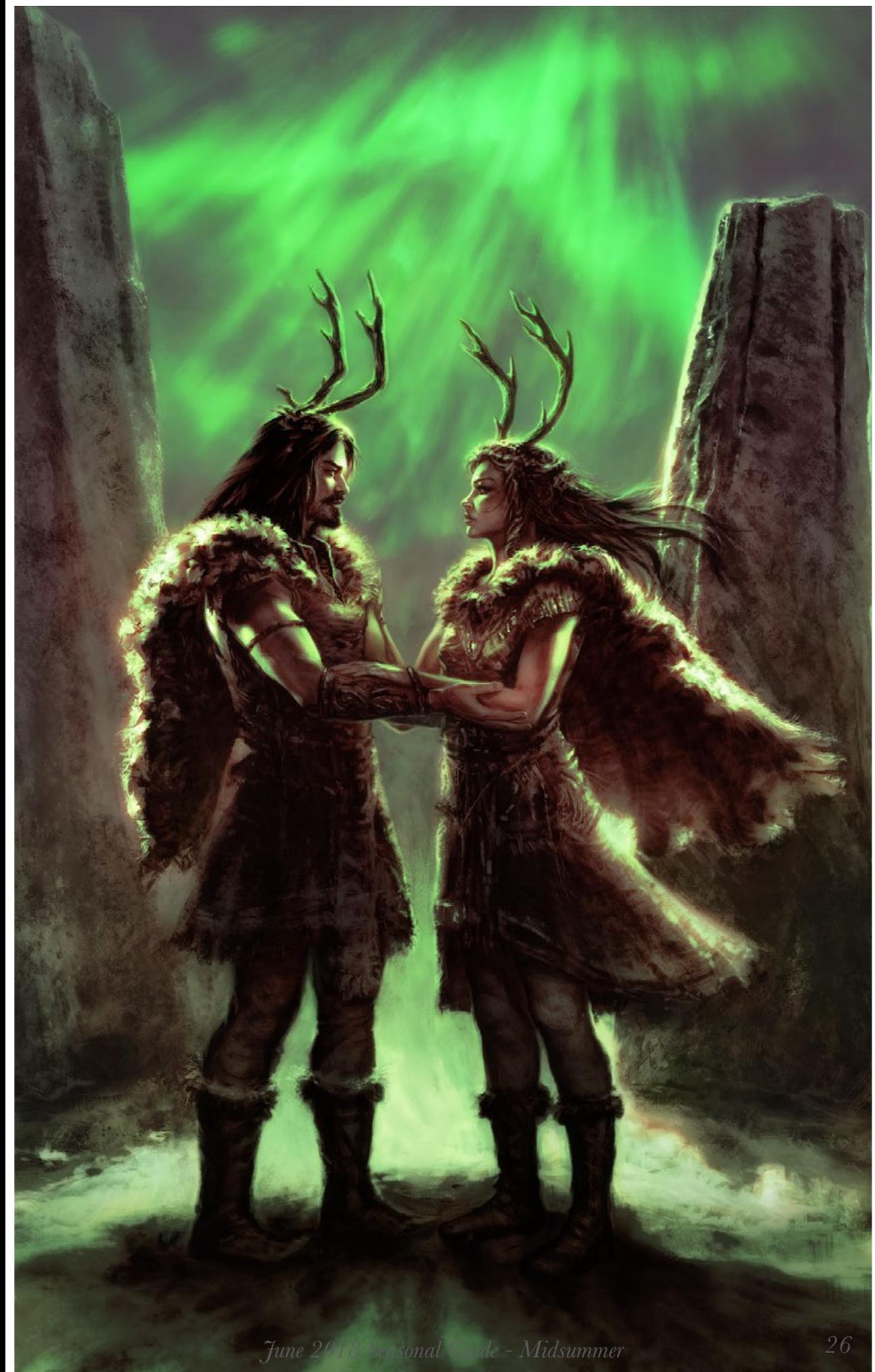
They are both stewards of the green places of midgard (earth) and beyond, and they have many valuable lessons for us, as humans that are in a similar vein to what you've read in this guide.

The parts of the story told from their perspective is a result of years worth of personal meditation sessions and devotional work with these figures and knowledge that is near and dear to me.

ELEN OF THE WAYS

I have seen a strong resurgence of interest in Elen of the Ways over the past year, and it validates my own experiences that she really wants her story to be told, and she is ever tied to the wild places.

If these types of subjects interest you, you will love my story. Please check it out and [subscribe here](#) to receive monthly issues of the story.



Thank you!

If you know someone else who might enjoy this type of guide, please tell them about my website and invite them to sign up for the newsletter so they can receive their own copy.

Thanks,
Jenn

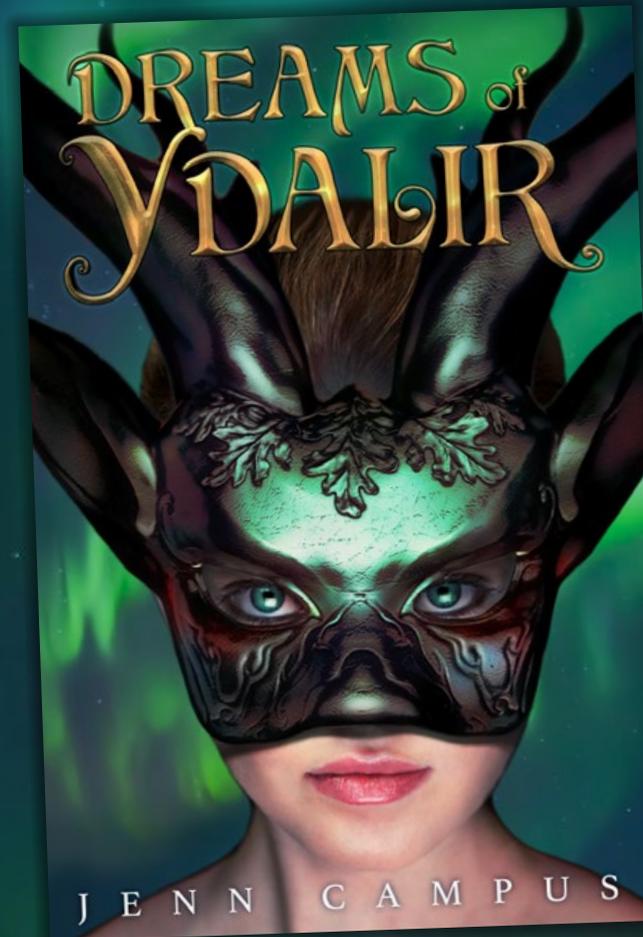
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And if you need more help around celebrating this season, feel free to get in touch with me, or start a discussion on my [Facebook Page](#).

Thank you!

NORSE MYTHOLOGY MEETS MISTS OF AVALON



A COMING OF
AGE TALE AND
THE UNTOLD
LOVE STORY OF
THE GODS, ULLR
(WULDOR) AND
ELEN OF THE
WAYS, AS WRITTEN
BY THE FEY-
TOUCHED HUMAN
FAWN.

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About the Author

FOLKLORIST, MODERN PEASANT, CULINARY ANTHROPOLOGIST, MATRIARCH, KITCHEN WITCH, MYSTIC, HEARTH KEEPER

I am a two time Amazon bestselling author. As an expat living on the ancient and enchanted Italian island of Sardinia, I am inspired by the days of yore. I long for simpler times and quiet joys. As a Sagittarius I am hardwired to seek out truths. I enjoy food, art and cultural traditions. I am deeply drawn to creating personal traditions and ritual and through the art of writing, I am able to share with others long held traditions, different perspectives and practical modern tips for navigating this often chaotic and unsettling world. In this global world, traditions can help everyone to feel that they have a place to come “home” to, even if that place is not a physical location.

In my writing I look for ingenious ways to bring together my favorite fiction and nonfiction genres which are fantasy/mythology, culinary arts, ritual, the magical arts, history and the many uses of herbs. I am passionate about the wild places, where my food comes from and sustainability, as well as the stories, foods, culture and mythology of Europe.

If you love deep, introspective cultural experiences, connecting with nature and preparing delicious food, then make yourself a warm drink and pull a chair up to my proverbial hearth. I will tell you fantastical stories or talk about practical skills for everyday life, that allow us to tap into the ways of our ancestors who often made much with little. There are riches to be had through simple joys and experiences, like a delicious meal or a day of foraging with the family. I want to share this with others. Life can be full, even if your wallet is not.

I have a degree in Anthropology from Hampshire College in Amherst, MA. I studied culinary arts at Sterling College in Craftsbury, VT. I have taught cooking classes to children and adults, alike. I have traveled extensively to and lived in Italy, Norway and the Navajo Reservation in Arizona. I also have a decade worth of experiences creating rituals and traditions for my family and myself. I have written two books on the subject of bringing more ritual into your life to help you connect with family, nature and where you are in the present moment.

