

Seasonal Guides

January 2018

The Heart of Winter

Jenn Campus Author

Newsletter Subscriber Exclusive Monthly Guide

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Seasonal Guide : January 2018

The Heart of Winter

By Jenn Campus

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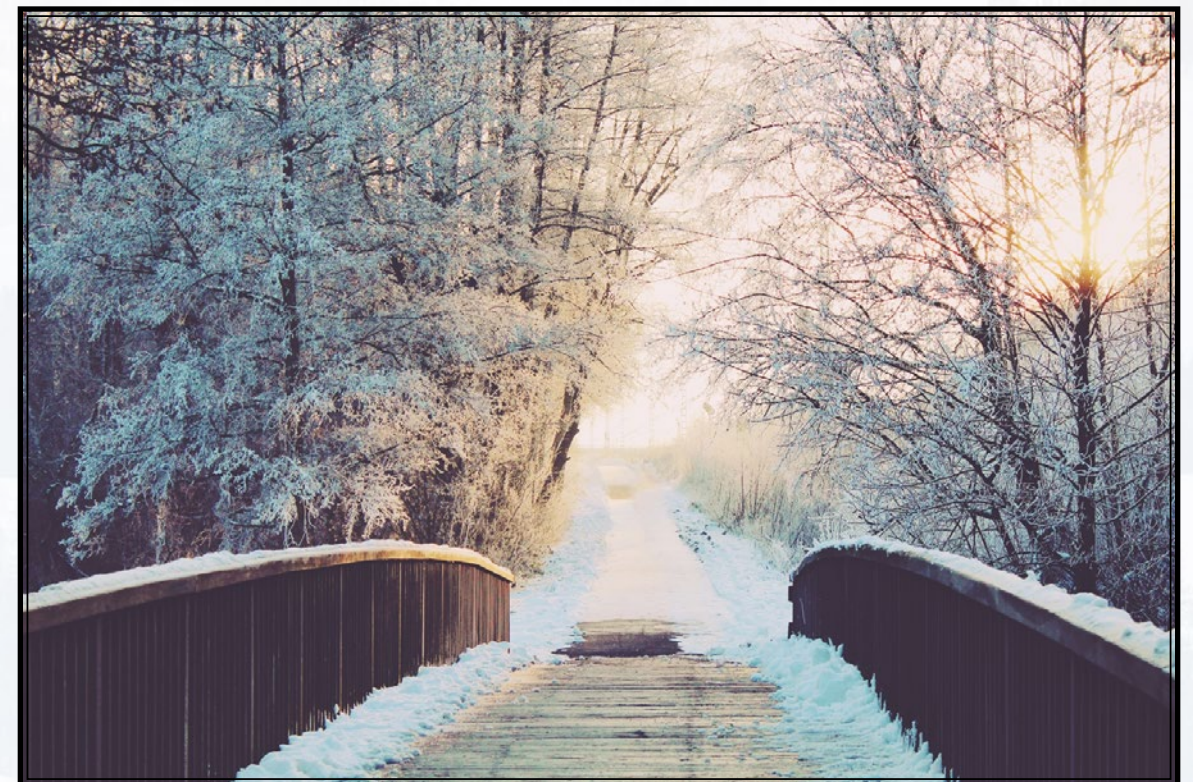


Introduction

January is the heart of winter, in between beats. The time after the storm of the holiday season, when you can really connect with the silence, and the stillness.

Did you enjoy implementing some elements of and cultivating a little hygge in your life in December? No reason to stop now. In fact you might need it more than ever. Remember that hygge is year-round. By finding ways to slow down, you now have some tools in your toolbox to create cozy moments, so keep finding moments of comfort when you need to.

If you aren't quite ready to let go of the magic of the holiday season, I am with you! Good thing we have La Befana or the Feast of the Epiphany as it is known to Christians as a way to extend it for a few more days by honoring a few more spirits with ancient roots.



La Befana

In Italy before Babbo Natale, or Santa as he is known in English, arrived on the scene (after WWII), there was La Befana, and she is still celebrated here today. She is a witch who flies around on her broomstick on the night of January 5, the eve of the holiday known as “La Feste dell’Epifania” in Italy.

But everyone around here just calls the celebration “Befana”, after the witch. She comes in the night and puts dried and fresh fruit, nuts and other edible treats (coal too, if you were naughty) in children’s stockings hung on the hearth.

All Italian children know her nursery rhyme:

*“La Befana vien di notte
con le scarpe tutte rotte
col cappello alla romana
viva viva la Befana!”*

*“The Befana comes at night
wearing old broken shoes
dressed in Roman (hat) style
long live la Befana!”*



Rooted in Folklore

How did the Italians come to celebrate a witch dressed in rags? The Christian telling of the story is that when the three magi were on their way to see the baby Jesus, they stopped at her house to rest from their travels, because she was known in the village to keep her home very clean.

When they woke the next morning they asked her to join them in their journey, but she said she had too much housework to do.

Later she changed her mind and set out with her broom to look for the baby herself, but can't find him, so she continues to search. Every year on this night she honors her search for him by giving gifts to all children.

But as most Christian feast days, there are pagan roots to the history of the Befana. Some say she is derived from a Strina, a Roman goddess known for purification and renewal, just as the new year is often a time of resolutions, and starting anew.

Strina was given offerings around this time of year, called Bastrina. Those gifts, often figs, dates and honey, are similar to the gifts Befana leaves to children in the present day.

It is traditional to leave wine as an offering to La Befana, much in the same way we leave cookies for Santa. Depending on where you live, and according to local and regional customs you might serve the wine with cheese or sausages, so why not both? Do you already celebrate Befana? If you do, what do you leave her? I'd love to know!

Frau Holda

Although she is often linked to the goddess Strina, La Befana reminds me a good bit of Frau Holda, an Alpine winter time goddess who was celebrated in pre-Christian times during Yule.

Holda is known for such domestic household arts like spinning, cooking, cleaning, and child care.

This makes her a hearth goddess. She is known to reward women who keep a clean house, and trouble those who do not. It has also been said she accompanies witches during the wild hunt, which takes place during the Yuletide season, by flying on her distaff, a tool used for spinning wool into yarn.

She can appear as young and beautiful, or as an old hag, and she was once one of the winter time gift-givers in parts of Germany. Dressed in a red-cloak she is depicted as a witch on a broom who fills children's shoes with treats.

It was customary for German children to leave milk and bread for her in offering.

If you are so inclined now is the time to get your halloween witches back out, or find Befana decorations and leave a little something out on the night of January 5th for one or both of these winter time witches, and perhaps they will leave something in return!

Clean the House

In the spirit of celebrating these two witches that love a clean house, think about sprucing up your place on January 5th, in time for Befana's day.

Since it is still cold outside, we all tend spend more time indoors, than in warmer weather, and that can make our living spaces feel energetically stagnant.

Did you read my post about allowing the element of wind into your home to change the air? If not, you can [read all about it here](#).

Perhaps leave your doors open as you clean, to clear out some of that stagnation.

The New Year

Once the festivities are over, many people feel that it is time to get back in the game, or the rat race, and somehow make up for overindulging during the holiday season.

Did you make a New Years Resolution? That's OK so did I, but I am re-framing it this year. There is an Italian word that comes up all the time when things take time. That word is "piano" - which means slow.

If you share frustration with an Italian about bureaucracy, or how you are trying to find out why you haven't been feeling well lately, or if you are looking for an apartment, more times than not, they will respond with "piano, piano" - take it slow, it'll come.

In the new year we are all in a mad rush to get fit, get back on track, move forward, and that is all well and good, just remember, the good things often take time to manifest, and we can savor the journey in the meantime. Take a little time to breath, rely on hygge, and dig deep to see what you really want more of in your life this year.

Making a dreamboard can help you flesh out what you want to accomplish over the next 12 months. This can be done individually, or as a couple, or a family.



Make a Dream Board

A dreamboard is a physical representation of all the things you hope to accomplish in the new year.

Take some time to think about what you want to bring in during the next 12 months - it can be a feeling, a physical object, a trip, or a goal - hopefully all of these things.

The basic idea is to cut out pictures, words and phrases that represent your dreams, wishes, hopes and desires, then place them on a large poster board.

Once you are finished, hang this collage up in a place that you see often (we usually put ours in our bedroom, opposite the bed so we always see it when we wake up).

You will be amazed to see how many of those dreams come true over the course of the next twelve months.

If you want a little more guidance on how to create a dream board, learn more in my book [A Guide to Celebrating the 12 Days of Yule](#)

Yes, Yule is over for this year, and it is never too early to begin dreaming of how you want the holidays to be next year, piano, piano.

Have Some Soup

This is the best time of year to nourish ourselves, body mind and spirit. Even if we did cultivate some hygge, many of us feel a little depleted after the holidays. My favorite cure for all that is making soup. Not only is it good for our bodies, but it replenishes our spirits too, and it is very hygge.

A recent blog post I wrote was called [How to Make Soup Like an Italian](#). I talked about how I've had to adapt my cooking methods to living in a tiny home, and having very little storage space. I also gave tips on how to make simple, delicious soups at home. I gave a few examples of soups I made using those techniques, and asked readers which soup they would like the recipe for.

The winner is Comforting Chicken Soup With Nettles (and pane carasau).

Ingredients:

- 4 chicken wings
- 6 cups water
- 1 cup of brewed nettle tea
- 4 carrots, chopped
- 2 celery stalks (with leaves) chopped
- cheese rind*
- salt and pepper
- 1 1/2 cups of frozen peas

Method:

1. Place chicken wings and water in a large soup pot and bring to a boil.



Lower heat to simmer and let cook for 2-2 1/2 hours.

2. Brew nettle tea.
3. After 2 1/2 hours remove chicken wings from the pot, and set aside to cool a little; enough to handle.
4. Place chopped carrots, celery and cheese rind in the pot and season with salt and pepper. Simmer for about 1/2 hour or until veggies are cooked through the way you like them.
5. While veggies are cooking, strip the meat from the bones. Once the veggies are cooked add the nettle tea and the peas, and cook another 5 minutes.
6. Turn off heat and remove anything that is left of the cheese rind. Then add the meat to the pot and taste for seasoning. Season as you like with salt and pepper (I like this soup with a good bit of pepper).

Serve with pane carasau or another type of crunchy flatbread.**

Serves 4 large bowls and 6 small bowls.

* I never throw away rinds from cheese, and use them to flavor soups and other recipes

**I have found pane carasau at Trader Joes, it is called Pane Guttiau Sardinian Parchment Crackers with Olive Oil. It is also available through some Amazon sellers



Thank you!

I hope that you enjoy some quiet reflective time during the heart of winter. Things will begin speeding up soon enough with the approach of Spring. So enjoy this quiet time of rejuvenation.

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

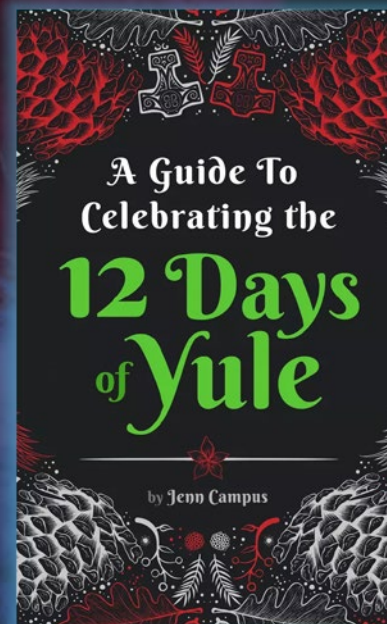
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And if you need more help around celebrating this holiday season, feel free to get in touch with me, or start a discussion on my [Facebook Page](#).

Thank you!

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About the Author

**STORYTELLER, HISTORY & MYTHOLOGY GEEK, MYSTIC,
KITCHEN WITCH, WANDERER, HEARTH KEEPER**

I am an author and American expat, a matriarch and hearth keeper. I moved my whole family (my husband, 2 children under 5, my father in law, myself and our dog) to my husband's ancestral homeland, the mysterious and ruggedly beautiful Italian island of Sardinia. In order to make that move, we downsized our Vermont homestead into 33 small boxes (50% books!) and 6 suitcases for our new life. We learned to live on very little money, in a tiny space and with a whole new set of cultural norms. In essence, we have eased into a life amidst chaos.

I long for simpler times and quiet joys. As a Sagittarius I am hardwired to seek out truths (professional translation: I am a great researcher). I enjoy food, art and cultural traditions. I am deeply drawn to creating ritual (professional translation: pays great attention to details) and through the art of writing, also a form of ritual, I am able to share with others (professional translation: good communication skills) 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 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.

I have a degree in Anthropology from Hampshire College in Amherst, MA. 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 2 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.

