

# **Wicca**

## **A Guide for Friends and Family of Wiccans**

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# INTRODUCTION

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## Introduction

It can be very disturbing to discover that someone you know practices witchcraft. This is particularly true if your only images of witches, or Wiccans as they are commonly called, are taken from Hollywood movies or fairy tales. Reading this booklet will ease your mind.

First, some very important points

- Wiccans are not Satanists
- Wiccans are not evil
- They are normal, everyday people who follow a religion that is often misunderstood

This passage may say it best.

*We are not evil. We don't harm or seduce people. We are not dangerous. We are ordinary people like you. We have families, jobs, hopes, and dreams. We are not a cult. This religion is not a joke. We are not what you think we are from looking at TV. We are real. We laugh, we cry. We are serious. We have a sense of humor. You don't have to be afraid of us. We don't want to convert you. And please don't try to convert us. Just give us the same right we give you – to live in peace. We are much more similar to you than you think.*

- Margot Adler, Drawing Down the Moon, p.453., Beacon Press

But this is not to say that you should be complacent and accept everything. Treat Wicca as any other group you didn't understand and that someone important to you was involved.

If you have questions

- Talk to the Wiccan in your life
- Talk to the members of the coven
- Get an understanding of Wicca; this booklet is a good start
- Discuss your feelings or concerns with an open mind
- Talk to other Wiccans, visit your local new age shops and make inquiries

Eventually you will be able to tell which Wiccans and covens have a good reputation. The Wiccan faith allows harm to no one, but like anywhere else, there are good people and bad people in Wicca.

# WICCAN BASICS

## Wiccan Basics

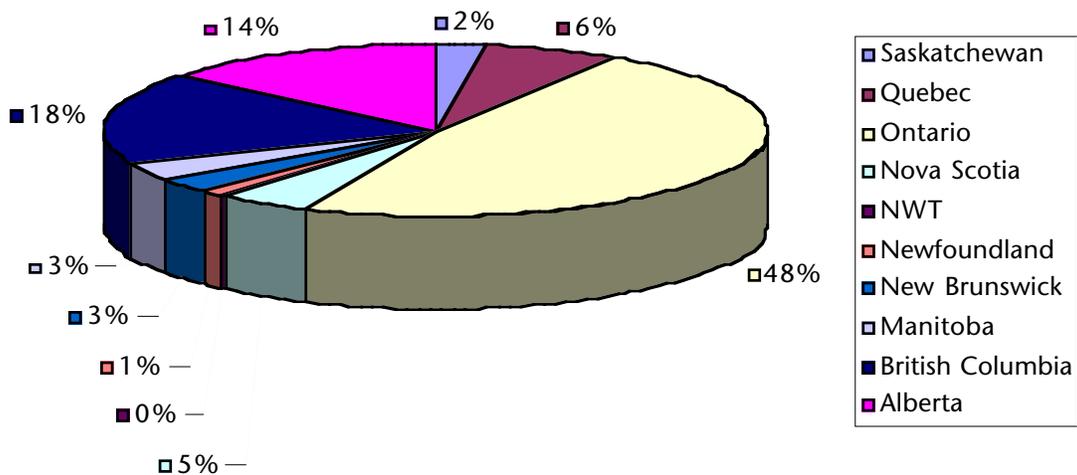
Wicca is a nature-orientated religion that follows the change of seasons and the cycle of the moon. That is, it is an earth-based faith. It is one of many Pagan religions. Pagan is not considered a derogatory term by Wiccans and pagans.

Wicca is not a satanic religion. Since Wiccans do not believe in the Judeo-Christian God, they do not believe in Satan.

Many folk-tales and stories cast Witches in the role of evil sorceress or some other malevolent force. This image is unjust and came from the fear of the unknown. The Wiccan faith strictly forbids harming another person.

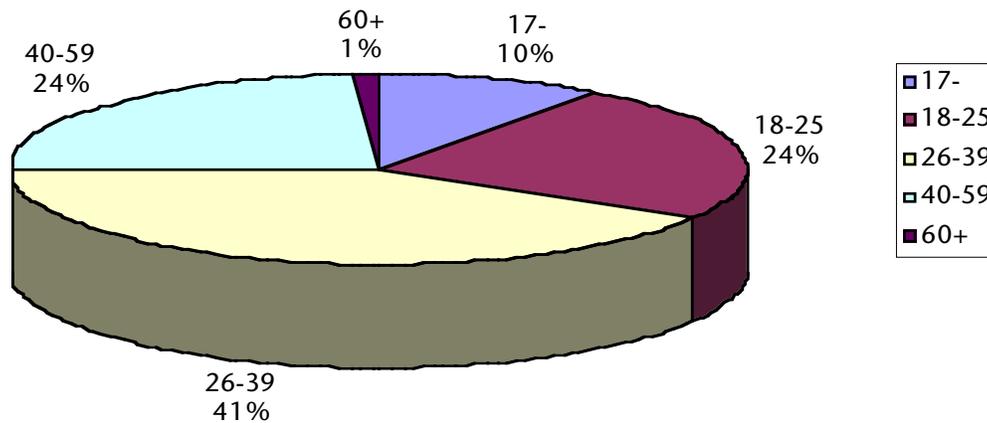
There are Wiccans who believe that their religion can be traced back through history in a continuous line. This is very hard to prove. What is certain is that Wicca is based upon Western European, pre-Christian practices. Modern day Wicca came into being in the 1950s after Gerald Gardner publicized his research and involvement with the occult and a pagan group called *The Wica*.

Recently the Covenant of the Goddess released the initial results from a poll they performed on the Internet. They received responses from a total of 20,194 Wiccans and other Pagans.

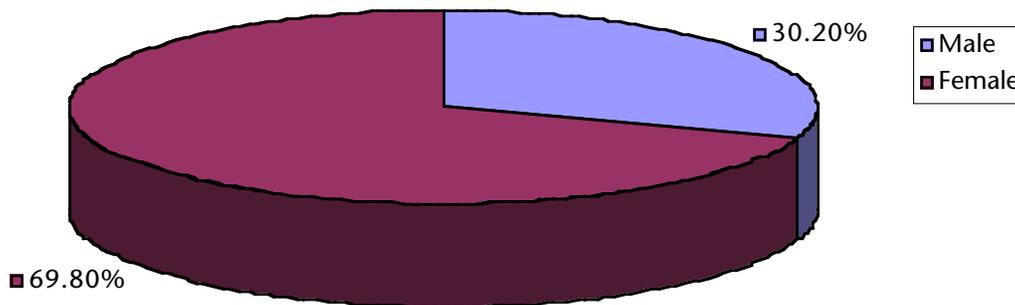


**Distribution of Canadian Wiccans and Pagans, 568 Responses**

## WICCAN BASICS



**Age Grouping of Wiccans and Pagans**



**Gender Division**

The 1991 Canadian census records 5,530 Pagans living in Canada. The United States Military publication, Religious Requirements and Practices of Certain Selected Groups: A Handbook for Chaplains (1990) estimates that there are approximately of 50,000 Wiccans in the United States.

It is likely that the actual number of Wiccans is much greater than the official census, as discrimination can make life difficult for people who are openly Wiccan. For further information on discrimination against Wiccans, visit the Ontario Consultants Religious Tolerance Web site at <http://www.religioustolerance.org/welcome.htm>

### What Wiccans believe

#### *In general*

The Wiccan faith is relatively free from rigid dogma, and encourages a high regard for diversity and individuality. Wiccans draw upon a basic core of beliefs and modify it based on life experience and preferences. Some rely heavily on various traditions to create their own system, and some use only the most central beliefs.

This ensures diversity, not only from coven to coven, but also from person to person. Even within a coven, members can have varying practices.

Some core beliefs include

- Celebration of the change of seasons and the yearly 8 festivals (Sabbats) and 12-13 lunar festivals (Esbats)
- Homage to the divine through the Goddess and God
- Belief that men and women are both equals and essential
- Value of learning, which should never stop
- Respect and protection of the earth
- Diversity of race, religion, thought
- Belief in reincarnation
- Adhering to the Law of Three, and the Witch's Rede

#### *Light and dark*

To understand Wiccan ethics, you need to understand the concept of light and dark. Wiccans believe in cycles and opposites. The year is a cycle of light and dark, as is night and day, and the moon's orbit. All living things follow the cycle of life and death. Light represents the good events that occur in life and dark can represent the events that are harmful or need to be overcome.

However Wiccans note the difference between dark and evil. Death for example is a dark event. Wiccans see it as a natural event and do not fear it. Murder, on the other hand, is evil. Evil takes human interaction, occurring only when a human does something that harms another or themselves.

# WHAT WICCANS BELIEVE

## *Ethics*

People commonly believe that Wiccans do not have an ethical or moral system. This may be the result of misinterpretation or misrepresentation of some of its core beliefs.

There are two laws that are universal to Wiccans. Common to all traditions and, in some cases, used as a foundation for a more elaborate set of ethics.

The laws are

- The Witch's Rede
- Law of Three

### *The Witch's Rede*

*An It Harms None, Do What Thou Will.* This simple rule is the very core of Wiccan ethics. Wiccans are free to do as they wish, but not to harm anyone. The term *harm* encompasses a wide range of meanings. It includes making people feel uncomfortable, casting spells upon people, trying to impose upon or influence people, and cursing people. This rule includes practitioners, as well — they should not harm themselves. Wiccans should have respect for others and themselves. Harm is never come to living things through Wicca and its Craft. For this reason many Wiccans are vegetarians, while others see the eating of meat as a natural part of the cycle. Either way, Wiccans are thankful for the bounty granted by the Great Mother.

### *The Law of Three*

The Law of Three is another simple rule. Wiccans believe that the good that they do will come back to them three times as good. The bad that they do will come back three times as bad.

## *Deities*

Wiccans worship multiple gods as symbols of a single unknowable divinity. They believe that it is impossible to understand the divine otherwise; that the divine is inherent in all things.

Here is an analogy. If you want to safely look at the sun, you need to use a filter. The filter allows you to see some of the light

## WHAT WICCANS BELIEVE

spectrum and glimpse the sun without permanent damage. Changing the filter you use can allow you to see different spectrums. Like the filter, the use of a multiple Goddesses and Gods allows Wiccans to behold the divine in a manner that allows comprehension and interaction. Wiccans believe that this gives them a very close relationship with the divine.

Most of nature is divided into the two genders, so it makes sense that a nature-based religion would follow that division. Most Wiccans worship the Goddess and the God, the female and the male. In general the sun and sky are associated with the God. The moon and earth are associated with the Goddess. Some Wiccans do not recognize the God or male aspect. However, all Wiccans recognize the female aspect.

A complete list of Goddesses and Gods would be impossible to present as they number in the hundreds. However, some commonly worshiped deities include

Aphrodite	Selene
Ceres	Venus
Cerridwen	Apollo
Cybele	Bacchus
Diana	Dionysus
Freya	The Green Man
The Great Mother	Odin
Hecate	Pan
Inanna	Poseidon
Isis	Ta
Nuit	Tezcatlipoca

### *Traditions*

A tradition is a set of shared worship practices, shared by a group of covens related either by common lineage or by practice. Wicca has dozens of traditions and sub-traditions. Differences can and do exist from coven to coven.

## WHAT WICCANS BELIEVE

Traditions help Wiccans to

- Grasp the main beliefs of other Wiccans
- Define themselves as Wiccans
- Develop a sense of belonging, as with any set of religious beliefs

Solitary Practitioners also exist. A Solitary Practitioner differs from coven members. Rituals and festivals are celebrated privately, or with only a small number of friends and family. Solitary Practitioners can also follow a tradition. For example you may encounter Solitary Gardnerian Wiccans.

The next section covers three common traditions.

### *Gardnerian*

The Gardnerian tradition, founded by Gerald Gardner (1883-1964), has been active for more than 50 years. This makes it one of the oldest and most widespread practicing Wiccan traditions.

Gardner was a British civil servant and spent some time as a plantation manager in Southeast Asia. While there, Gardner spent a lot of time studying archeology and folklore. After World War I, Gardner returned to England and began to study the occult. By the fall of 1939, he was initiated into a coven called “the Wica.”

Gardner feared that the religion that he had come to love was on the verge of dying out. He spent the next few years publishing what he safely could on the subject. This was limited as the Witchcraft Act in Britain, which stated that all witches were to be put to death for practicing witchcraft, was not repealed until 1951.

After the repeal of the Witchcraft Act, Gardner became the Resident Witch at the Museum of Magic and Witchcraft on the Isle of Man. He was able to give interviews and continue his work in preserving the Craft. Although Gardner seemed intent on publicizing the existence of Wicca, details of Gardnerian practice are protected by Oath. This Oath has given the tradition the reputation of being secretive.

This tradition requires a fairly high level of commitment. Students are required to follow a lengthy course of studies in theory and

## WHAT WICCANS BELIEVE

practice, swear oaths of secrecy, and memorize lengthy chants. After completing three degrees of initiation, people are encouraged to form their own coven. This addresses one of Gardner's primary concerns, keeping the Craft alive. There is no central coven or hierarchy and although the tradition sees itself as a large extended family, each coven acts autonomously.

Common Gardnerian traits include

- Drawing Down the Moon, a ritual invoking the spirit and power of the Goddess into a priestess or priest
- Studying and preserving a Book of Shadows
- Cultivating relationships with deities sacred to this tradition

### *Alexandrian*

Alex Sanders (1926-1988) and his wife Maxine formed the Alexandrian tradition in the 1960s. Sanders started his Wiccan training as a Gardnerian. Later he felt it was important to open the Craft and tradition.

His effort to publicize Wicca was greeted with opposition. He was accused of profaning the mystery of the Craft, and of seeking out self-indulgent notoriety. However, Sanders was successful in the public eye. He initiated many people in the 1960s.

Most Alexandrian covens accept new people who wish to study. Training begins with ritual basics, followed by a number of assignments. After completing the initial training and assignments, they achieve the rank of First Degree.

The Alexandrian tradition varies greatly from coven to coven, but they all share some general traits. Common Alexandrian traits include

- A strong focus on training and ceremonial magic
- A hierarchical structure
- Weekly coven meetings
- Coven meetings on all Esbats and Sabbats
- Permitting guests to watch

# WHAT WICCANS BELIEVE

## *1734 Tradition*

The 1734 Tradition is made up of groups that follow the philosophy of Robert Cochrane (1931-1966). British-born Cochrane found a Wiccan teacher and later formed his own coven. He emphasized research, evolution, and change as opposed to dogma. Cochrane's love of puzzles and riddles is reflected in his teachings.

In the 1960s, Cochrane began exchanging letters with Joseph Wilson in the United States. These letters form the foundation of the tradition as it is practiced today. Wilson and several colleagues worked together to solve the puzzles that Cochrane included in his letters. These letters were then distributed to others who worked on the puzzles, often with different results. This produced covens with a number of unique differences in doctrine. Each is independent and they have no central authority.

Students normally require at least a year and a day of training to obtain the rank of First Degree. Training encourages research and the evolution of ideas. Normally initiates are required to decipher the puzzles 1734 and 1737. The tradition's name derives from the first of these puzzles.

The 1734 Tradition was relatively unknown until the 1980s, when it began to gain popularity. It is rooted deeply in British-Celtic mythology, leaning more and more to the Celtic as time goes by.

Common 1734 traits include

- Passing the letters of Robert Cochrane from teacher to student.
- Meditating.
- Seeking Visions (there are no known covens using hallucinogens).
- Practicing rituals outdoors.
- Dancing & chanting.
- Channeling.

### What Wiccans practice

#### *Festivals*

##### *The importance of festivals*

Like most religions, Wicca observes important days with ceremony and celebration. They call their eight major festivals “Sabbats” These Sabbats are derived from the change of seasons and include the equinoxes and solstices. Wiccans believe it is important to live in harmony with the earth and its changing seasons. This harmony brings enlightenment and aids in communion with the divine.

The Sabbats as a group are called the *Wheel of the Year* and are

- Samhain, October 31st
- Yule, December 21st and 22nd
- Imbolc, February 2nd
- Ostara, March 21st
- Beltane, April 30th
- Midsummer, June 21st and 22nd
- Lughnasadh, July 31st
- Mabon., September 21st

##### *Samhain*

This Sabbat is also known as Halloween, ShadowFest, Martinmas, Feast of Apple, and Old Hallowmas.

The last harvest, this is a time for Wiccans to mark the death of the God. It is a time of reflection, time to remember past friends and family as well as ancestors. Death is part of life, but like the seasons the God will be reborn, at Yule. This ties closely to the belief in reincarnation. It is the beginning of the God’s half of the year.

## WHAT WICCANS PRACTICE

### *Yule*

This Sabbat is also known as Yuletide, Winter Solstice, and Alban Arthan.

This celebrates the return of the God. On Winter Solstice, the longest night of the year, the Goddess gives birth to him as the Sun God. It is a celebration of new possibilities, hope, and family. There are large meals prepared, singing, dancing, rituals, and quite often an exchange of gifts. Wiccans burn candles to signify the returning sun and when possible burn a Yule log. The log represents the darkness of winter that is consumed in light.

### *Imbolc*

This Sabbat is also known as Candlemas, Imbolg, Imbolgc brigantia, Lupercus, and Disting.

This marks the beginning of spring. Wiccans believe the Goddess is caring for the young, growing Sun God. It is a time of new growth, strengthening of spirit and body, and healing. As with Yule, candles are burnt in great numbers.

### *Ostara*

This Sabbat is also known as Vernal Equinox, Ostara, Alban Eiler, and Esther.

This is a time of growth and renewing energy. It is a celebration of spring and many see this as a time to start planning the planting season. It is a common time for a Wiccan to propose Handfasting to another.

### *Beltane*

This Sabbat is also known as Mayday, Walburga, and Bealtinne.

This Sabbat is a celebration of the joy of life. Wiccans see this as a time to enjoy nature as it has finally broken free of winter and is in full bloom. It is a time of fertility, and the God expresses his love for the Goddess. Maypoles are erected as a symbol of the union of the Goddess and God. The Goddess's half of the year begins.

## WHAT WICCANS PRACTICE

### *Midsummer*

This Sabbat is also known as Feill-Sheathain, and Alban Hefin.

This Sabbat celebrates the health and power of nature. It is celebrated with both candles and bonfires. It is common for Handfastings to be performed. It is a time for people to work together and to recognize the importance of the community.

### *Lughnasadh*

This Sabbat is also known as Lammas.

This is a celebration of the first harvest of the year. Plants are in full bloom and animals are getting to be full grown. It is a time of gratitude for the bounty of the earth and bread is a very common staple at the feasts that take place. Although the God still burns brightly in the sky, he begins to lose his strength.

### *Mabon*

This Sabbat is also known as Alban Elfed, and Winter Finding.

This is the second harvest celebration and thanks is given in the form of offering of food and beverages. Wiccans begin to prepare for the coming winter, preparing gardens, canning food, etc. This is a time to recognize the balance of light and dark and achievements.

## **Circles**

The Circle is a portable temple. A Wiccan raises a Circle through ritual, drawing a circle in the earth, or placing objects on the ground in a circle, and using personal power to consecrate and cleanse an area. Techniques for raising a circle varies. The Circle's main purpose is to create an area for people to interact with the divine. It is similar to a church for Christians. The circle acts as a holy area and therefore should not be entered while active. When the rituals are completed the circle is lowered. It is customary to leave no trace of a Circle.

## WHAT WICCANS PRACTICE

### *Raising a Circle*

Basic circle casting includes the steps listed below.. The exact method of raising a circle will vary from ritual to ritual.

1. Mark or outline an area  
Etch a circle in the earth, using chalk, or lay rope or other objects in a circle. It is customary to make the circle nine feet in diameter. The cardinal points are often marked with incense or ritual tools.
2. Cleanse the circle of negative, unwanted energy.  
This is done ritualistically. Some use a broom to symbolically sweep away the energies.
3. Call the Guardians of the Watchtowers or the Four Quarters.  
This will invite the guardians to aid in the ritual.
4. Declare that the Circle is whole.
5. Ask the Goddess and God to attend the Circle.
6. At this point, the ritual that the circle was raised for is performed. For example, a healing ritual or one of the Sabbat rituals.
7. The Gods are then thanked and dismissed.
8. The guardians are then thanked and dismissed.
9. Disperse the energies back to their origin then closes the Circle.
10. Finally the Circle is declared open. The area is cleaned and tools put away.

Ritual can be found on the Internet at the Pagan Library at  
<<http://www.paganlibrary.com>>

## Wiccan Wordlist

### ***Bane***

Anything that is harmful, evil, or dangerous in nature.

### ***Book of Shadows***

A book of spells, rituals, and lore, usually handmade.

### ***Broom***

Used to spiritually and physically cleanse an area. Also used during handfasting ceremonies.

### ***Circle/Magic Circle***

An area that is cleansed and then used to perform a ritual or use magic. Although called a circle, it extends into the air and ground.

### ***Coven***

A group of Witches, usually limited to 13 members. Usually led by a High Priestess and Priest.

### ***Craft, the***

The witch's craft. It is the use of ritual to harness of personal power and the power of natural objects to achieve a certain goal.

### ***Divine Power***

The power of the Goddess and God.

### ***Earth Power***

The power of the elements and all natural things.

### ***Esbat***

The meeting of a coven during the full moon. There are usually 13 Esbats each year.

### ***Handfasting***

A Wiccan wedding. It usually involves oaths and the ritualistic jumping over a broom.

### ***Initiation***

The method used to prepare and welcome a new member into a coven or tradition.

### ***Magic***

The process of waking, building, and giving purpose to personal, divine and earth power to achieve a goal.

## WICCAN WORDLIST

### ***Old Ones***

A term that encompasses all the differing goddesses and gods.

### ***Pagan***

A follower of earth based religions such as Wicca and Shamanism. From the Latin *paganus*, a country dweller.

### ***Pentacle***

A ritual object adorned with a five-pointed star. It represents earth.

### ***Personal Power***

The inner power that people can tap into.

### ***Reincarnation***

The rebirth of the soul in a new body. This allows the soul to evolve through multiple lives.

### ***Ritual***

A ceremony used to heighten a religious practice or experience. Also used to perform magic, in which case it is often referred to as a magic ritual.

### ***Sabbat***

A Wiccan celebration of the eight seasonal festivals of Samhain, Yule, Imbolc, Ostara, Beltane, Midsummer, Lughnasadh, and Mabon.

### ***Tradition***

A group of Covens bound by common lineage or practice.

### ***Wand***

A ritual object that symbolizes air and has a male aspect.

### ***Wiccan/Witch***

One who worships the Goddess and often the God. These terms are interchangeable.

### ***Witchcraft***

See Craft, the

### Wiccan Resources

#### *Book*

Scott Cunningham, Wicca: A guide for the Solitary Practitioner, Llewellyn Publications, 0-87542-118-0

Margot Adler, Drawing Down the Moon, Beacon Press, 0-8070-32530

Janet Thompson, Of Witches, Samuel Wieser, Inc, 0-87728-762-7

Pauline Campanelli, Wheel of the Year, Living the Magical Life, Llewellyn Publications, 0-87542-0915

Tikva Frymer-Kensky, In the Wake of the Goddesses, Fawcett Columbine, 0-449-907465

The United States Military publication, Religious Requirements and Practices of Certain Selected Groups: A Handbook for Chaplains (1990)

#### *Web*

Religious Tolerance

<<http://www.religioustolerance.org/welcome.htm#new>>

The Witches Voice

<<http://www.witchvox.com>>

The Wiccan Church of Canada

<<http://www.wcc.on.ca>>

Covenant of Gaia Church of Alberta

<<http://www.spots.ab.ca/~cogcoa/>>

The Pagan Library

<<http://www.paganlibrary.com>>

Alt.Pagan list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

<<http://www.teleport.com/~rain/altpagfaq.html>>