The Wheel of the Year

by

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The eight holidays of the modern Pagan “wheel of the year” present an annual cycle of holidays tracing seasonal changes, agricultural cycles, and metaphors of the cycle of life. It's not a bad point to start from, rooted as it is in astronomical fact (the holy days are the solstices and equinoxes, and the midpoints between them) and the reality of seasonal change in parts of the world which have a European climate cycle. And while there is a large body of mythology in the Pagan traditions which ties these seasonal changes to stories about gods, the gods aren't really necessary for the cycle to work. It doesn't require them in order to be meaningful and apropos for anyone living today.

For my calendar, I adapt these 8 observances for the area where I live, which has more of a Mediterranean climate, and to add the elements of modernity that the old cycle of holidays ignores. I kept some Pagan holiday names because I know that new ones for the more prominent holidays won't catch on anyway:

Yule (Winter Solstice; equivalent Christmas or Chanukah). The Festival of Lights, keeping us warm through the Longest Night. Celebrates family, community, and beginning of light’s return with the lengthening of days). A time to gather together to survive the cold and dark,, to celebrate and give thanks for what sustains us even in the darkest times. It is the height of Winter.

Riverain (Midpoint between Winter Solstice and Vernal Equinox). The Festival of Rain. Celebrates rain, water, art, poetry, music. A time for service to and preparation for what is hoped for in the future (as, caring for a newborn or sharpening agricultural tools). The beginning of Spring.

High Spring. (Vernal Equinox) The Festival of the Newly Born. Celebrates renewal, childhood, innocence, playfulness, discovery. A time for sowing the crops and garden. Per the name, the height of Spring.

Beltane (midpoint between Vernal Equinox & Summer Solstice). The Festival of Love and Maturity. Celebrates passage into adulthood, sexuality, freedom, fertility. The beginning of Summer.

Midsummer (Summer Solstice). The Festival of Attainment. Celebrates the Longest Day, arrival into comfort, leisure, relaxation and enjoyment. The height of summer.

Summer’s End (midpoint between Summer Solstice and Autumnal Equinox). The Festival of Work. Celebrates technology and handcraft, science and invention, responsibility, physical work. First of the Harvest Festivals (the Grain Harvest) and the beginning of Autumn.

Harvest (Autumnal Equinox). The Harvest Festival. Celebrates gratitude for the bounty of the Earth, the harvest of what has been worked for, the gifts of the World, enjoyment of the fruits of

labors. Second of the Harvest Festivals (the Harvest of Fruits and Vegetables), height of Autumn; beginning of transition into the darker time of year.

Hallows (midpoint between Autumnal Equinox & Winter Solstice). The Feast of Darkness and Endings. Celebrates the wisdom of old age, acknowledges the inevitability of Death, the legacy of ancestors, the memory of those no longer alive. A time of the drawing down of nature into the dark and dormant part of the year, to contemplate the unknown, to acknowledge the darkness in life. It is a time for burial/release/composting of what is ended to make room for what is to come, to call the rains back, and to enjoy the spooky, gothic and atmospheric. It is the final Harvest festival (the Flesh Harvest) and the beginning of Winter.

Additional holidays can be added to this calendar as celebrants see fit. I recommend International Talk Like a Pirate Day (Sept. 19), and Pi Day (March 14).

Note that this wheel of the year is one that works for me, in an area with a Mediterranean climate. If you live in Minnesota or Montana or Massachusetts (or Manchester or Melbourne or Mindanao), your experience of seasons will be different and you will want to roll your own. The point is to have a cycle of Sabbaths that *work for you.* You shouldn't have to pretend it is Spring when it won't stop snowing for another six weeks. Adopt and adapt as you see fit, or toss the whole thing and go with another concept. This framework must never be viewed as dogma or the "right" way to do atheist paganism—there simply is no such thing…nor are there "experts" whose views are any more important than your own.