

2024 Beltane Ritual Full Script

This is our longest and most complex ritual of the year, normally lasting about 8 hours. We invite people to come for the daytime portion, or the evening, or both – they are separated by a potluck so that's a good transition point.

It needs at least 35 people (depending on how many ribbons your maypole has), a Maypole, and a fire pit for a good-sized fire. It has many moving parts, needs a lot of volunteers and takes a lot of work to organize. Or you could simplify it quite a bit. But it's a REALLY good ritual, a community favorite that people look forward to all year!!

In the weeks before the ritual – for this ritual in 2024, we invited a subset of the ritualists (self-selected) to commit to a practice of deepening connection with a “sacred tree” in the weeks before the ritual. We recorded a 10 minute devotional meditation and sent it out to all who were interested, along with this information email:

Hello Beloved Community!

Our guiding theme for the Sacred Groves Beltane Ritual this year is the Tree of Life (aka the World Tree).

To prepare for the ritual, we are seeking community members/ritual participants to commit to doing at least one 15-minute solo meditation with a favorite tree of your choice the week before the ritual. We want to seed the ritual with this simple devotional practice. Our wish is to invoke the energy of the mysterious, universal Tree of Life by cultivating and nourishing our individual relationships with our own sacred trees.

Feel free to use the guided meditation journey we created (**attached**) AND/OR create your own!

We will ask you to bring a simple offering from your chosen tree, something of its essence and wisdom, to the ritual. During the invocation of the Tree of Life on Saturday, we will ask our devotees to come with their offerings and place them at the base of the May Pole (our symbolic ritual Tree of Life) while the community sings for them.

You can also bring a brief wisdom teaching that you received from your sacred tree, in the form of a word, phrase or one breath prayer to share in the ritual.

Here is audio file for the meditation we sent out, written by Sandra O'Connor, recorded by Kayla Black

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dKeh2Srl198P0r20oAiqStSlVmQ0U8J1/view?usp=share_link

The Ritual:

Gather at 2pm

XXX will coordinate the making of the May Crowns. In the circle casting, we will be using the may crowns (people can also make more of a garland if they don't want something on their

head). XXX will bring all the supplies to make 35-40 crowns. There will be blankets set up around the maypole with crown making supplies, ivy for the crown base and flowers and other forest items for décor.

Ritual begins at 2:30 yeah, good luck with that...probably more like 3

Song to gather- Mama Gaia (by Sarah Conner) - V will get 5 or 6 people to learn and hold down the song. Call everyone to stand in a circle around the meadow and sing.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/6mRgt30uwoHKJGMIawr2RB?si=ecd2936675cc4953>

Welcoming – Sandra. (my welcoming is impromptu, but the notes on the themes for the ritual and the ritual intention, which is what the welcoming is based on, are here.)

MY NOTES FOR THE WELCOMING AND PREPARATION:

If the maypole is representing the world tree, how does that inform the ritual?

The container is built around the axis, the solid core. We are then supported and safe to weave magic around it. Safe to surrender to our joy and belonging.

Every person has their own vision of what it looks and feels like to have a core connection. Collectively, we also have structural stability. By the very fact we have shown up here, drawn to create this ritual together, we are to weave together around some central idea, all worship at the same altar. We all want to create some beauty, some sense of belonging to something greater than ourselves. We all want to feel rooted and anchored in belonging. To be a part of all that is, not separate. To feel an integral part of this community. We all want to add power to our own prayers and our collective prayer for peace and sanity in this world.

We name the maypole as our collective anchor point for this ritual. The kiss between earth and sky, allowing us to feel rooted and expansive at once. Name it as the channeler of our individual and collective prayers.

After we have danced the maypole and feasted, we light the Beltane Fire. which may have had one set of meaning to the ancient Celtic peoples, but for us, in this time at this place, it has its own meaning. We light this fire to... offer our prayers. Be a focal point of community joy. Jump over it while shouting our intention to make magic in our lives, offer our dance.

This is ritual with three parts. Weaving around a Central axis, lighting a sacred fire to gather in community and feasting to welcome in spring and the coming abundance.

The Celtic Beltane fire was the welcoming into the summer season, when the animals were brought to the high country for grazing, and blessings for a good crop year.

Fire - blessings, protection, abundance, the Celebration of summer, Fertile creative energy, making babies, creating relations with each other

Maypole - weaving community, central axis, magnifying intention and prayer, nectar, rooted & grounded, fluidity around stability, physical connection to the land

Feast - building friendships, gratitude, abundance. Sharing of both our resources and our gifts, gathering together to welcome in the more outward energy of summer

World Tree Story :

V will talk story for a few minutes about the mythology behind the World Tree. The elements that are common among different world mythologies. Roots, branches, nectar. The role the tree plays in culture. How the maypole is representing the energetics of the World Tree today for our Beltane ritual and what that means, how it expresses in our ritual intention.

Land Acknowledgement:

XXX will make cedar bundles, 1 for each kid at the ritual. XXX will do special acknowledgment and welcoming of cedar. Have the children come into the circle and walk around fanning all the people with their cedar bundles. While they do that, speak something along the lines of:

We acknowledge that we are living on the traditional lands of the Suquamish coastal Salish people. The coastal Salish called the cedar the tree of life - as a gesture of respect, can we all learn the word for cedar in Lushootseed? Xe Pay. (have everyone learn and speak the word). The cedar was used to make everything from canoes to clothing to medicines to menstrual pads. Cedar played a large role in the spiritual lives of local indigenous peoples as well. Today we are honoring the traditional and the modern ties people have to these beautiful trees. We have also invited our young people into the center of the circle to acknowledge them as our future, to appreciate them, and to remember, each of us, that it is our responsibility and obligation to make decisions that will help leave a better world for our children and all our descendants.

Cast Circle together with our May Crowns:

XXX will lead

XXX says (not call and response) something like: The Maypole, which for this ritual is representing the World Tree, is the center point of our circle. May it collect and pull energy from the earth to strengthen our prayers and may it magnify our intentions.

Our bodies form this circle, creating a container where each of us are individuals, but no one stands alone.

Now we move into call and response, leader saying the line and all repeating

Instruct all to hold their may crown up to the sky – all repeat: *The branches of the world tree support the heavens*

hold crown out in front of you – all repeat: *The trunk of the world tree gives structure to existence*

crown down on the ground – all repeat: *The roots of the world tree connect us to the underworld* (maybe ancestors would be a better word than underworld? Caster should decide)

while they are down on ground - all repeat: *May we be anchored in this sweet earth*

Crown out in front of you - all repeat: *May our sprits weave a solid community*

Crown over your head - all repeat: *May our prayers gather together and fly free*

XXX says: For decades, the trees around this meadow have witnessed and held the community in these rituals. Turn around and face the trees, holding your crown out as an offering to them. We are protected and nurtured by these sacred beings who have

witnessed and held so much. Turn back around and face center, put your crown back on your head and repeat after me:

I am the kiss. (all repeat)

Between the earth and sky. (all repeat)

Held by these trees. (all repeat)

Anchored by this maypole (all repeat)

Our circle is cast. (all repeat)

Grounding w the trees :

XXX lead this – will give instructions, share a couple prompts, then everyone will head out to the woods around the meadow and spend 10 minutes in devotion/grounding with a tree. He says something like: This next piece will be our ritual grounding - you will be grounding yourself. When we are ready, everyone will head out into the woods in any direction – don't go too far. Don't take too long but pick a tree that calls to you. Don't spend all your grounding time picking the perfect tree, we only have about 10 minutes for this. Kids can go out with parents or by themselves, or they can stay here.

Once you have found a tree, here are some prompts for you -

remember to breathe

stay focused on your body and the body of the tree

connect with the groundedness and the deep presence of the tree

imagine that this tree is aware of your presence -

notice the details of the tree and the forest

Listen for the sound of the gong in 10 minutes to call you back.

Everyone will then gather around maypole, except the Tree Devotees: You will gather over there with your offerings and enter when I call you thru the west gate.

Group grounding w may pole:

once everyone is called back from the woods

Group is gathered around the maypole, devotees in the woods at the west gate.

V talks a bit of the world tree story again, connecting the maypole specifically to the world tree and the central axis. In many of the world tree stories, there are things that wrap around the axis, like serpents, that represent the fluidity of life energy. With this maypole, we have these ribbons to weave around the core. We are holding the may pole as our tree of life. He can explain what “the devotees” have been up to, that they are bringing offerings from their trees.

Start singing Mama Gaia, the ritual opening song, and have the devotees do a procession to the maypole and bring an offering from their tree. Circle around the maypole one time. Maybe silent offering and then popcorn words, one breath prayers of wisdom received from the trees.

Honoring the Elements and Invocation -

V asks our small group of tree devotees to form a circle around the maypole to represent and hold space for the world tree.

V says something like: next we are all going to be calling in the elements while the devotees are holding space for the world tree.

Sandra does the elements invocation, holding a piece of wood picked from the Beltane fire pit – says something like this:

In this ritual, we are honoring the trees and the Beltane fire. Honoring how all the elements come together and weave the magic that creates trees. From those trees come the wood for the fire, holding the magic of transformation and shapeshifting. This piece of wood, so solid and substantial in my hands, this solid wood is literally made of air, water, sunlight, and some minerals from the soil. I am holding in my hands the earth, the water, the fire and the air!

Let's honor the air - the great giveaway dance, the inhale and exhale of the trees. Take a breath in and know you are breathing in the exhalations of these trees. Exhale and know you are gifting these trees with the carbon dioxide they need to make food.

Let's honor the fire - the greatest fire of all, the energy of sunlight. The magic from the earth goddess, the ability for plants to make sugars from sunlight. We honor the fire that creates and sustains life. Fire is a part of the life and reproductive cycle of many trees, and we recognize, especially in this time of changing climate, that fire is burning our beloved forests and each of us has to make our own peace with that fire.

Let's honor water - let's remember another miracle of mother earth - the journey of a drop of rain. In praise of rain and mist and nectar captured in the expansive branches of trees. In awe of another amazing Gaia magic - transpiration, the force that pulls water from the soil, through the roots, up the trunk and then evaporates thru the leaves to form clouds once again, to fall as rain onto the upward facing branches of the same tree. Honoring all these bodies that are comprised mostly of water.

Let's honor earth - let's remember the billions of mycelia that form the mycorrhizal network. Their world, their magic, is dirt. let's honor the dirt beneath our feet, the earth that holds the roots, the earth that networks the tree beings, allows them to share resources, and holds their water in vast groundwater storage. The soil holds the minerals for the trees to mine, absorbing those minerals into their bodies.

Instructions to all: V will do this *(as a side note, in retrospect, this portion of the ritual did not work exceptionally well...I would change this. Figure out some other way to somatically embody the elements and their connection to the trees...or use this but tweak it a little? It's a great idea, in theory it should work, but for some reason it fell a little flat for us in 2024)*

1. You will begin by picking an element that you want to portray. Embody that element and begin to move with it and allowing that element to move you.
2. Then we invite you to flow, as that element, in relation to the maypole/world tree – our group of devotees will be holding space as the world tree. The invitation is to move as the element, interacting with the devotees and the world tree.
3. Anyone can shift roles at any time, making this a dance between the tree and the four elements. See if you can maintain the coherence and integrity of the world tree while still portraying how a tree is really a constant flow of all the elements.
4. Be in joy, have fun, be interactive

Allow about 5 minutes for all ritualists to embody a chosen element and interact with the world tree/maypole.

V ends it by saying something like now we take a 5 minute bio break in preparation for the maypole dance. listen for the gong to call you back into circle.

Maypole instructions -Sandra

I have attached verbal instructions for dancing the maypole at the end of this document. Very helpful for a group that is not experienced at maypole dancing, but your group may not need them at all.

Dance the maypole :

We normally recruit drummers and percussionists and have at least one very experienced drummer to lead. You could do it to recorded music if you don't have enough people or drummers. In my experience, it's hard to hold down the dancing of the maypole while also singing – so we normally have music the dancers don't need to perform.

Post Maypole:

XXX will hold a minute or two of silence (good idea after the raising of energy), then offer a poem/something thematic to the world tree motif. They will end the held space with an invitation to gather around the fire pit to light the ritual fire.

Fire Gathering Song: This Fire by Lawrence Cole

<https://www.laurencecole.com/album/this-fire/>

most people know this so we don't need to teach it, XXX will invite everyone over to the fire pit and begin the song

Light Sacred Fire – A fire will have already been laid in the fire ring as part of the ritual set up. Also as part of set up, ritual prayer offerings for the fire will have been assembled – normally dried herbs, cedar sprays, tobacco, corn meal, lavender, rosemary, etc.

XXX, the fire lighter, will say some words about the Beltane Fire. Maybe talk about the historical practice of the Beltane Fires, then something about how it weaves into our current ritual practice, what the intention of having this fire is.

Depending on the energy of the moment, there may be a song that wants to be sung while the fire is being lit? Or it may want to be done in silence. This will be the choice of the fire keepers in the moment

After the fire is lit, the Firekeepers talk about the practice of offerings and prayers at the fire, model how to do fire offering and personal prayer - invite everyone to do it during the potluck. (need someone to coordinate bringing of fire offerings)

Firekeepers will now invite everyone to transition to the potluck

Song for Food blessing - this will be a spontaneous community offering – the Firekeepers can ask if anyone has a prayer or a song to bless the food...and invite them to teach it and sing it.

Potluck and personal fire offerings

Announce the potluck is ending and cleanup must happen before we jump the fire –

It's a good idea to do this while there is still daylight – it's a lot harder to clean up a potluck in the dark, and after a lot of people have left. Tell everyone to get their potluck dishes off the table and brought to their own possessions, make sure their dishes are done, etc.

Song to reconvene the group for fire jumping - Will probably use "My body is a burning temple of love"

<https://alimaya.bandcamp.com/track/body-of-the-goddess> - is the base song

we change it a little, much faster tempo, and we change the words a little.

My body is a burning temple of love

My body is a burning temple of love

My body is the body of the Goddess

My body is the body of the Horned One

Oh oh oh, I am what I am....uh huh

Oh oh oh, I love who I am

Get everyone gathered around the fire. Make sure there is a clear “runway” leading to the fire, and a clear “landing zone” to land in after you jump. We usually offer an alternative for anyone who is mobility challenged or scared or unable to jump the fire – often a ceremonial broom – anyone can step up and call for the broom, someone will hold it for them to jump or step or even be rolled over.

Jumping the fire – this works best if you have some kind of MC person. We often offer a prompt, but people can do whatever they please! Something along the lines of "what are you calling in?" or “What is lighting the fire of your life right now?”

We don't normally have to urge people – they know what's coming and how fun it is.

Especially kids! Some of the kids will jump the fire 10 times if you let them.

People jump it alone, in pairs, as lovers, as hopeful lovers, as families, as friends, as covens, as neighbors etc. **DO HAVE A FIRE EXTINGUISHER NEARBY.** Do caution folx to tie up flowy skirts or dresses or scarves. It has been known to happen that people light clothing on fire while jumping the bonfire. Just be mindful.

Dance and drum – there is normally a dance after the fire jumping dies down. Sometimes recorded music, sometimes live drumming, sometimes a mix of both. Depends on the energy level.

Sometimes, if there is desire and energy, it transitions into story telling or performed music or group sing along after the dance and drum.

We don't take down the Beltane circle in a formal way – as the organizer, at the end of the evening, I always make sure to do that which energetically needs to happen to tidy up spiritually, thanking that which needs to be thanked etc.

Ritual Flow Outline - short form condensed

Gather at 2pm - everyone makes a may crown or garland

2:50? Song to gather- Mama Gaia V leads

3:00 Welcoming - V and S - includes logistics and ritual conspiracy

World Tree Story -

Land Acknowledgement -

3:20 Cast Circle together with our May Crowns

3:30 Grounding w the trees - V and Sandra

3:50 Group grounding w may pole - V leads

Honoring the Elements and Invocation - Sandra and V

4:15 Maypole instructions - Sandra -

4:20 Dance the maypole - need drummers

4:40 Post Maypole Grounding -

4:50 Song to Gather at the Fire

5:00 Light Sacred Fire -

5:15 Song for Food blessing

Potluck and personal fire offerings

6:30? Announce the potluck is ending, cleanup must happen before jumping the fire

6:45 Song to reconvene the group for fire jumping - "my body is a burning temple of love"

7:00 Jumping the fire – V leads

7:30 Dance and drum - V will coordinate

Maypole Instructions

(These are the instructions we have honed over the years – even people who have never danced a maypole before can normally weave a pretty good pole if someone instructs them like this. If you have an experienced group, these instructions can be whittled down to about 2 minutes. You may want to give different instructions about the energy raising at the end – or no instructions at all and just let it happen the way it chooses to. It also helps to have an “organizer” person who monitors the dance and finds trouble spots early – if there is one person who just can’t seem to get the hang of it, run over and dance with them for a minute til they get it). Obviously, you change instructions based on how many ribbons your pole has.

Our current pole has been in use for 5 years now. We leave it up all year long in our ritual meadow. As a symbol of our greater community, we leave the ribbons woven around the pole all year. We specifically bought synthetic ribbons that would last for many years, so we don’t have to take down the pole every year and re-attach new ribbons next year. One of our fave parts of Beltane is the pre-beltane, where the organizers get together one afternoon and meditatively, prayerfully, ceremonially unwind last year’s weaving. Then we can check the ribbons, give them a good tug,

replace any that are frayed or loose or broken. So far, this is year 6, we have not had to replace one ribbon.

INSTRUCTIONS: this is one of the only times you will ever see me with a script or notes in a ritual. I pretty much say it verbatim.

We only have 24 ribbons so we need 24 people to dance – you can double up on a ribbon if you like, especially if you have children with you. This will work better if there are no younger kids dancing alone!

You are also welcome to drum or play percussion, a basket of which you will find by the drummers. We **need** drummers so if anyone knows they want to drum, in a minute you can join Therese who will be leading the drummers - drummers, know that you can also rotate out of drumming and into the maypole dance.

Anyone is also welcome to grab a rattle or shaker and park yourself right in the middle of all the fun, right at the maypole.

Once the dance starts, or even before the dance starts, you can ask anyone with a ribbon if they would be willing to take turns with you – or just approach someone at any time during the dance and ask if you can have a turn. It's a long dance, there will be time for everyone to get a turn!

Everyone - stick close because when the Maypole dance is close to over, **EVERYONE** (minus the drummers) needs to be here at the maypole for the final raising of energy. Now is a good time to think about an intention or a prayer you'd like to add to the energy raising. The way this works is that the dance itself, and all our voices at the end, contribute to generating magical energy. We let the world tree amplify and magnify all our prayers and intentions, releasing them skyward.

Typically, this dance ends with **EVERYONE** in a really tight clump around the maypole – touching it if you can, touching the backs of people who are touching it if you can't. Go with the flow of the raising energy, which normally will end in a long wordless howl - and when the energy can't be contained any longer, we all collectively let it fly free, visualizing it going through the pole, and then reverberating out into the world for everyone who needs it. Then sit tight, breathe, ground because XXX will be guiding us all in a group grounding.

IN A MINUTE - Everyone who wants one, go get a ribbon. Walk out from the pole til your ribbon is stretched out, sit tight.

OK, now go get a ribbon if you want one.

WHEN EVERYONE HAS A RIBBON AND IS IN A CIRCLE SANDRA SAYS:

First, we gotta get you facing the right way

Starting here, you two people face each other, holding your ribbon. Now moving sunwise, everyone pair off and face each other, all the way around the circle. (Make sure all turned the right way.)

Everyone, put your ribbon in the hand closest to the pole.

If your ribbon is in your right hand, raise your ribbon up in the air. You are going to be moving Sunwise, clockwise. When we start to dance, your first move will be **OVER**. That means you will bring your ribbon over the head and to the outside of the person facing you. Lower your hand.

If your ribbon is in your left hand, raise your ribbon up in the air. You are going to be moving Moonwise, counterclockwise. When we begin dancing, your first move will be UNDER - that means you will duck under the ribbon and go inside of the person you are facing. Lower your hand.

Sunwise (clockwise) people, raise your ribbon. Your first move will be over and outside. Moonwise (counterclockwise) people, your ribbon stays down because your first move will be under and inside. Sunwise people, lower your hands.

Let me show you with these 2 dancers how this will look – sunwise, raise your ribbon. Moonwise, keep your ribbon low. Sunwise, move to the outside and over the head of the moonwise. Moonwise, go inside and duck under the ribbon. Now you will switch. Moonwise, raise your hand because you will go outside and over the head of the person facing you. Sunwise, you will keep your ribbon low and go inside and under the ribbon of the person facing you. (then have them unwind the ribbon they just wove)

The dance is repetitive. You'll raise your arm to go over and to the outside, then lower your arm to go under and to the inside – over and over again.

Keep a gentle pressure on your ribbon at all times.

Remember, we are going to be looking at this weaving on this pole for a whole year – the main goal is to have fun and raise some good energy, but if we can get a really pretty weave as well, it's a total bonus!!

We will start dancing relatively slowly til you get the hang of it. The tempo will get faster and faster. At some point, when you are closer to the pole and your ribbon is short, it will get harder and harder to keep doing the over and under. At that point, we let all hell break loose, people start dancing, or just running around the pole, winding their ribbon around it. do what feels right to raise energy!

Everyone, whether you have a ribbon or not, come into the center here and join the knot of people at the pole. Everyone make noise, howl, shout - listen to the drums, they will lead you to a crescendo. It usually ends in a wordless howl as we release our energy into the pole, the world tree, to be amplified and released to the spirit world.

Are we ready? Let's begin!