

Celtic Wedding Traditions

*Marry when the year is new,
Always loving, kind and true.*

*When February birds do mate,
You may wed, nor dread your fate.*

*If you wed when March winds blow,
Joy and sorrow both you'll know.*

*Marry in April when you can,
Joy for maiden and for man.*

*Marry in the month of May,
You will surely rue the day.*

*Marry when June roses blow,
Over land and sea you'll go.*

*They who in July do wed,
Must labour always for their bread.*

*Whoever wed in August be,
Many a change are sure to see.*

*Marry in September's shine,
Your living will be rich and fine.*

*If in October you do marry,
Love will come but riches tarry.*

*If you wed in bleak November,
Only joy will come, remember.*

*When December's showers fall fast,
Marry and true love will last.*

This is an old Irish poem, but there are many aspects of it that are true to Celtic traditions. The Celts divided the year into two, the "light" and the "dark" half of the year. November 1st - or Samhain (representing the final harvest), is the start of the dark half and is actually the start of the year. This time was considered the beginning of a whole new cycle, the time of year when the seeds were considered to be under new growth underground and was considered lucky, hence the start of the wedding season. May 1st was deemed to be the time for declaring divorce, and hence the line: "You will surely rue the day". Lent was also considered a bad time to wed, giving rise to the line for March: "Joy and sorrow you'll both know". Dates were of great

importance to the Celts, and even the day of the wedding had significance, the following little poem illustrating this perfectly:

*Monday for health,
Tuesday for wealth,
Wednesday the best day of all,
Thursday for losses,
Friday for crosses,
and Saturday is no day at all.*

Loving Cup / Quaich,

By the 15th century it was common for the Celts throughout Ireland and Scotland to toast each other with a ceremonial cup known as a Loving Cup. The traditional quaich - *from the Celtic word cuach meaning cup* - is shaped like a two-handled bowl and often has Celtic designs etched onto it. The purpose of the Loving Cup ceremony is for the bride and groom to share their first drink together as wife and husband and to show the coming together of their two families. After that, the cup is then passed down from generation to generation, ensuring happiness and good fortune to all who toast from it at their own weddings.

The Bell of Truce:

The bell of truce is both a charming and useful tradition which can be performed during the wedding ceremony. A bell is blessed and then presented to the bride and groom. The couple is then asked to each give the bell a ring, while thinking loving thoughts of each other and considering their future together. The bell is then kept at home as a reminder of the wedding day and should arguments arise, the bell is rung by either the husband or wife to call a truce. The tinkling sound is there to remind the couple of their wedding vows and to help them relive the happiest memories from their wedding day.

Handfasting:

We've all heard the phrase "*tying the knot*", but not many are aware that it originates from a pre-Christian custom of literally tying a couple's wrists together in a probationary form of marriage lasting a year and a day, at the end of which a new agreement was either reached, or the couple parted ways. It was due to the frequent lack of available clergy that this custom started and for this reason the vows were only temporary. Today, handfasting is incorporated into many wedding ceremonies as a way to honor the couple's Celtic heritage.

Flowers for the bride:

For centuries, flowers have stood for a variety of emotions and values. In Celtic wedding traditions brides carried herbs beneath their veils to symbolize fidelity, and spices to frighten off evil spirits.

Ring finger:

In ancient Celtic times it was believed that there was a vein in the third finger of the left hand that ran directly to the heart. A ring being placed on that finger denoted the strong connection of a heartfelt love and commitment to one another.

Why a wedding cake?

In early Celtic wedding traditions, the cake was a special part of the wedding celebration. A thin loaf was broken over the bride's head at the end of the ceremony to symbolize fertility. The wheat from which it was made symbolized fertility and the guests eagerly picked up the crumbs as good luck charms.

The Grushie

It was common for the Celtic groom to toss a handful of coins to the crowd after the wedding, in the belief that this would bring them luck in the years ahead. People choosing to do this today would be advised do so with small coins, to avoid injuring your guests and relatives.