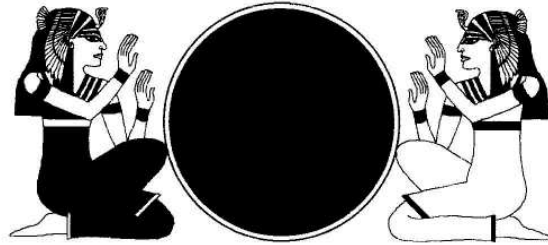


# Temple of the Dark Moon



## Surviving the Southern Wheel of the Year

*By Frances Billinghamurst (© 2007)*

Where I stand, I can see the cat lying flat on the grass as if he is absorbing a layer of coolness, however he is lying in the full sun and it has not rained for months. As if by psychic means he senses me watching him and raises his head to mouth a “meow” – help, it’s hot. Yes, I know it’s hot. Come inside where it’s cool, I try to telepathically send him, but it doesn’t work. His head flops back down on the grass.

The rest of my garden is barren and deserted. What resembled my own little Garden of Eden a couple of weeks ago shrivelled up in last week’s “heat wave”. Even the afternoon gully winds bring little relief. I sigh and return to the air conditioning. I am over Summer already and it is only January. We have been having unseasonably high temperatures since October and our hottest month is still to come. I search for something to watch that will cool me down – penguins in Antarctica should do the trick.

When it comes to the Wheel of the Year, many authors forget about those of us living in the Southern Hemisphere, and those who do remember, simply advise us to move the dates six months around. Clearly they have no idea of what is like for us, for in reality, it is not always that simple. For us living “down under”, Mother Earth seems to rebel against being told when Her seasonal wheel will turn. And at times, She seems to turn it to a different drum altogether, as if to test those of us proclaiming to follow Earth based spiritual paths.

I was excited when I bought my place a couple of years ago. The large backyard meant I could grow my own vegetables and while the garden bed was built, I was imagining what fresh from the vine tomatoes and straight from the stalk corn on the cob tasted like. I was in my own private heaven as I visualised turning my brown patch of dirt into something resembling the Biblical Garden of Eden, that was lush and overflowing with healthy abundance, a cornucopia of smells and tastes. But, in reality, things did not always happen as we would have liked them too.

Having never gardened before, the first year my super rich soil was too much for the seedlings – they virtually packed their bags and left. Last Spring I was able to plant earlier, so the first lot of seedlings went into the ground in August. Over the next couple of months, the Goddess seemed to have rewarded me for my endeavours as Her bounty began to show. It was not long before I was starting to pick my first lettuces, small flowers were appearing on the tomatoes, and each day I could swear the corn was getting taller. Then disaster happened.

It is not unusual for it to rain around Bealtaine (at the end of October for us living south of the Equator) and last October, it did just that for a few days, at least. However, these precious life giving waters had been the only rains we had received since May and after six months without rain the fire ban season was brought in early – in some places the beginning of October. October also saw our temperatures start to head skyward, with the Friday before Bealtaine it actually reaching 40 degrees Celsius.

I watched with a mixture of disbelief, sadness and some degree of anger as what was once lush bounty was reduced to burnt and shrivelled stalks. I could almost hear my garden gasping for water despite me labouring diligently with buckets of water from my rainwater tank as water restrictions had intensified with the heat. But I was fighting a losing battle. My garden quickly reverted back to barren wasteland.

As the Wheel turned and I started to plan a Mid Summer Solstice ritual, I found myself pondering over the invocations used not only by myself in previous year but also those by other people. Invocations to the “Gentle Goddess of the Green Earth” and acknowledgments of the “endless bounty of the Earth Mother” seemed to be totally out of place as my garden was now almost totally spent.

Where was this “Gentle Goddess”? The Goddess who has greeted me recently resembled some beast out of a science fiction novel whose eyes shot gamma rays that destroyed

everything in sight. Images of the Egyptian Goddess Sekhmet came to mind – the lion headed Goddess seeking revenge on mankind and who was only calmed when the people managed to get Her drunk. Needless to say the Goddess invoked at Mid Summer was simply the Lady of the Earth Herself.

Now the Festival of the First Harvest, Lughnasadh, is approaching and all my garden is showing is a handful of tomatoes. None of the corn survived – it dried on the stalk before the cobs could be formed properly.

Despite the devastation, I have learnt many a valuable lesson. We tend to be too complacent when it comes to Wheel of the Year relying solely on what the books and internet sites tell us instead of going out into nature herself. We declimatise ourselves by being locked away with our central heating and air conditioning. Whether global warming or a natural cycle, our seasons are changing and Mother Earth cannot be expected to always have the seasons arrive on cue.

While my garden might not resemble my dream Garden of Eden this time around, there is always next year. My mother always said that gardening was a very hit and miss affair when you first start out. And with each cycle of the turning wheel I find that I gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of not only my own self, but also of my place in the web of life. I am slowly learning what will survive in my little patch of dirt and what is not suited. For everything is interconnected and I am just one small part of the whole.

The following is a brief look at the seasonal Wheel of the Year from a Southern Hemispheric point of view as observed in Adelaide, South Australia:

Mid Winter (Yule)	21-23 June	Frosts, cold temperatures, Winter rains.
Imbolg	31 July/1 August	Early spring flowers such as daffodils appear. Spring planting. Blossoms on almond trees appear.
Spring Equinox	21-23 September	Warmer days, activity abuzz in the garden. Irises are now flowering.
Bealtaine	31 October	Early bounty beginning to show in the garden. Last of Winter rains usually occur. Daylight savings commence
Mid Summer (Litha)	21-23 December	The East coast of Australia gets rain but in the South we enter another drought. Harvest what we can before it gets burnt.

Lughnasadh	31 January or 1 February	Death in the garden, scorching temperatures burn everything sight. The Far North East and other parts of Queensland is getting flooded out – we experience more water restrictions.
Autumn Equinox	21-23 March	High daytime temperatures, but distinct evening coolness, end of Daylight savings.
Samhain	30 April	Crispness in the air. Finally the Autumn rains arrive.

#### About the Author:

Frances has been a student of metaphysics and the occult for most of her life, with her formal training commencing in 1993. She is trained in both ceremonial magick and Alexandrian Wicca, and has been initiated into the Alexandrian Wiccan tradition.

Frances founded the Temple of the Dark Moon in 1999 to provide accurate information on Paganism (in particular Wicca and Wytchcraft. For a period of six years from 2000 Frances was the secretary for the Pagan Alliance Inc (SA) and worked closely with both the SA Police and Attorney General with respect to changes in legislation. In 2003 she was invited to speak at the New Zealand Pagan Fest where she also led the opening ritual with Chief Druid, Philip Carr-Gomm.

Frances regularly writes for Australia's number one spiritual lifestyle magazine "Insight" and her articles also appearing in over 10 separate publications around the world including the 2008 Llewellyn's Witch's Calendar. Frances has appeared in the "Sunday Mail", the "Messenger" and the "Melbourne Age" with respect to being a Wytch.

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