

Exactly at midnight from deep in the woods aloud thunder will be heard and with gorgeous red flames a bloom of enchanted flower will be seen from far and wide. He, who isn't scared of the fairies and the mermaids, the witches and the werewolves... he, who ignores the magic spirits of the wild and finds the enchanted flower, will become the richest and the happiest in the world. As soon as the man picks the Fern Flower, evil spirits come close to him so he has to be courageous and knowledgeable enough not to lose his precious find.



Love plays an integral part in Kupalo rituals. Couples who are in love and want to marry jump over the bonfire holding hands to seal their fate. In some regions, the ideal was to jump over the bonfire directly into the water. In early times this was done after disrobing, because certain rituals were more powerful if carried out in the "natural state."



Ivana Kupala is the most happy community event, which brings together people of all ages and diverse social roles, and everybody is having a splendid time: the participants are playing games, laughing, making jokes, socializing, dancing and singing, with the most delicious homemade foods for the festive dinner: pyrohy and varenyky, mlyntsi and cabbage rolls, roast meat and sausage, etc. Children were enjoying themselves with countless outdoor games and different fun activities.

Not only Ukrainians were invited to Ivana Kupala celebration. The feast was also attended by gypsies; however they did not actively participate in traditional Kupalo rituals. The representatives of this minority group took a warm interest in the performed rites, especially in the fortunetelling ceremonies.

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IVANA KUPALA



MODERN INTERPRETATION OF THE ANCIENT TRADITIONS

Living in the world of Internet and mass communication, trying to catch up with the latest gadgets for our laptops and smart phones, sometimes we - the children of the XXI century – want to go back to our ancestral roots, to study and practice the customs of our predecessors. A growing interest in history and tradition lead to a widespread revitalization of the number of ancient celebrations. Notwithstanding that the new holidays are rapidly expanding, the celebration of *Ivana Kupala* is flourishing among Ukrainians both in Canada and Ukraine.



Kupala: Fire, Nature & Love



Ivana Kupala is the height of summer, the turning point, the day when the sun is at its longest, highest power. Nature also has reached its peak, with plants at the pinnacle of their growth. Wild plants, especially herbs and medicinal plants are at the height of their curative powers, and are gathered that day for use throughout the year.

The power of plant life on this night is reinforced by the fragrant herbs braided into the vinky, the garlands or wreaths of wildflowers worn by the young women. These wreaths, with candles in them, foretell the maiden's romantic future as they are gently cast into the flowing water. Depending if the vinok floats, sinks, gets caught in an undertow or tangles on the bank – this symbolizes if, when, and whom she will marry, or even if she and/or he will die.

An old legend says that Ferns bloom once a year (or once in three-five years) on the Night of Ivana Kupala, at the Summer solstice. Whoever would be brave enough to go to the forest and find this flower, will become a sorcerer and will be able to understand the language of animals and plants. His wife would always stay young, healthy, beautiful and kindhearted, and their future children would be able-bodied, hard-working and bright.

For this reason, the flower of fern is also called the Flower of Happiness.



Midsummer's Night, celebrated all over Europe, is the longest day, and the shortest night of the year. The basic elements of each Ukrainian feast, and their symbolism, are present here also: fire, water, holy Mother Earth and nature, ancestors, and love /fertility / procreation.

Fire symbolizes and reinforces the power of the sun, and is present in the enormous bonfires and in the burning big wheels of straw careening down hillsides towards the water.

Water symbolizes life and purification, and the companion of fire. Fire evaporates water, water puts out fire. Water from heaven – the dew – is very powerful in the early morning of the feast, and people wash and roll in the dew in order to be healthy for the rest of the year.



All villagers are expected to attend the Kupalo festivities, and there are even songs mocking and shaming those who do not. Kupalski pisni, the Kupalo ritual songs, are about love, nature, and Marena and Kupalo, symbolic of this feast.

Two scarecrow- type figures made from tree branches or saplings are dressed as a male and a female, then carried around by the young people singing ritual songs. Often a young tree is decorated with ribbons, flowers and other ornaments by the young women, and is carried as Marena.



Why is this holiday sometimes called the feast of Ivana Kupala? As with most of our traditions, it is an example of dualism, of the combination of pre- Christian and Christian religions. The celebration of Kupalo fell around the time of the Feast of St. John the Baptist, Ivan Khrestytel, so the name of the feast became that of Ivan Kupalo, and the feast was moved from the June summer solstice to July.

On this night we can go back in time to the enchanted world of magic, nature and love (and if some of you do wander off into the woods, the organizers of the festivities and the vatra take no responsibility for the consequences).

