



# NORSE CALENDAR

The way our ancestors celebrated during the year by using a lunisolar calendar.





Norse Calendar. The Way Our Ancestors Celebrated.

## Introduction

One of the things that we get asked about most is Norse holidays. Which ones did the Vikings celebrate, how did the Vikings mark them, and how do they relate to the essential holidays we celebrate in Unixploria today? With those questions in mind, let's look at the Norse calendar and how it frames the year.

## Norse Calendar

The Vikings' description of days and months reveals their beliefs and the challenges and opportunities each season brings.

The Norse calendar was designed to reflect the changes in seasons, such as the height of the sun in the sky, availability of food, and fertility. The year was divided into two halves, namely summer and Winter. People's ages were counted by the winters they had lived through. It is believed that the "New Year" started on April 14, also the first day of summer.

In ancient times, the year was divided into moon phases, from new moon to new moon or full moon to full moon. However, counting days was not always accurate in Scandinavia because the nights were quite bright, making it challenging to observe the moon.

The Norse calendar is a lunisolar calendar that uses lunar and solar movements to mark time. The movement of the earth around the sun is used to count the year itself. The year is also broken into two halves: *Nattleysi* ("nightless days," which is Summer, and *Skammdegi* ("short days"), which is Winter.

The Vikings did not have a specific numbering system for the years themselves but marked years related to one another. For example, an event may have happened ten years after the death of Ragnar Lothbrok or two years after an important battle. The Vikings started to use the Christian system for counting years from the 12<sup>th</sup> century.



Norse Calendar. The Way Our Ancestors Celebrated.

Ages were counted in how many winters an individual has seen. This may suggest that the Viking year officially started in April, at the start of the summer half of the year.

Months were marked by the moon's cycles, with 12 lunar months, each lasting 30 days. The Viking months began mid-month compared to today's calendar and were roughly the following:

**Harpa** – April to May – The first month of the year marking the start of summer and probably named for a forgotten goddess.

**Skerpla** – May to June – The month's name refers to vigor and abundance. It may also have been called *Eggtid*, which means "egg time."

**Solmanudur** – June to July – The name means "sun month" and marks the beginning of summer in earnest. Additional days of the year were added between this month and the next.

**Heyannir** – July to August – The month's name means "hay season."

**Tvimanudur** – August to September – The name of the month probably refers to the fact that it is the second last month of the summer season.

**Haustmanudur** – September to October – The last month of the summer.

**Gormanudur** – October to November – The first month of Winter. The name means slaughter month and probably indicates that this was the time of year when animals were slaughtered ahead of Winter.

**Ylir** – November to December – Named for the important Viking festival of Yule, which arrives the following month.



Norse Calendar. The Way Our Ancestors Celebrated.

***Morsugur*** – December to January – The name of the month means "fat-sucking month" and probably refers to the large amounts of stored fat in the Viking diet at this time. It was also called *Jolmanudur*, which means "month of Yule."

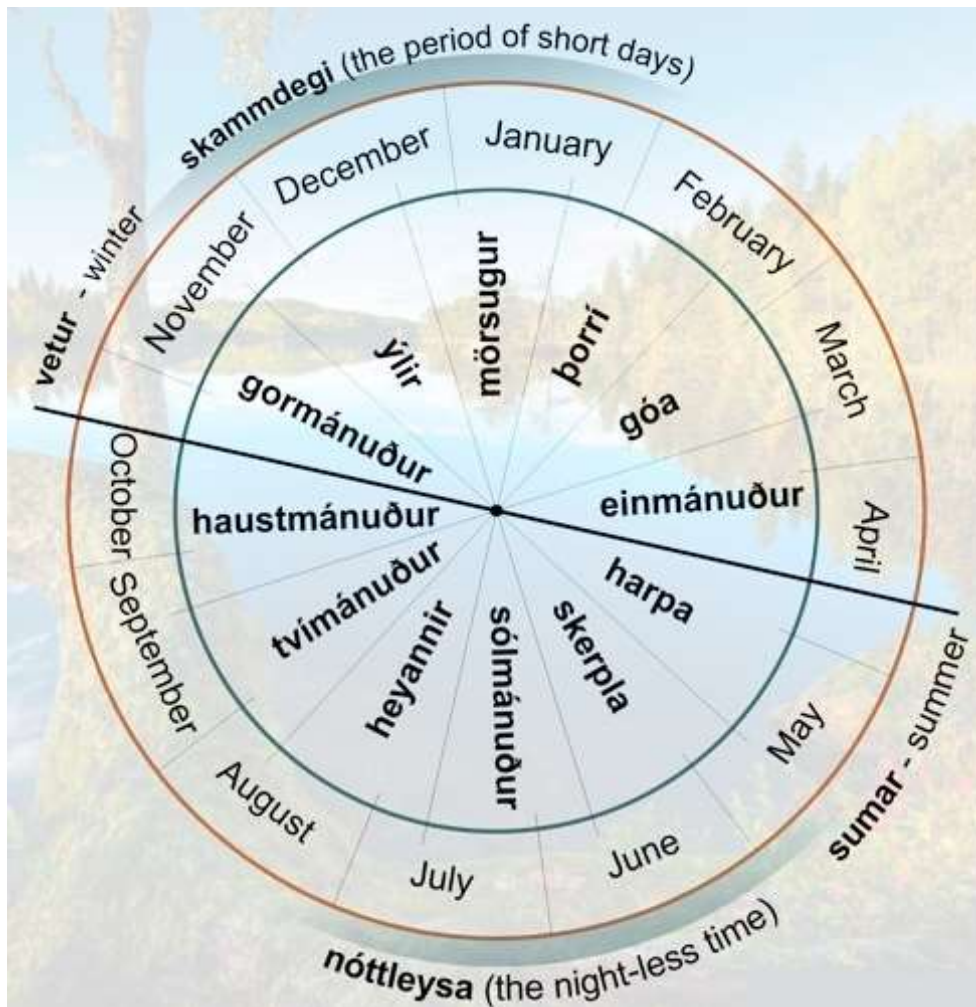
***Thorri*** – January to February – The month is named for Thorri, a god of frost (not to be confused with Thor).

***Goa*** – February to March – The goddess Goa is also a deity associated with Winter, giving her name to this month.

***Einmanudur*** – March to April – The name means lone month, possibly because it is the last month of the year or the loneliest month at the end of a long winter.



## Norse Calendar. The Way Our Ancestors Celebrated.



The use of 30-day months meant that the months and the years quickly fell out of sync, so every few years, extra days were added in Summer, called *Sumarauki*, which brought the year back into sync. This alignment of the months meant that each month always started on the same day of the week. For example, the start of Summer in April always fell on a Thursday.



Norse Calendar. The Way Our Ancestors Celebrated.

**Sunnudagr** – Sunday, the name means "sun day."

**Manadagr** – Monday, the name means "moon day."

**Tysdagr** – Tuesday, named for Tyr, a god of war and justice.

**Odinsdagr** – Wednesday, Odin's day, is named for the most essential Norse god.

**Thorsdagr** – Thursday, Thor's day, named for the protector of Asgard and Midgard.

**Frjdagr** – Friday, the name may refer to the goddess Freyja or Frigg. The two goddesses may have been the same in early Norse times.

**Laugardagr** – Saturday, but literally "bath day." The Vikings were known for their hygienic practice of bathing once a week.

We know what the Norse calendar looked like thanks to the survival of scores of Norse calendars from Iceland, Norway, and Sweden dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The oldest surviving Norse calendar is from Nyköping in Sweden and was engraved into a staff. Unfortunately, the original has since been lost, and only a copy was made for the summer half of the year. Another vital calendar is Worm's Runic Calendar, which dates to 17<sup>th</sup> century Norway.

However, because these calendars date from the Christian period, although they use the old Norse months, the festivals marked on the calendars are Christian.

## **Viking Festivals**

The most important dates in the Viking calendar were linked with the solstices and equinoxes. This makes sense since these celestial events would have been highly noticeable, especially at more northern latitudes.



## Norse Calendar. The Way Our Ancestors Celebrated.

These events can also be linked to the changing of the seasons, which would have primarily dictated life in the Old Norse world as this told the Vikings when to plant, harvest, hibernate, and set sail.

The major festivals in the Viking calendar, called blots, also aligned with these critical celestial events. We do not have a complete calendar of all the marked dates, but we have an idea about some of them thanks to references in the surviving histories and sagas.

### **Sigrblot – Mid-April**

*Sigrblot* was marked on the first day of *Harpa* in April, which marked the start of summer and probably the beginning of the Norse calendar year. The sources suggest that offerings were made to Freyja at this time of year. She was associated with fertility, so the world bloomed after Winter.

### **Alfarblot – Late October**

*Alfarblot* was marked at the end of October, which marked the start of Winter and is often associated with Halloween and the old Celtic holiday of Samhain. It was considered a time of year to honor the ancestors (the dead), and it was a dangerous time of year when the veil between the worlds was thin and supernatural entities had greater power. Rather than being a large public festival, it was a private festival celebrated in the home.

### **Yule – Late December**

The Vikings celebrated Yule during the second half of December when the days were at their shortest and coldest. It was considered a dangerous time of year when the god Odin was abroad with the Wild Hunt. Anyone caught alone out of doors was at risk. Sacrifices were made to various gods, including Odin, Thor, and Freyr, probably to ensure survival during these last difficult months before the coming of spring. Many Viking Yule traditions have been adapted into modern Christmas traditions.



Norse Calendar. The Way Our Ancestors Celebrated.

While there certainly would have been other important festivals celebrated throughout the year, and we know that the Vikings would take almost any excuse to gather, we can't say much about the different festivals based on the surviving sources.

## Heathen Festivals

Looking at the Heathen calendar, you will see many more dates marked. But it is important to remember that Heathenry is a form of modern paganism, and the Heathen calendar of festivals was only really developed in the 1970s. It draws on Norse tradition but also other Pagan and Wiccan traditions.

The calendar of annual festivals used by most followers of Asatru in Scandinavia today is listed below.

**Julblot** – Late December/Winter Solstice – linked with Odin and Freyr.

**Disablót** – February – linked with the Disir, nature spirits, usually female.

**Varblot** – March/Spring Equinox – linked with the Vanir gods and the light elves, especially Freyr and Freyja.

**Majblot** – Late April/Early May – fertility festival linked with Freyr, Thor, Sif, and Jord.

**Midsommarblot** – Late June/Summer Solstice – another fertility festival linked with the Vanir gods.

**Sensommarblot** – Early August – fertility festival linked with Thor and Sif.

**Hotsblot** – Late September/Autumn Equinox – linked with Frigg, Freyr, Ullr, and Skadi.

**Alvablót** – Late October/Early November – a celebration of the ancestors.



Norse Calendar. The Way Our Ancestors Celebrated.

## A Modern Viking Calendar?

For modern Vikings, it is not particularly important to celebrate specific festivals on specific dates. What does matter is connecting with the natural rhythm of the year. The Vikings recognized that they were part of nature rather than separate from it and aligned their lifestyle with nature. Marking the changing seasons and important celestial events reflects and honors that.

Viking festivals often seem to have honored multiple gods, with sacrifices to gods such as Odin, Thor, Freyr, and Freyja made together. They also blurred the lines between gods, dead ancestors, elves, and nature spirits. They were often honored together, and clear distinctions between the different groups did not seem particularly important.

<i><b>Norse Season</b></i>	<i><b>Norse Month (English)</b></i>	<i><b>Period</b></i>	<i><b>Norse Month (Old Icelandic)</b></i>	<i><b>Comments</b></i>
Winter	Slaughter Month	October 14 – November 13	<b>Gormánuður</b>	
Winter	Ýlir/Jólnir: One of Odin's, the "Allfather's" names	November 14 – December 13	<b>Ýlir</b>	Christmas month
Winter	Bone Marrow Sucking	December 14 – January 12	<b>Mörsugur</b>	"Mör": Bone marrow or fat. Essential to survive Scandinavian winters.
Winter	Black Frost	January 13 – February 11	<b>Þorri</b>	Norse mythical winter figure, son of "Snow". Also, men's month



# Norse Calendar. The Way Our Ancestors Celebrated.

Winter	Daughter of <b>Þorri</b>	February 12 – March 13	<b>Gói, góa, gjø</b>	Women's month
Winter	One-Month	March 14 – April 13	<b>Einmánuður</b>	Men's month
Summer	Cockoo's Month (?)/ Unknown mythical figure	April 14 – May 13	<b>Gaukmánuður/ Harpa</b>	Women's month
Summer	Unknown woman's mythical figure's name	May 14 – June 12	<b>Skerpla</b>	
Summer	Sun's Month	June 13 – July 12	<b>Sólmánuður</b>	
Summer	Haymaking Month/ Worm's Month	July 13 – August 14	<b>Heyannir/ Ormamánuður</b>	
Summer	Two-Months/ Corn Cutting Month	August 15 – September 14	<b>Tvímánuður/ Kornskurðarmánuður</b>	
Summer	Autumn Month	September 15 – October 13	<b>Haustmánuður</b>	
?	Late Month		<b>Silðimánuður</b>	The 13th month