



CELEBRATING THE SUMMER SOLSTICE

Liz Lowe offers some ideas for celebrating the shifting seasons

The June solstice heralds the start of summer on the astronomical calendar, and is an invitation to spend time in nature, reflect and look ahead to the coming months.

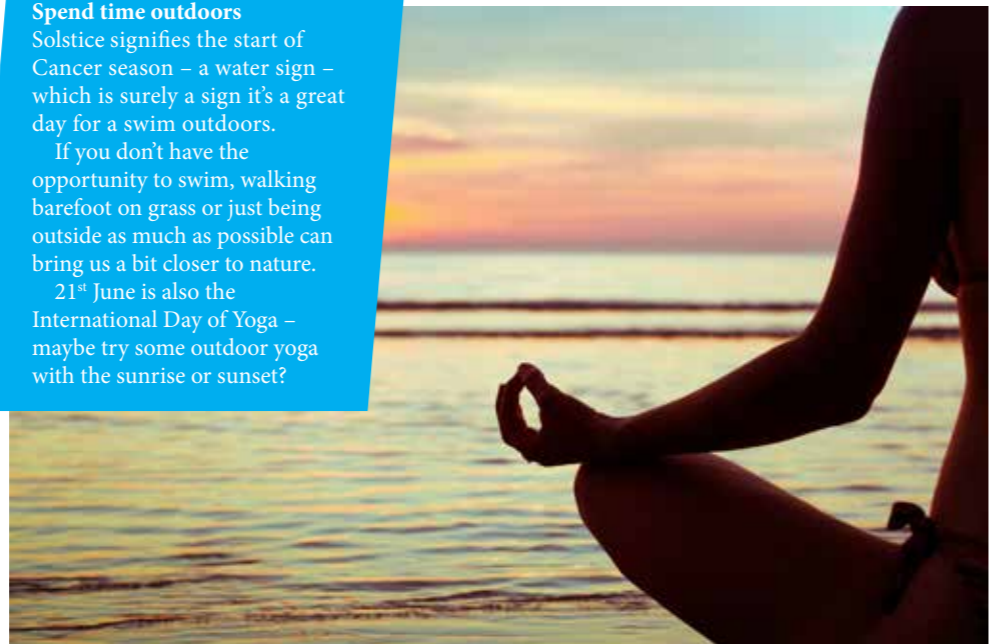
The word 'solstice' comes from the Latin 'sol' (sun) and 'sistere' (to stand still) and was known as 'sunstead' in Old English. As the sun reaches its northernmost position in the sky, it appears to 'stand' above the Tropic of Cancer. During solstice we experience the longest period of daylight, yet it can feel somewhat bittersweet – summer stretches out ahead, but the sun's path is about to reverse and our days to shorten gradually.

Here are some ideas for celebrating the shifting seasons and this ancient star that bathed our ancestors in light and warmth and continues to shine on us.

Spend time outdoors
Solstice signifies the start of Cancer season – a water sign – which is surely a sign it's a great day for a swim outdoors.

If you don't have the opportunity to swim, walking barefoot on grass or just being outside as much as possible can bring us a bit closer to nature.

21st June is also the International Day of Yoga – maybe try some outdoor yoga with the sunrise or sunset?



Practice mindfulness in nature

Whatever you do, try to find a few mindful moments to connect with your internal and external environment. First, tune into your breathing and how you feel mentally and physically. Next, listen to the soundscape surrounding you, beginning with far away sounds and moving to those nearer.

Notice the different colours, shades and textures you can see, where the sunlight falls and how it moves. If you can't see the sun, how and where can you sense its presence? Notice all the places where your body connects with the natural world – the temperature of the air as it touches your skin, the feel of water enveloping your body or the grass beneath you.



Perform a fire ritual

In the Pagan calendar, solstice is known as Litha and celebrations often involve fire to symbolise the sun or the battle between light and darkness. Gathering around a firepit, or simply lighting a candle, can evoke the sun's energy.

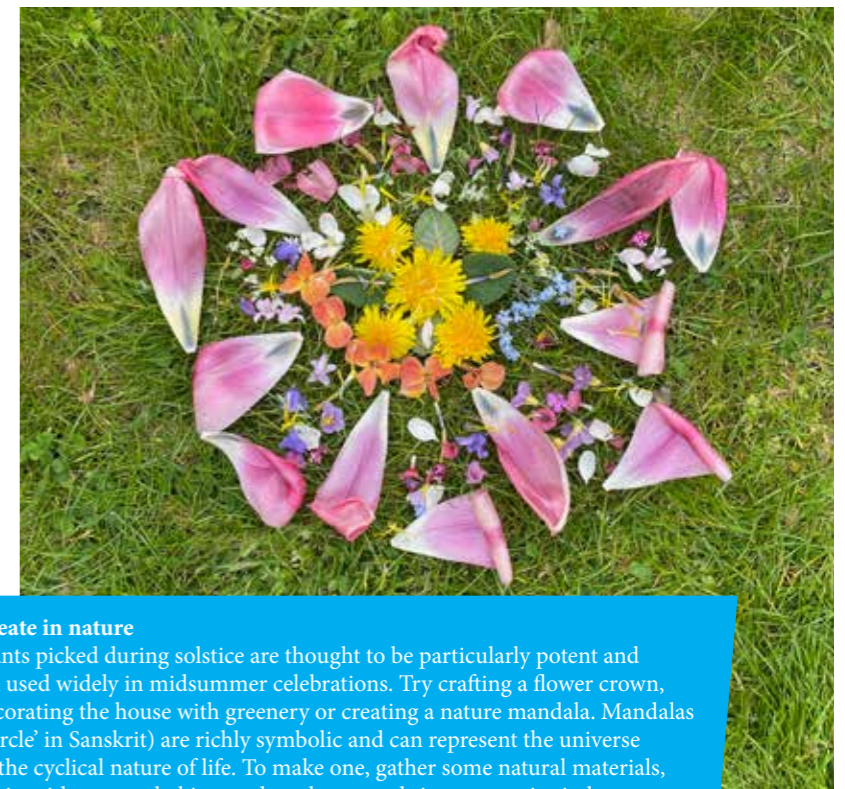
For a cleansing ritual, burning sage (smudging) is thought to purify spaces by clearing negative energy.



The northern hemisphere's summer solstice takes place on Tuesday 21st June at 10.13am BST. In the southern hemisphere this is the date of the winter solstice when the sun appears to be positioned directly above the Tropic of Capricorn.

Set an intention

Solstice is an opportunity to renew past intentions or set new ones. Think about what lights you up and how you could invite more of this into your life? What could you commit to doing daily, weekly or monthly to help you feel more balanced, energised or fulfilled? Equally, what could you let go of?



Create in nature

Plants picked during solstice are thought to be particularly potent and are used widely in midsummer celebrations. Try crafting a flower crown, decorating the house with greenery or creating a nature mandala. Mandalas ('circle' in Sanskrit) are richly symbolic and can represent the universe or the cyclical nature of life. To make one, gather some natural materials, begin with a central object and work outwards in concentric circles.