

Jack-o-Lanterns (turnips, pumpkins, carving tools, tealights) were traditionally carved from turnips. The term *Jack* of the Lantern first appeared in print in 1750 and referred to a night watchman or a man carrying a lantern. Previous to print, it was used to describe a strange light flickering over the marshes of Ireland. If approached, the light advanced and was always out of reach. The mysterious occurrence is also known as *will o' the wisp* and *ignis fatuus*, Gaelic for “foolish fire.” Its legendary status, however, reaches far back into Irish folklore with a story of a stingy drunkard named Jack.



Jack, an Irish blacksmith, had the misfortune of running into the Devil in a pub on Halloween. Jack had drunk a bit too much that evening and was about to fall prey to the Devil, but the quick thinking trickster made a bargain with the Devil. In exchange for one last drink, Jack offered up his soul. The Devil changed his form into a sixpence to make payment to the bartender, but Jack pocketed the coin in a bag with a silver cross, knowing that the Devil couldn't change back. Once under Jack's thumb, and in his purse, the Devil agreed not to come for Jack's soul for another ten years.

Ten years later, the Devil came across Jack walking on a country road and explained to him that he was there to collect Jack's soul. Not ready to go, Jack, pretending to comply, asked the Devil if he would climb an apple tree first and give him an apple. The Devil, thinking he had nothing to lose, climbed the tree. But as he was plucking the apple, Jack pulled out his knife and carved the sign of the cross in the tree's trunk. The Devil was unable to come back down and Jack forced him to make an agreement: that the Devil would never take his soul.

Years later, Jack finally died. He went to heaven, but was dismissed from the gates due to his drinking, tricking, and miserly ways. He then went to hell, but was denied entrance because the Devil had made that earlier promise. Jack asked, “But where am I to go?” And the Devil replied, “Back to where you came from.”

The way back was dark and windy, so Jack pleaded with the Devil to at least grant him light in which to find his way. The Devil, in a very un-Devil-like generous manner, tossed Jack an ember from the fires of Hell. Jack shielded the ember inside a turnip he'd been eating and left Hell to wander back.

Ever since, Jack has been doomed to wander in the darkness alone, and his name and lantern are synonymous with a damned soul.

Needfire (kindling/dry grass/leaves, wood, fire extinguisher, metal can, paper/pencil, and matches)

[We'll start this fire in a metal/ash can, placed in a patch of open earth in one of the raised bed gardens. Traditionally, the Needfire was lit by rubbing a pair of sticks. And anyone willing to try is welcome. Given it will be unlikely for most of us, we'll use matches as our last resort.]

In some areas of the Celtic lands, people believed that a special fire, called the *Needfire*, could be used to create magical results. However, the *Needfire* could only be created in times of great need. In many areas, Samhain was seen as an opportune time for the *Needfire*. After all, harvest was over, the earth was getting cold, and in just a few short months, families could be starving and freezing. The *Needfire* helped to assure that families would be safe from famine, pestilence, deadly cold, and other natural disasters.

In some nomadic societies, the *Needfire* was also the place to make offerings. For example, if you wanted to have healthy sheep, you might carve an effigy of a ewe and toss it in the fire. Perhaps you would throw a few seeds in the fire to assure an abundant crop the following season.

Traditionally, the *Needfire* was lit without the use of iron. It could only be started by rubbing a pair of sticks together, or twisting a rope along a stake until a spark was created. In some areas, it was considered acceptable to use embers from a tree that had been hit by lightning as the starter. Typically, though, the *Needfire* was started by hand. If someone could start a fire without iron or match, their family will be protected throughout the winter! Although it can be really difficult, with practice and good technique, *Needfires* can be successfully lit to help safeguard families through the coming year.



[We will acknowledge tradition and invite anyone who wants to try using sticks to start the fire. But for our purpose today, matches are available. Phew! Once fire has started, everyone is invited to write or draw an offering to toss into the fire, a wish or prayer for the coming season. When everyone is ready, toss into the fire, sharing aloud the wish or keeping it private.]