



Moonstruck!

The moon may physically control the world's tidal activity but it has also had an influence on the beliefs, customs, practices and social behaviour of particular groups of people. The Harvest Moon is an interesting example.

In folklore the full moon of each month is given a name. Obviously these names originated in the northern hemisphere. The seasons are reversed in the southern hemisphere. There are many variations but the following list gives the widely accepted names.

January—Wolf Moon

July—Hay Moon

February—Ice Moon

August—Corn Moon

March—Storm Moon

September—Harvest Moon

April—Growing Moon

October—Hunter Moon

May—Hare Moon

November—Snow Moon

June—Mead Moon

December—Winter Moon

There has been a lot written and sung about the Harvest Moon. A standard from 1908 is a love song. The chorus begins with “Oh, Shine on, shine on, harvest moon / Up in the sky; / I ain't had no lovin' / Since January, February, June or July”.

But what is the Harvest Moon?

In Norse mythology the Harvest Moon is said to be the most powerful of the moons, granting Loki's blessing for a plentiful harvest.

Today the Harvest Moon is often mistaken for the Hunter Moon. The Harvest Moon is the full moon closest to the autumn equinox (the day of equal night and daylight—about 23 September in the northern hemisphere). About once every four years it occurs in October, depending on the cycles of the moon. Currently, the latest the Harvest Moon can occur is on 8 October. Between 1900 and the present-day the Harvest Moon fell on 8 October in 1911 and on 7 October in 1930, 1949, 1987 and 2006.

In legend, the Harvest Moon is said to be bigger or brighter or more yellow in colour than other full moons. This is an illusion, but it did allow farmers to keep harvesting the autumn crops well after sunset.

In some cultures, anyone whose birthday falls on or near a Harvest Moon must provide a feast for the rest of the community.