

# Ostara: Light of the Earth – symbols of new beginnings



Partners Joe Longo and Craig Sloan of Blu Lotus, show off the fairy statues under their purple and pink lit tree, in preparation for Ostara, which will be March 20. The tree is the altar for their Church Street shop.

DEBORAH ANN TRIPOLDI/STAFF

**By DEBORAH ANN TRIPOLDI**

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Montclair resident Joe Longo, co-owner of Blu Lotus on Church Street, intends to balance a raw egg at precisely 12:15 p.m. Tuesday, March 20. Tuesday is the Spring Equinox, also known as Ostara or Alban Eilir (Light of the Earth) in the Druid and Pagan traditions.

It is a customary tradition to try and balance an egg in an

upright position on the Spring Equinox. The egg's ability to stand upright is possible due to the earth's position with the sun at that time on that day. The equinox is the balance point between day and night and is therefore is regarded as a time to balance our own lives.



An egg balanced at  
the Spring Equinox  
COURTESY JOE LONGO,  
CO-OWNER BLU LOTUS

“It does stand up for spring,” said co-owner and partner Craig Sloan.

Longo reveals a trick: “A room temperature egg works much better.”

Many Christian symbols have Pagan roots. In the Druid tradition, a life-giving symbol of Alban Eilir, is a hare protecting an egg. In addition to eggs and bunnies, other adopted symbols are chicks and ducklings, which all represent new life. Pagans also color eggs for the holiday, which falls between Imbolc – Feb. 2 and Beltane – May 1.

A symbolic plant of Celtic Druidry's Ostara is the shamrock, linked to St. Patrick's Day, which falls only a few days before the equinox.

“At home we are gardeners. We love to start planting. Start indoors and do something the day of Ostara, seeds or herbal. I like to grow my own herbs such as passion flower, skull cap and peppermint. We bring bulbs in the house: hyacinths, daffodils, crocus and tulips,” Sloan said.

The foods for Ostara are also similar to traditional Easter meals. Sloan will be cooking a ham, stuffed cabbage, deviled eggs and homemade ice cream.

“We bake hot cross buns. The hot cross bun has roots with the Celts and is an offering to Eostre. They were adopted by Christians. Because the cross could be considered Christian but it actually isn’t. At one time, they were actually banned by the church. The [equal-armed] cross represents the four seasons and the phases of the moon,” said Sloan.



A spring goddess statue stands next to an egg. The egg is a symbol of new beginnings.

COURTESY CRAIG SLOAN,  
CO-OWNER BLU LOTUS

Eostre is the German Goddess of spring, from which Easter got its name.

Blu Lotus also sells more fairy statues in the spring.

“It’s more of a waking up, although they are around all year. I feel it most this time of year with creatures,” said Sloan.

Longo said, “Also you can hear the doves [at this time of year]. The Dove is my spirit animal.” It’s Sloan’s, as well.

In their home, the couple will have a statue of Gaia, the Greek Earth mother goddess.

“We will start our seeds and light candles. Go back to basics in spring. Turn on our waterfalls,” Longo said.

Sloan said it’s a time for new beginnings.

“My favorite time of the year, everything feels new. We clear out the old stuff and give it away; a spring cleaning. Also we go outside in nature. We always feed the birds,” Sloan said.

A large artificial tree in the center of the store changes colors according to the season and holidays.

“Pink and purple for the cherry blossoms, until May and then green for Beltane,” Sloan said.

### ***Ostara Celebrations***



Spring Goddess statues sit

under the tree at the  
shop.

COURTESY CRAIG SLOAN, CO-  
OWNER BLU LOTUS

***Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Montclair***

*67 Church St. in the Mortenson Room*

*Tuesday, March 20 at 7:30 p.m.*

*Free event, open to public.*

*For info: 973-744-6276*

[uumontclair.org](http://uumontclair.org)

***Mystic Spirit Metaphysical Shoppe***

*324 Bloomfield Ave.*

*Saturday, March 24 from 6 to 9 p.m.*

*Potluck meal and small fee for supplies*

*For info: 973-509-7155*

[mysticspirit.net](http://mysticspirit.net)

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**Alban Hefin: The light of the  
summer**



Partners Joe Longo and Craig Sloan of Blu Lotus, arrange the fairy statues under their tree for the Summer Solstice– June 21. The blue lit tree is the altar for their shop on Church Street. DEBORAH ANN TRIPOLDI/STAFF

by Deborah Ann Tripoldi  
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The longest day of the year – and no, it's not a Monday or Black Friday – falls on Wednesday, June 21.

Summer begins that day at exactly 12:24 a.m. EDT.

The first day of summer for the Northern Hemisphere is known by many names: the summer solstice, Midsummer, Alban Hefin (or “light of the summer”) to the Druids, or Litha to most pagans. It is one of eight sabbats, which mark the turning of the Wheel of the Year. They are seasonal festivals celebrating the cycles of nature.

Montclair resident Craig Sloan, co-owner of Blu Lotus on

Church Street, said that wherever he and his partner, Joe Longo, may be on the summer solstice, they make sure to watch the sun set.

Sloan is an eclectic pagan, or as he puts it, "an explorer." "The roots are all feeding to the same tree," he said. Longo considers himself spiritual.

Midsummer is one of the two solstices. Directly opposite on the Wheel of the Year is the winter solstice, also known as Yule or Alban Arthan which usually falls on Dec. 21. The Celts and many other cultures celebrate the summer solstice with bonfires.

The word "solstice" means sun stopping: the sun appears to stop and then reverse direction as the days grow shorter or longer, depending on time of year. "When we use to have a large property we held a bonfire on the solstice," said Sloan.

For those who observe the solstice, traditional colors to mark the holiday are blue, green and yellow. Some items presented on the pagan altar would be strawberries, oranges and tangerines, and flowers such as the sunflower, as well as anything associated with the sun or fire. Altars are usually in homes or created by a group. "I always light a white candle for clarity [on the Summer Solstice]," said Sloan. "I'm a nature lover and pick flowers to place on our altar in the bay window at home for the solstice." "There are candles, sand and shells in there right now," added Longo.

It is the most powerful day of the year for Bel, the Celtic God of the sun, who is associated with light, health and healing.

The day is the highest point of energy: "Energy is everything. Whatever the reason is, if we are not feeling it, we won't force just because a calendar says when it has to be done. We wait until the time feels right," he said. "Our ancestors went by the seasons changing, not a calendar."

“In essence we live our lives seasonally,” said Sloan.

Sloan and Longo say they enjoy being outside, at Verona Park or the beach, for the solstice. “We honor the seasonal festivals,” said Longo.

Blu Lotus has a tall ornamental tree that Sloan decorates for each season with lights. It serves as the store’s altar. Currently the tree is lit in blue lights and surrounded by figurines of fairies. Sloan noted that his shop has a lot of fairy statues for Litha. “We have a fairy promotion especially for the solstice. There is a belief that the line between the world of fairy and ours is the thinnest at this time,” he said.

Herbalist Kim Sisco of Montclair, an employee at Blu Lotus, will be in upstate New York for the solstice. “Fifty-five acres of positive land to celebrate with other herbalists during the Green Wisdom Weekend,” she said. “We will gather plants and herbs, make herbal medicine and build a bonfire at the end of the day. We will share and do a releasement to the universe; write it on a piece of birch or paper and toss that to the fire. We sit still and converse with Mother Earth and within ourselves.”

Like Sisco, Longo does a lot of reflecting during this sabbat. “We write down our good and bad, compare them and place under a shell or a crystal and leave it until the next new moon. Then we ... burn the bad ones,” he said.

For Longo it’s about “respecting the earth and taking care of what we have.”

Blu Lotus, 20 Church St., will hold a Healing Circle open to the public on Wednesday, June 21, from 8 to 9 p.m. Judie Hurtado, intuitive, Reiki master and spiritual teacher, will lead the circle, which will involve a “Welcoming the Light” meditation.