

Months and Seasons

The calendar we use today comes from the Romans. The Celtic peoples had a different view of seasons and months. Mostly it had to do with the environment and specific times of the year when certain agricultural activities could or needed to take place. As these weather-dependent times are variable, so were the start dates and durations of “months.” When the Roman calendar took hold, some of the names for these variable time periods became the names of months.

The four seasons each began with a feast. The first one, the “Celtic New Year” occurs November 1, with the Samhain feast.

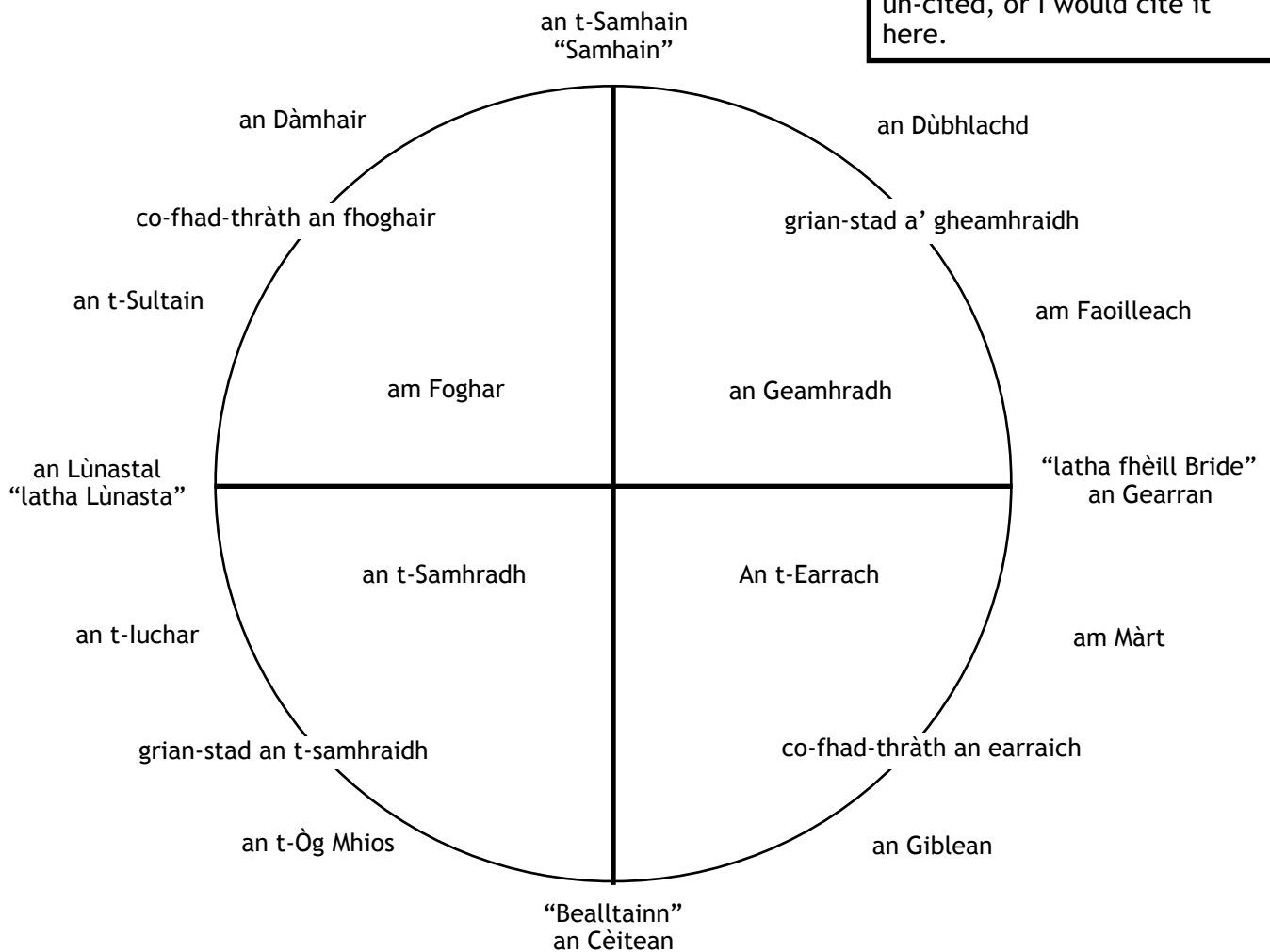
On the next page are some notes regarding the names of the months. The names of the months may have moved significantly from their original place in time.

Na Ràithean - The Seasons

an t-Earrach (fir.)	spring	as t-earrach	in spring
an Samhradh (fir.)	summer	as t-samhradh	in summer
am Foghar (fir.)	autumn	as t-fhoghar	in autumn
an Geamhradh (fir.)	winter	anns a’ Gheamhradh	in winter

The Circle of the Year

I received a version of this as a handout at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig one summer. The author was un-cited, or I would cite it here.



Na Mìosan - The Months

An t-Samhain (boir.) - November. Samhain, the feast of All Souls¹, Hallow-tide. Early Irish samfhuin 'summer-end', i.e., sam (summer) + fuin (end, sunset)².

An Dùbhlachd (fir.) - December. The depths of winter, gloominess, dreariness, tempestuous weather³.

Am Faoilleach (fir.) - January. The season of the wolf ravages, originally the last fortnight of winter and the first fortnight of spring⁴.

An Gearran (fir.) - February. Latha fhèill Brìde, the Feast of Brigid, Candlemas. Originally March 15 to April 11th, originally the nine days after Faoilleach⁵.

Am Màrt (fir.) - March. Time suitable for agricultural work, seed-time⁶.

An Giblean (boir.) - April⁷ - no historical reference found.

An Cèitean (boir.) - May. Feast of Bealltainn (Beltane). Beginning of summer, fair weather, favorable season⁸. Old Irish cét-shamain, cét (first) + sam (summer)⁹.

An t-Òg Mhios (m) - June. The young month.

An t-Iuchar (m) - July. The dog-days, warm month¹⁰.

An Lùnastal (m) - August. Early Irish Lúgnasad 'Lammas Day' or 'Festival of Lúg', i.e., Lúg (the sun god) + nassad (festival)¹¹.

An t-Sultain (m) - September. The month of fatness¹², joy¹³.

An Dàmhair (f) - October. The rutting-time, damh (ox or stag) + dàir (rut)^{14,15}.

1 Samhain, Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samhain>, retrieved 10/31/12

2 Macbain, Alexander, *Etymological Dictionary of Scottish Gaelic*, Hippocrene Books, New York, 1998, p. 301

3 Dwelly, Edward, *The Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary*, 10th ed., Birlinn, Edinburgh, 1993, p. 370 (entry for Dùbhlachd)

4 Dwelly, Edward, *The Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary*, 10th ed., Birlinn, Edinburgh, 1993, p. 412 (entry for Faoilleach)

5 Dwelly, Edward, *The Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary*, 10th ed., Birlinn, Edinburgh, 1993, p. 486

6 Dwelly, Edward, *The Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary*, 10th ed., Birlinn, Edinburgh, 1993, p. 634

7 Macbain, Alexander, *Etymological Dictionary of Scottish Gaelic*, Hippocrene Books, New York, 1998, p. 193

8 Dwelly, Edward, *The Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary*, 10th ed., Birlinn, Edinburgh, 1993, p. 187

9 Macbain, Alexander, *Etymological Dictionary of Scottish Gaelic*, Hippocrene Books, New York, 1998, p. 79

10 Dwelly, Edward, *The Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary*, 10th ed., Birlinn, Edinburgh, 1993, p. 559

11 Macbain, Alexander, *Etymological Dictionary of Scottish Gaelic*, Hippocrene Books, New York, 1998, p. 236 (entry for lùnasd, lùnasdal, lùnasdainn)

12 Dwelly, Edward, *The Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary*, 10th ed., Birlinn, Edinburgh, 1993, p. 915 (entry for sultan)

13 Macbain, Alexander, *Etymological Dictionary of Scottish Gaelic*, Hippocrene Books, New York, 1998, p. 353 (entry for sult)

14 Macbain, Alexander, *Etymological Dictionary of Scottish Gaelic*, Hippocrene Books, New York, 1998, p. 122

15 Dwelly, Edward, *The Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary*, 10th ed., Birlinn, Edinburgh, 1993, p. 308 (entries for damh, dàmhair)

Further Readings

Ò Maolalaigh, Roibeard, *Scottish Gaelic in Twelve Weeks*, pp. 32-33 (months and seasons); p. 80 (holidays, time references).