

The Green Man

Look up the topics listed in blue



You might have seen images of The Green Man before. They can often be seen on old churches. They show a strange figure that seems to be made up of leaves and branches, like the one to the left. They are often known as Wildmen.

It is said that the famous figure of Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Shakespeare is really a Green Man.

It is often said that the character Robin Hood is also a Green Man, made up in medieval times. The character of Peter Pan might also be based on a Green Man. He enters the civilized world from Neverland, dressed in green leaves.



The Green Man is really a symbol from olden times, which represented nature. He represents the wild world. He appears to be pagan, perhaps a fertility figure or a nature spirit, similar to the Woodwose (the wild man of the woods); He is, perhaps, the Spirit of the Woods.



In times past, the ancient woodlands were very important to the people who lived near to them. Forests were dark and mysterious, and people were often afraid to go there. Many people had their 'sacred trees' and were almost treated like gods.

Look up the Epic of Gilgamesh, a Sumerian story.

In Egypt, green was an honoured colour. To 'do green things' was to do good things.

Doing 'red things' was bad! Osiris was the God of Vegetation. He was often called 'The Great Green'. He was worshipped in the hope that he would make the River Nile flood each year, to provide water for the crops.



Look up the God Pan from classical literature and religion.



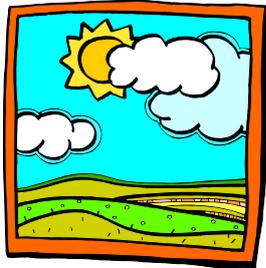
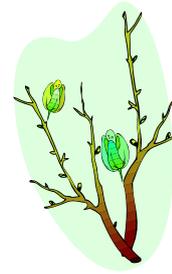
In the Arabic world, green is the colour of rebirth.

In the Hindu world, Krishna is thought of as the preserver of life. He is usually linked to the first months of spring, when green shoots would be springing up. The god Rama is often shown with a green skin. He lives in the woods and his wife, Sita, is the goddess of nature. She comes from the ground when it is ploughed



Look up the story of Rama and Sita.

The yearly cycle: The Green Man begins his year as a young sapling in spring. He then grows into a hearty man during the summer months, before slowing into the lovely colours of autumn. In the winter, the Green Man is said to live in the evergreens. (This is why we often bring evergreens, such as holly and ivy into our homes during the winter, particularly at Christmas.) He is then a symbol of fertility.



One of the first festivals of the Green Man is May Day, when the spring has truly sprung into life. He is then celebrated in the Harvest Festivals that we often have in church in the autumn. These traditions and festivals were very important to people who depended upon the harvest to be good to see them through the harsh winter weather to come.



The midwinter was also a special time in times gone by, as the people prayed for the end of the winter weather and the coming of another spring.

Look up the story of the 'King of the Wood' or 'Rex Nemorensis'.

Look up the poem 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'.

Look up the story of 'The Kings of Summer and Winter', as they fight for the hand of the 'Spring Maiden'.



Look up the festival of 'Garland Day' in the town of Castleton, Derbyshire.



Look up 'Morris Dancing'.

The character 'Tree Beard' in J.R.R. Tolkien's 'Lord of the Rings' was, of course, a green man. You might want to read the book and watch the film, if you haven't already seen it.

Of course today the Green Man is reminding us that we are dangerously close to destroying the natural world around us in order to rob out the natural resources we need to run our modern lives. It is trees that keep us alive, providing us with much of our oxygen. (A mature oak tree will supply all the oxygen for two people for their entire lives! If an oak tree lives to be 800 years old, that's 32 generations who will benefit from its oxygen!

We depend upon the Green Man for so many things, such as the fibres for our clothes. Can you think of any other uses we have for plants in our lives? Make a list.

Take a walk into a quiet woodland, (**NOT ALONE!**), and sit a while and look and listen at what is going on around you.