

# KUPALA FEST:

## Ancient Tradition in Modern Times

Kupala Fest, an ancient Slavic pagan celebration, marks the end of the summer solstice and the beginning of the midsummer harvest season. It is celebrated on June 24 according to the Julian calendar and July 7 the Gregorian calendar.

References to the festival date back to a marking found on a fourth century calendar pot, to a 1262 chronicle, and to medieval and early (Eastern Orthodox) Church documents. In an attempt to stop the pagan rituals after Christianity came to Ukraine, the Church proclaimed this day to be a celebration of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist. However, the midsummer festivities, begun centuries earlier, continued and continue into the present. Now the celebration is known as the festival of Ivana (John's) Kupalo.

The celebration begins in the evening, with the setting of Yarylo, the spring sun, continues through the night, and ends at dawn with the rising of Kupalo, the god of the summer sun, of love, and of the harvest. On this special night, the gods Kupalo (summer sun god), Yarylo (spring sun god), Marena (goddess of spring and of water), and Lada (goddess of fertility and marriage) take center stage. Ghosts, water nymphs, goblins, and witches also play a role.







## Fire

To welcome the summer sun, Kupalo, on the day of the celebration, young men in the village build a log fire in the shape of a square. Each corner of the log fire symbolizes a season.

As the spring sun sets, young men stand with lit torches at the four corners of the unlit fire. They walk towards each other and light the fire at the same time as soon as the sun sets. The fire burns from the setting of Yarylo to the rise of Kupalo.

On this night, the fire is seen as a cleansing force. When the flames die down, everyone takes turns jumping over the smoldering ash to bring hope for the year. The person who jumps the highest, will have a plentiful harvest. Those who do not clear the fire pit will have a year of bad luck.

Couples jump over the fire holding hands. If their hands stay together as they jump, they will have a lasting bond. However, if they break apart, they will not be together for much longer.

The magical fire is allowed to smolder and die out, and then all embers are stomped upon so that bad spirits cannot steal any of the fire for good luck. For this reason, the ashes of the special fire also are scattered.

## Tree of Life

On the day of Kupalo, young women decorate a festive tree branch, usually a willow, with flowers, ribbons, and berries. They place a periwinkle wreath at the peak and stuff stinging nettle and thistle into the lower branches to prevent the tree branch from being broken.

At sundown, young women dance and sing traditional songs around this tree. Young men try to steal this tree and if they succeed, they break apart the tree and carry the pieces to the fire.



## Plants and Flowers

Plants and flowers gathered on this day are considered to have magical powers, offering protection from evil forces and curing illness in people and animals.

People search for the special “tsvit paporot’,” a flower that is believed to bring good luck. According to legend, Perun, the god of thunder, visits a shady wooded area and sets one such blooming flower aflame. The flower does not bloom for long and once on fire, quickly turns to ash.

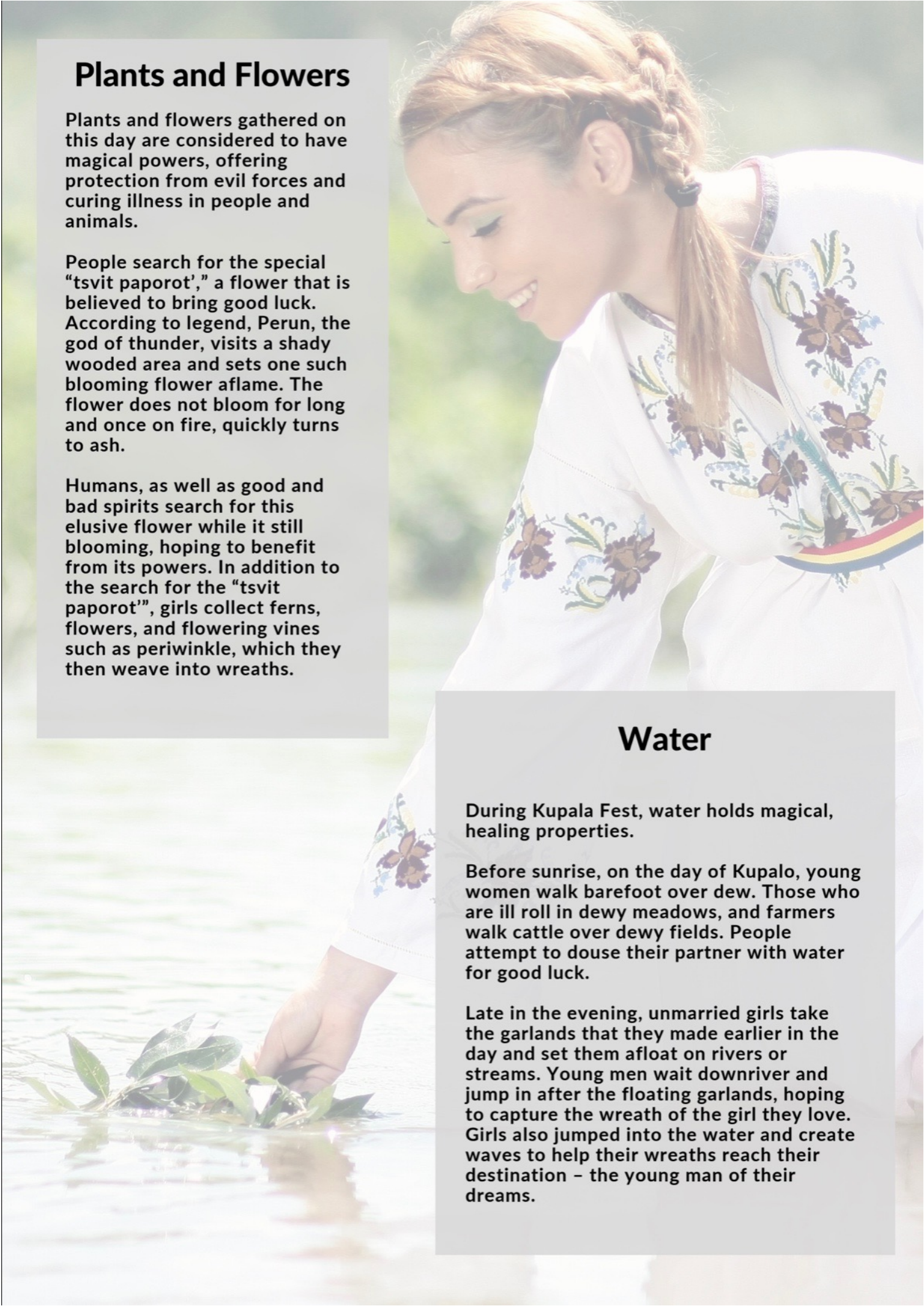
Humans, as well as good and bad spirits search for this elusive flower while it still blooming, hoping to benefit from its powers. In addition to the search for the “tsvit paporot’”, girls collect ferns, flowers, and flowering vines such as periwinkle, which they then weave into wreaths.

## Water

During Kupala Fest, water holds magical, healing properties.

Before sunrise, on the day of Kupalo, young women walk barefoot over dew. Those who are ill roll in dewy meadows, and farmers walk cattle over dewy fields. People attempt to douse their partner with water for good luck.

Late in the evening, unmarried girls take the garlands that they made earlier in the day and set them afloat on rivers or streams. Young men wait downriver and jump in after the floating garlands, hoping to capture the wreath of the girl they love. Girls also jumped into the water and create waves to help their wreaths reach their destination – the young man of their dreams.





## Other Traditions

Young men create an effigy of Kupalo and young women built one of Marena. The effigies are drowned, buried, or torn apart as sacrifices to the god of the sun and the god of water to have a rich harvest.

In some regions of Ukraine, a wheel is stuffed with dry grass or straw, set on fire, and rolled down a hill. The burning wheel represents Kupalo and symbolizes the inevitable decline in strength of the summer sun.

## Kupala Fest Sponsored by the CMA and the UMA

The Cleveland Maidan Association (CMA) was established in 2014 with the mission to raise funds to purchase medical equipment for hospitals and necessities for families affected or displaced by the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine.

To date, the CMA has purchased and delivered nine ambulances and four 40 foot containers filled with medical equipment. The CMA has sent over \$300,000 in aid to families in Ukraine struggling because of the effects of the armed conflict.



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