



THE LOVE IRELAND GUIDE N. 010

St. Brigid's Cross

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Pull a handful of green rushes from a wet field, fold and tuck them into a woven diamond with four arms radiating out, and you have made the same object Irish households have pinned above their doors for centuries. The St. Brigid's Cross is woven fresh each year on 1 February - the feast of St. Brigid and the old festival of Imbolc that marks the first stirrings of spring - then hung in the rafters to guard the home. This is Guide 010 in The Love Ireland Guide series.

What It Actually Is

A St. Brigid's Cross is a small woven cross, most often built around a central plaited square or diamond with four radiating arms. It is traditionally made from green rushes (*Juncus*) gathered from damp ground, though straw or reeds are used in regions where rushes are scarce. The rushes are usually pulled by hand rather than cut - folklore holds that they should not be taken with a blade - then folded one over another and

bound at the tips, so no glue or thread is strictly needed.

The most familiar form is the four-armed cross, but it is far from the only one. Collectors and folklorists have recorded three-armed crosses, multi-armed lozenge and diamond designs, and wheel-like variants, with regional styles differing across the country. Many of these survive in the folk collections of the [National Museum of Ireland](#), whose Country Life branch at Turlough Park in Mayo holds a substantial body of Irish material culture.

The Saint and the Legend

Brigid of Kildare, traditionally dated to around 451-525, is one of Ireland's three patron saints alongside Patrick and Columba (Colmcille). The best-known origin story tells that Brigid wove the first cross from rushes on the floor while sitting at the deathbed of a dying chieftain - often said to be a pagan lord, sometimes her own father. As she wove, she explained the meaning of the cross, and the man is said to have asked for baptism before he died.

Brigid's monastery at Kildare became one of early medieval Ireland's most important religious sites. The place is still marked today by St. Brigid's Cathedral in Kildare town, while the modern Brigidine [Solas Bhríde](#) centre keeps her devotion and craft traditions alive with workshops and pilgrimages around her feast day.

How and When It's Made

The cross is made on or around St. Brigid's Day, 1 February, which in the old Gaelic calendar is Imbolc - the point midway between the winter solstice and the spring equinox. In many households the new cross is blessed, then hung over the door or in the roof space, and the previous year's cross is taken down and, in some customs, burned. Making the cross is a hands-on tradition still taught in Irish schools each spring, and detailed accounts of the local customs were recorded in the 1930s in the Schools' Collection, now searchable through the [National Folklore Collection](#).

What It's Believed to Do

Traditionally the cross was hung to protect the house and its occupants - most commonly said to guard against fire, lightning, illness and evil, and to bring blessing on the home and livestock for the coming year. Because it was renewed annually, a rafter might hold a small stack of old crosses, one for each year the family had kept the custom. The symbol became so bound up with Irish identity that the national broadcaster [RTÉ](#) adopted a stylised St. Brigid's Cross as its on-screen logo for decades from the early 1960s.

A Day, a Symbol, and a Revival

St. Brigid's Day gained new prominence in 2023, when the Irish state made it a public holiday - the first Irish public holiday named for a woman. The holiday falls on the first Monday in February, or on 1 February itself when that date is a Friday, as confirmed by the Government of Ireland. Kildare, Brigid's own county, has leaned into the revival, and visitors planning a trip around the feast can find events and workshops through

Into Kildare.

Myths Worth Retiring

Myth: A St. Brigid's Cross always has four arms. In reality, three-armed, multi-armed, lozenge and wheel-shaped versions are all well documented, with the design varying by region and by the maker's local tradition.

Myth: It's a purely Christian invention. The cross is genuinely tied to St. Brigid, but it is also widely linked to the pre-Christian festival of Imbolc and to older solar-wheel symbolism, and it is commonly understood as a Christian tradition layered over an earlier seasonal one.

Myth: It's made from straw. Straw is used in some places, but the classic material is fresh green rushes pulled from wet ground, which fold and hold their shape without breaking.

Frequently Asked Questions

When are you supposed to make a St. Brigid's Cross?

On or around St. Brigid's Day, 1 February, which coincides with Imbolc and the traditional start of spring in Ireland. Many families make and hang the cross that day, sometimes replacing the previous year's one.

Where can I see or learn to make one?

Historic examples are held in the folk collections of the National Museum of Ireland, and workshops around the feast day are run in Kildare by the Solas Bhríde centre, with wider events listed through Into Kildare.

How long should you keep the cross up?

Custom is to keep it for the year, then take it down when the new one is made the following 1 February. In some households the old cross is burned; in others the year's crosses are simply left to gather in the rafters.

Official websites mentioned

National Museum of Ireland: [museum.ie](https://www.museum.ie)

Solas Bhríde: [solasbhride.ie](https://www.solasbhride.ie)

National Folklore Collection: [duchas.ie](https://www.duchas.ie)

RTÉ: [rte.ie](https://www.rte.ie)