

cover story

WHAT'S IN A MOON NAME: BEHIND THE LUNAR NAMING TRADITIONS

BY MAKENZIE WHITTLE • The Bulletin

Names for the full moon phases have existed throughout human history as a means of tracking the seasons and knowing when to harvest and hunt. While we don't rely on them as much any more, the names we give to full moons are as interesting now as they were helpful in the past. While the names are old and vary from culture to culture, the English-speaking world seems to have agreed on using a mix of medieval European names and names from North American Indigenous peoples. Here are the named moons for the next year, according to the Old Farmer's Almanac, and some alternatives from different Native tribes across what is modern-day America, according to Brad's Astro Pages from Western Washington University. Because a full moon appears in the stellar night skies every 29.5 days, dates vary from year to year.

JUNE 24: STRAWBERRY MOON

Strawberries are ready to be harvested and the best of the juicy berries are available at local farm stands (Oregon berries are the best berries). In Europe this was known as the Rose Moon, but for North America, many tribes have Strawberry Moons depending on their geographical location, the Anishinaabe and the Sioux have theirs in June, the Potawatomi and the Shawnee have theirs in May and the Cherokee's is in March. Other names include Moon of the Crane (Choctaw), Blackberry Moon (Creek), When the Berries are Good (Lakota) and Summer Moon (Passamaquoddy).

JULY 23: BUCK MOON

This one comes from when deer start to show off their full set of antlers. Other names include Moon When the Buffalo Bellow (Omaha), Salmon Moon (Tlingit), Limbs Are Broken By Fruit (Zuni), Grass Cutter Moon (Abenaki) and The Hot Weather Begins (Arapaho).

AUG. 22: STURGEON MOON

Traditionally when the sturgeon are most readily caught around the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain. Other names include Drying Up Moon (Cherokee), Green Corn Festival or Courting Time depending on when the moon occurs (Choctaw), Big Harvest (Creek), Corn is in the Silk Moon (Ponca) and Berries Ripe on Mountain (Tlingit).

SEPT. 20: HARVEST MOON OR CORN MOON

This is the time that crops like corn, pump-

kins, squash, beans and wild rice can be fully harvested, and farmers can usually work by the light of the full moon above. Many tribes have September moon names in relation to harvesting but a few deviate including Snow Goose Moon (Cree), Drying Grass Moon (Cheyenne), Moon Where the Deer Paw at the Earth (Omaha) and Big Moon (Tlingit). Typically, the Harvest Moon is the full moon that occurs closest to the Fall Equinox, which usually means the September full moon. Every few years the Harvest Moon, by that definition, occurs in October, meaning the September moon is the Corn Moon.

OCT. 20: HUNTER'S MOON

With the harvest done and leaves falling, game is easier to spot in the fields and trees. Deer are also fattened after the long summer. Other names include White Frost on Grass (Algonquin), Moon of the Wildcat (Choctaw), Bears Hibernate (Haida), Moon of Long Hair (Hopi), Time of Poverty (Mohawk) and When They Store Food in Caches (Ponca).

NOV. 19: BEAVER MOON

This is the time when traditionally beaver traps would be set in order to gather pelts before the deep winter freezes. Beavers are also active at this time as they prepare for the season. This year, a partial lunar eclipse occurs with 97.4% of the moon occulted by the Earth's shadow, making it appear blood red. Other names include Deer Rutting Moon (Cheyenne), Moving Inside for Winter (Kalapuya), Freezing Moon (Passamaquoddy), Moon When All Is Gathered In (Pueblo) and Long Moon (Shawnee).

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Alpenglow illuminates the Cascades as the moon begins to set near the horizon in October. The full moon was also a blue moon for that month, a designation for the second full moon to occur in a single calendar month. Blue moons occur roughly once every 2½ years.