

“Bei uns ist immer was los!”

## FEIERTAGE UND FESTE IM MAI SITTEN UND GEBRÄUCHE MAIBAUM

May pole: der Maibaum, die Maibäume

1. On May 1st, many villages still raise a May Pole / Maibaum in the marketplace, which is the symbol of the happiest month.
  - It consists of a high pole adorned at the top with a great wreath, woven of leaves and flowers and ornamented with long ribbons of many colors.
  - The old custom of raising the May pole in the market square is still done almost everywhere in Europe.
  - Under this Maibaum with a green wreath, one finds a dance in the afternoon and in the evening of May 1<sup>st</sup>.
2. The King of May is also chosen.
  - The boy is usually covered with birch branches and accompanied by his friends and goes from house to house to collect gifts.
  - The Queen of May, who is chosen by the king, personifies summer and is followed by a group of maids of honor, who are adorned with flowers.
  - Other names and figures during Maifest: King of May, Little Pentecost, Walber, King of Grass, Man of Boughs, Bear of Branches, etc.
3. May Pole custom:
  - During the night of May 1<sup>st</sup>, the boys of the village place a May tree, which is a young birch branch and solely planted in front of the house of their girlfriend for the purpose of showing that they really like her.
  - In the center of the village, young boys place a white arrow, on which a stuffed doll and green wreath with colored ribbons is placed.

Maypoles, incidentally, must be guarded round the clock to protect them against theft or destruction by the young men or bachelor's clubs from neighboring towns. After all, the maypole is still a kind of prestige object of a village or town – even today.

The inn-maypole – the “Wirtshaus-Mai” – is put up outside an inn or tavern or in the garden belonging to it. As a reward for their work of erecting it, the young men get a beer or another free drink “on the house”. Such maypoles are found today mainly in those areas where the “real country-inn” as the center of the community life of a village can still be found.

More common still is the lovers-maypole – the “Liebesmai”. The young man

puts up the tree – mostly a (decorated) birch – outside the front door or the bedroom window of his sweetheart's house (sometimes she has no idea of her good fortune). This usually happens in the night of the first of May, the Walpurgis Night. The girl thus honored must then be well-disposed towards the bringer of the maypole throughout the whole month, must go with him to the May festivals, dances, and balls of her own village as well as to the ones of the neighboring communities.

When the merry month of May is over, the May-couples will stay together – or not. In any case, the maypoles are removed again, private as well as public ones. In Hesse, there is the custom of drawing lots for the town-maypole. For this, the pole is cut up into small pieces, and with 30 and 50 pfennig tickets everyone can win some firewood. For the young men of the village this maypole-lottery means at least a keg of beer.