

# What is Wicca? An expert on modern witchcraft explains.

By Helen Berger Sept. 17, 2021



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Wicca and witchcraft are popping up in pop culture these days, from **teenage witches on TikTok** to a Marvel comic superhero **called Wiccan**. It has even led **The New York Times** to ask: “When did everyone become a witch?”

Wicca, an alternative minority religion whose adherents, regardless of gender, call themselves witches, began **in the U.K.** in the 1940s. Wicca and Witchcraft are part of the larger contemporary pagan movement, which includes druids and heathens among others. All these spiritual paths, as pagans refer to them, base their practices on pre-Christian religions and cultures.

Ever since Wicca arrived in the United States in the 1960s, it has been growing – sometimes by leaps and bounds, and **other times more slowly**. It is estimated that there could be around **1.5 million** witches in the U.S.

As I am aware from **my own research** of more than 30 years, however, not all witches consider themselves Wiccans. Based on my most recent **survey data**, approximately 800,000 Americans are Wiccans. The increasing numbers that have been witnessed in surveys and the growth of groups, such as those on TikTok, suggest that the religion is continuing to grow.

Wiccans have one overriding rule, “Harm none and do as you will,” and no single religious text that they draw beliefs from. Most Wiccans practice alone and are free to develop **their own unique practice**. They are nonetheless in regular contact, networking on the internet and congregating **at large gatherings** to conduct rituals, learn about magical and spiritual practices from one another, and enter what they see as a magical space where they can more readily encounter and embrace divinity.

## **A religion for the 21st century**

Although many Wiccans claim to draw inspiration from ancient cultures, such as pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon and Celtic traditions, it can be seen very much as a religion of our times. The Goddess provides a female face for the divine, appealing to feminists and those who seek “girl power.”

Wiccans see divinity in nature, which resonates with growing environmental concerns, **particularly among the young.**

Most Wiccans **practice magic**, which they believe taps into a spirit world often referred to as the “otherworld.” Others think of magic as drawing on an energy field they view as surrounding all of us. They do magic to heal themselves and others or to find a new home or job, among other things, and emphasize that magic must not cause harm. Magic is viewed as changing the practitioners as much as their circumstances, encouraging adherents to pursue self-growth and self-empowerment.

There is currently an increase in the U.S. of those with no formal religious affiliation, with just over a quarter of all Americans considering themselves **spiritual but not religious**. As sociologist **Courtney Bender** has noted, many members of this group tend to avoid formal religious structures but instead participate in occult practices that enhance their self-development – in these ways, **echoing spiritual practices** of Wiccans.

Moreover, humans have been heavily invested in the use of crystals and stones for thousands of years, but is there any merit to their use? Can crystals actually alter anything in our lives with their properties?

Carrie Eller, owner and operator of Under the Elder Tree, sells assorted stones, crystals, herbs and even boasts a Himalayan salt sanctuary.

“To the skeptics, anything in life can be a tool to make positive changes. You just have to want the change bad enough to make an effort,” said Eller.

While this thought can be applied to witchcraft, Eller doesn’t necessarily believe it can be applied to being a modern witch per se.

“Nobody knows for sure how these cultures implemented them as these were groups of people with no written language to refer to for historical references,” said Eller regarding the lives of witches, warlocks and Wiccans, also known as Picts, Druids and Celts.

“However, archeological evidence shows they lived closely with the earth, cycles of the seasons and celestial bodies. And as everything always had meaning and associations with other things, it stands to reason that the use of stones was a part of their culture too.”



“There’s a crystal out there for every emotion and even at times a physical ache! Sounds crazy right? How about the copper bracelet you always see your father or grandmother wearing for their arthritis? Guess what, copper is a mineral,” said Young.

“So, for me, when someone says they carry around a quartz tumble in their pocket all because it gives them mental clarity and encouragement to enjoy their job, hey, go for it! At the end of the day, our happiness is what matters most. So, if a pocket full of rocks is aiding to the joys of this world, well, sign me up!”