

# Green Corn Ceremony

## The Cherokee Tradition

Among the Cherokee people, the Green Corn Ceremony honors Selu, the Corn Mother. In ancient times it lasted for four days. The ceremony was comprised of sacred dances which were performed by the dancers within the sacred circle. The ceremony would begin with all the members of the town going to a running body of water and washing themselves.

Within the sacred circle, a deep pit would be dug and a branch of wood from a tree struck by lightning would be lit and used to bless the grounds for the ceremony. The coals from this “thunderwood” would be used to kindle the sacred fire in the pit in the center of the circle.

The dancers would then perform several rounds of sacred dances which typically lasted from 2-4 hours. The War Dance was also performed by the men. Several other dances which symbolized the planting of and harvesting of the corn were performed.

Within the dance circle, the dance leader and priest would make offerings to the Thunder Beings and the ancestor spirits as a gesture of thanks for a fruitful corn harvest. The final dance of Green Corn was the running dance, which would involve not only the sacred dancers, but also the entire assembly in a combined social dance, who would enter the circle and form a snaking, sinuous line of dancers circling the fire.

The dancers would use rattles made from gourds which were filled with small rocks and a stick of wood from a lightning struck tree during all the dances with the exception of the war dance and the running dance, which was accompanied by a drum made from a hollow log and covered with deerskin.

During the ceremony all the clan matrons would take coals from the sacred fire in the circle to the new year's home fires.

In many tribal towns, all the residents would bring out their furniture and shared living items and destroy them as a symbol of renewal of the new corn harvest. They would then remake new furniture and shared items for their clan dwellings.

Minor infractions of the religious and clan law, as well as debts were typically forgiven during green corn between parties as a symbol of rebirth and new beginnings, which allowed minor deviations from the ancient religious laws in deference to community bonding and cohesion as part of traditional Cherokee culture in ancient times.