

M A T A R I K I

What is Matariki?

Matariki is the Maori name for the group of stars also known as the Pleiades star cluster or The Seven Sisters; and what is referred to as the traditional Maori New Year.

When is the Maori New Year?

The Maori New Year is marked by the rise of Matariki and the sighting of the next new moon. The pre-dawn rise of Matariki can be seen in the last few days of May every year and the New Year is marked at the sighting of the next new moon which occurs during June. This occurs on **8 June 2005**, 27 June 2006, 16 June 2007 and so on.

What does Matariki mean?

Matariki has two meanings, both referring to a tiny constellation of stars; Mata Riki (Tiny Eyes) and Mata Ariki (Eyes of God).

Why is Matariki important?

Traditionally, depending on the visibility of Matariki, the coming season's crop was thought to be determined. The brighter the stars indicated the warmer the season would be and thus a more productive crop. It was also seen as an important time for family to gather and reflect on the past and the future.

Why do we celebrate Matariki today?

Today Matariki means celebrating the unique place in which we live and giving respect to the land we live on.

How is Matariki celebrated?

Matariki is celebrated with education, remembrance and the planting of new trees and crops signalling new beginnings. Matariki was the optimum time for new harvests, and ceremonial offerings to the land-based gods Rongo, Uenuku and Whiro to ensure good crops for the coming year. It was also seen as a perfect time to learn about the land we live on and to remember whakapapa (ancestry) who have passed from this world to the next and the legacy they left behind.

How long do celebrations last?

Traditionally celebrations lasted up to 3 days after the new moon had risen following Matariki becoming visible

Who celebrates Matariki?

Anyone who wishes to participate

Are all Iwi involved in the celebrations?

All Iwi (Maori Tribes) celebrate Matariki, although they may celebrate at different times. For some tribes celebrations are held when Matariki is first seen in the dawn sky, for others it is celebrated after the full moon rises, and for others the dawn of the next new moon.

Relationships and Celebrations Around Matariki

There are many ways to celebrate Matariki, here are a few examples:

- **Matariki and Arts**

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The sky was used by Maori for many reasons throughout history. Reading from the vast volumes of stars was a way of preserving history, knowledge, culture and maintaining ancient practices. The time of Matariki was a celebration in all customs and beliefs, so arts in its many forms were very important to this period. With the coming together of family and friends it was a time to share with each other skills, achievements and history through story telling, song and dance, carving and weaving, ancient ceremonies and passing on of knowledge and history. Matariki is a special time of year to celebrate being Maori, its customs and art forms and to show how unique the Maori culture is.

- **Arts activities associated with Matariki:**

- Special play performances
- Street performances
- Exhibitions of Maori crafts
- Classes showing how to weave, carve etc
- Television shows on Matariki history
- Musical performances

Matariki and Celestial Navigators / Astronomers

The night sky contains a massive number of stars which were used by Maori as a way to calculate time and seasons, navigate oceans, preserve knowledge and stories, maintain customary practices and inspire action and achievement. Matariki is an especially important cluster of stars to Maori, it is a signal for seasonal celebration and a key navigational beacon for ocean voyages.

The time of Matariki brings together family to share and learn the stories and knowledge that the stars hold. There are many legends that are associated with Matariki and not only in New Zealand but the Pacific and worldwide.

Matariki is a time to understand the history and the importance of the stars for Maori, not only in past but in everyday life

Celestial Navigators / Astronomers activities associated with Matariki:

- Astrology nights
- Waka ceremonies at night during Matariki
- Astrology information packs and activities
- Story telling nights based on legends of stars
- Dawn sighting event when Matariki appears

- Seminars of sailing by the stars
- Seminars on Matariki's importance worldwide

Matariki and Conservation

For Maori the land that they live on is one of the most important aspects of life. Preserving their way of life depended on the treatment of the land and all things living on it, this outlook was paramount to their survival

and was reflected and filtered through to many other aspects of Maori culture.

The Matariki star constellation was used to dictate how the coming year would be in regard to the size of the harvest, so it was very important for Maori to prepare the land as best they could in order to enable the coming

year to be successful. It was a time for everyone to learn about the trees, crops and environment that was around them. Therefore the land, its conservation and care is at the forefront of the Matariki celebrations.

Conservation activities associated with Matariki:

- Organize conservation days
- Cleanups of beaches and local parks
- Promotion of New Zealand bush walks
- Recycling awareness
- Teaching about native New Zealand forests in schools
- Public talks on conservation

Matariki and Food and Hospitality

The Matariki star constellation marked a time for starting all things new, this was a particularly important period for new crops to be planted and the preserving of old crops to be finished. When Matariki was sighted ceremonial offerings of food were planted for the gods Uenuku and Whiro to ensure a good harvest for the coming year.

Even the stars themselves were looked upon for guidance as to how successful the coming season would be; the brighter the star constellation the warmer the year was destined and the better the harvest was thought to be.

The timing of Matariki fell at the end of a harvest and food stores were full. Meat, fruits, herbs and vegetables had been gathered and preserved and the migration of certain fish ensured a great period of feasts. Matariki was seen as a time to share with each other, for family and friends to come together and share in the gifts that the land and sea had provided for them.

Food and Hospitality activities associated with Matariki:

- Certain meals made of traditional foods (month of Matariki)
- Matariki dinner celebrating the event
- Information added to menus promoting Matariki
- New Zealand beer/ wine and food only at Matariki
- Hangi nights during Matariki
- Signs during Matariki at supermarkets promoting healthy food

Matariki and Health

Matariki is a time of new beginnings, a time to pause and reflect on the year that was and the year that will be. So naturally it is a time for people to take a look at their lifestyles, their health and make some changes for the better.

For a long time Maori people have been suffering in the state of their health. Diabetes, obesity, alcoholism and smoking are all areas of concern and areas that need to be addressed.

Matariki provides a perfect time for Maori people and people of New Zealand to take a look at the state of their health and lifestyle. With the help and information from the health centres, hospitals and medical staff Matariki could be a time of healthy beginnings and new awareness's.

Health activities associated with Matariki:

- Health awareness/new beginnings promotions
- Healthy eating
- Health workers going to affected communities
- Information at schools on healthy eating
- Family fun days
- Brochures on healthy living at medical centres
- Gym membership deals/subsidies
- Traditional Maori medicinal practices classes and promotions

Matariki and Horticulture

Traditionally Matariki was seen as a time to prepare the land in which we live on. As Matariki fell in the winter months when the land was at its most inactive this was an ideal time to learn about the land and about the forest. Certain vegetables were planted to appease land based gods Rongo, Uenuku and Whiro and heading towards spring, plans for the planting of the spring garden were carried out.

For Maori the land was held with the utmost respect, how the land was treated in turn dictated how they would be treated living on and amongst it. Learning about the land and how to treat it through care as well as techniques and strategies of planting ensured the Maori culture would live on and survive for years to come.

Horticulture activities associated with Matariki:

- Planting of traditional plants
- Ceremonies to appease land gods around the sighting of Matariki
- Promotions of native New Zealand plants

Matariki and Schools

For children Matariki is an important time to learn about whakapapa (ancestry), the land, the stars, and what it is to be Maori. The Matariki stars were used to navigate, to keep time, know what season they were in, and to learn about the legends of the stars.

Learning about family and whakapapa was also very important around the time of Matariki. It was time to come together to exchange stories, learn about ancestors who have passed from this world to the next, and hand down knowledge and practices to ensure the Maori culture is preserved.

The land and the preserving of it was a big part of Matariki, crops were being planted for the next season, and learning about the land and forest was essential for everyone. Matariki is a time when children can learn about and celebrate the unique culture that they are a part of through school, family and friends

Schools activities associated with Matariki:

- Matariki month/arts and crafts
- Maori history/legends classes
- Projects on star constellations
- Planting of vegetable garden and New Zealand plants exercises
- School play performances
- Family days surrounding Matariki
- Cooking classes for whole family
- Whakapapa/family tree exercises
- School Hangi (Traditional Maori cooking) to celebrate the new moon/new year

Matariki and Sports

Competitiveness is a dominant factor in Maori culture, and the time of Matariki emphasises this. Matariki signals a time of coming together of family and friends, to share in food, festivities, and fun. Families gathered to perform songs and haka, weave, carve, and prepare food delicacies, hunt and fish.

While all this is done for the celebrations and entertainment, there is always an underlying sense of competition, to be able to out sing and out perform peers, to catch the biggest fish or prepare the tastiest meal. Matariki provides a time when we can show off our talents and allows for recognition in achievement and success.

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