



The House Witch

Your Complete Guide to
CREATING A MAGICAL
SPACE WITH RITUALS
AND SPELLS FOR
HEARTH AND HOME

ARIN MURPHY-HISCOCK
Author of *The Green Witch*

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Dedication

For Ada and Audrey, who are discovering magic
as a way to help the world around them and
heal those they care about.

Introduction

Your home is a place of refuge, renewal, and creativity, where you begin and end each day. It is also the primary root of your energy and spirituality. The house witch works to honor and strengthen that sacred space, making it as simple, peaceful, and nourishing as possible.

Unlike green witches who focus on nature-based practices and kitchen witches who concentrate on food and cooking, the house witch explores and uses the magic of the home. While other spiritual paths often look *beyond* the home to focus on the natural world, the house witch creates a solid and supportive place to work from—a literal (and magical) home base.

In *The House Witch*, you'll explore the energies of hearth and home and learn how you can create a spiritual haven for yourself and your loved ones in today's busy world. Inside these pages you'll learn how to:

- Locate and enhance your home's spiritual hearth
- Perform rituals to protect and cleanse your home
- Build a kitchen shrine
- Prepare recipes that blend magic and food
- Master the secrets of the cauldron and the sacred flame
- Bring the ancient house witch practices into modern times
- Produce hearth-based arts and crafts

In essence, the role of the house witch is to serve as a facilitator for the spiritual well-being of herself, her family, and her welcomed guests. Her home is her temple, which she tends in order to keep energy flowing smoothly and freely, as well as to honor the

principles she upholds. She seeks to support and nurture her family (and extended community) in both a spiritual and physical fashion. So if you are ready to explore the magic that may be found or created in your home and use it to better your life, then let's get started.

Chapter 1

A Place to Call Home



IF THERE'S SOMETHING ALL PEOPLE have in common, it's the need for shelter, nourishment, and a place to call home. That place is somewhere to return to for refuge, renewal, relaxation, and rejuvenation. In this chapter you'll learn about the concept of home and its place in a spiritual life.

Spirituality comes from within, and the spiritual path or practice you choose gives it context. One of the most common of those contexts is the hearth, the spiritual center of the home. No matter what your current spiritual path is, rooting it in your hearth makes a lot of sense and can nourish the rest of your spiritual life.

Hearthcraft and Home-Based Spirituality

Hearthcraft is a spiritual path rooted in the belief that the home is a place of beauty, power, and protection, a place where people are nurtured and nourished on a spiritual basis as well as a physical and emotional basis. Hearthcraft describes the home-based portion of the spirituality associated with the path of the house witch. It is not kitchen witchcraft, although that can play a role within a house witch's practice. It is also not green witchcraft, although that, too, can influence and enrich a hearth- and home-based practice.

Hearthcraft argues that spirituality, like many other things, begins at home. It is not enough to attend an out-of-home spiritual gathering at specific intervals; the home itself is an essential element within a nourishing, vibrant, ongoing spiritual practice. Once upon a time organized religion was depended upon to be the source for spiritual fulfillment. With increasing dissatisfaction being felt within organized religious institutions, the relocation of the spiritual focus to the home, either as the central element or a supportive one, makes sense. Honoring the hearth means honoring your origins, where you come from each day, and where you return each night.

Why Hearthcraft?

The word *hearth* is of Old English origin meaning the floor around a fireplace or the lower part of a furnace where molten metal is collected during the smelting process. Throughout the ages the hearth has come to symbolize domestic comfort and the entire home, perceived as the heart or center of the living space. Therefore, someone who practices hearthcraft is someone whose spiritual practices revolve around the hearth and home, as symbolized by the fireplace and the fire that burns within it.

Perhaps a more familiar term, *kitchen witch* is used popularly to mean someone who practices magic through cooking, baking, and/or through everyday activity. Hearthcraft differentiates from kitchen witchcraft by primarily emphasizing the spiritual aspect that runs through the practice, as opposed to the primarily magical practice of the kitchen witch. There's more about kitchen witches later in this chapter.

Hearthcraft, like other aspects of the house witch's path and other forms of kitchen and green witchcraft, revolves around practicality, with little ritualistic guidelines or necessary formality. Here are some keywords to keep in mind when you think about hearthcraft:

- Simple
- Practical
- Family-related
- Domestic
- Everyday
- Household

Keep It Simple

The practices suggested in this book are based in simplicity. Here the word *ritual* doesn't mean something full-blown and complicated; instead, it means an intuitive ceremony or something set apart from everyday action by mindfulness and conscious intent. Also, the word *magic* means the conscious and directed attempt to effect change by combining and directing energy toward a positive goal. The rituals and magical workings included in this book are only guidelines to give you an idea of how you can structure your own hearth-based spiritual practice.

Why Hearthcraft Is So Special

Hearthcraft functions on a very basic truth:

Living your life is a spiritual act.

Having said that, it can be hard to isolate exactly what constitutes spirituality and, by extension, how to actively support it in the home.

What makes hearthcraft so special is that the principles of it dovetail—in fact, are—the things you do every day in your home. In essence, this book is designed to help you recognize those things and lend awareness to them so that you can appreciate them all the more. It also offers some ideas on how to enhance those everyday actions and objects in order to facilitate or deepen your experience.

What Is Spiritual to You?

Nurturing the spiritual element of the home is key to the path of the hearth-based house witch. How can you do this? The answer depends on how you define *spiritual*. You've already read some basic definitions, but what is crucial to this practice is defining the term for yourself. Think about these questions:

- What constitutes a spiritual experience for you?
- What are the characteristics of a sacred object?
- What elements of an action render it spiritual?

These are huge questions, and the answers will be different for every person who tries to answer them. Attempting to define *spiritual* can be challenging, frustrating, and faith-testing. You may not be able to say more than "I just know when something is spiritual," and that's fine. In essence when you recognize something as spiritual, you acknowledge that something about it moves you or touches you deeply in a very specific way, evoking certain feelings that may be indefinable.

Focus Your Practice

Once you know what kinds of things you find spiritual, or what kinds of events or actions evoke that response within yourself, then you may have some idea of where to focus in your practice of home-based spirituality and how to identify or establish everyday activities that can support your spirituality, recognizing and using these spiritual moments to reinforce your commitment to making the home a spiritual place. One method of doing this is to use these moments or activities as an opportunity to think about "important" things (not "important" as in balancing your checkbook or picking up groceries for dinner but as an issue related to your spirituality); an opportunity to send good thoughts out toward your family, friends, and community; an opportunity to practice a form of "walking meditation," where you perform a simple, ongoing action with a clear

mind. Perhaps you take a moment to say a prayer or simply open your heart and talk to God in whatever form you envision the Divine, the universe, the spirit of love, or whoever you feel like talking to.

Maintaining healthy spirituality means keeping yourself relaxed, focused, and practicing *something*. It means keeping the lines of communication open between you and something greater than you. The term *practice* is often used to describe what one does in respect to one's spiritual path, and it means physically or intentionally acting upon a theory associated with the path. By actively seeking out or defining spiritual activity, you create the opportunity to develop a deeper connection with the world around you. (Chapter 2 explores sanctity in more depth, especially as it pertains to the home.)

Everyday Things Can Be Magical

There is always a sense that something that is simple cannot possibly be as effective or powerful or useful as something more complicated or difficult. This is an odd human perception. People love to complicate things, possibly in order to have a scapegoat available if they fail. "It was too difficult!" they can cry. Humankind seems to instinctively eschew responsibility. But taking responsibility for your spiritual practice, working from the heart of your home outward, is a step toward a more rewarding relationship with the world around you.

Everything is, or can be, a magical act. Stirring a pot of soup as you reheat it can be a magical act. So can wiping down the counter, washing the dishes, filling the kettle, and arranging your tea caddy. So how do you make these things magical? Not with secret words or arcane shapes drawn in the air. It isn't the addition of something that is necessary, so much as a recognition and acknowledgment of something that is already there.

How do you recognize the magic? Try these steps:

- **Live in the moment.** Being in the moment is harder to do than it sounds. It means not thinking about your next action or the one you just performed, not thinking about how you have to leave in half an hour to pick the kids up from practice or how you have to remember to buy milk on the way home. It means thinking about what you are doing this precise moment instead. Just be. Feel the weight of the jug in your hand; feel the weight shift as you tilt it to pour the milk; hear the sound of the liquid flowing into the glass.
- **Be aware of your intent.** Awareness is key to most magical working. While you are performing your action, make sure you have a clear expectation of the associated result or energy. Envisioning a clearly defined result is key to success.
- **Direct your energy properly.** Focus your will and allow it to fill the action you are performing. Poorly directed energy is wasted.
- **Focus on an action.** It may go without saying that there should be an action upon which to hang your magical work, but for the sake of clarity it's worth noting that it is better to focus on a single action rather than a series of actions. It is harder to maintain focus over a long period of time, especially if you must change actions along the way.

Remember, hearthcraft is about keeping things simple and focusing on the actual work you are doing in the home. If you feel you need to speak during a moment you define as spiritual or magical working, speak from the heart or use a short prayer or poem that you already know and can apply to several situations. (See Chapter 10 for suggestions about spoken magic and prayers.)

In essence, magic is the art of clearly focusing your will to help create a change or transition of some kind. If you're familiar with the contemporary practice of magic, particularly in conjunction with your spiritual practice, then you know that certain symbols or objects can help you focus and lend energy to help accomplish that change. If you're interested in this kind of work as a supplement to your spiritual practice, you should read a book specifically focusing on

magic and spellwork, such as my book *Power Spellcraft for Life*. As this book focuses mainly on maintaining a home-based spiritual practice, there isn't a lot of magic-based work described here. It does include folk wisdom and home-based tradition, however, which some people may identify or define as magic.

Although many people use the terms *house* and *home* interchangeably, there is a difference between them, and each term is used to describe something specific in this book. *House* refers to the physical dwelling, the four walls and the roof over your head and the address and geographic location of your residence. *Home* refers to the energy entity created by that physical dwelling, the family that lives in it, and the identity that arises from the interaction between the two.

How does this all tie in to spirituality? Every moment is an opportunity to be in the now, to appreciate the moment and to make it magical. By doing this, you acknowledge that even the simplest of tasks informs your spirit and can nurture your soul. Allowing yourself to be in the moment illustrates how special you are. Life is made of many tiny moments strung together, after all. Opening yourself to the simplest of tasks and allowing them to inspire you with some insight or wisdom, or even a moment of peace, illustrates that the Divine can whisper to you in the oddest of unexpected places. Hearthcraft is about communing with the Divine through everyday tasks, not through complicated formal ritual.

Building Your Spiritual Headquarters

The hearth-based house witch seeks to create and maintain the best possible home atmosphere for family and friends, to support, fuel, and nourish them on both a physical and spiritual level.

A house is a neutral structure, and a home is a living, thriving place that is created by the actions and intentions of the people who live within that house. The home is a sanctuary, a place of security. It is defined by the people who live in it, is created by them, and is keyed to their energy. Energy defines the home in more than one way: it feeds and propels it spiritually and emotionally, but it is also invested in the form of money that sets it up and maintains it. Mortgage payments, rent, furnishings, consumables are all fueled by energy in the form of money, which is earned by an individual through work or other exchange of energy. Emotion, time, and money are all valid forms of energy that go into running a household and home.

The home is where you build a base or headquarters from which you may venture out into the world, and to which you may return at the end of the day. It is a place where you can be yourself, where you can relax and allow the energy you control so tightly outside its walls to flow freely in a protected space. It makes an excellent and very immediate base for a spiritual practice.

Denise Linn, author of *Sacred Space*, says, "Homes are symbolic representations of ourselves, and in fact in a deeper sense are extensions of ourselves." She is absolutely right. On an unconscious level, how you treat your living space can very often give insight into how you perceive yourself. On a more active level, by consciously controlling how you organize and decorate your living space, you can impact your sense of self as well and influence how you feel. Environment affects your emotional, physical, and mental functioning; it makes sense that it affects your spiritual well-being too.

For many of us it's important to have a room or defined space within the home that is exclusively ours: a bedroom, a corner, an office or reading room. What is often overlooked is a communal area that is equally invested in with conscious awareness and is cared for in the way a private or personal space would be. Communal spaces in a home, such as living rooms, family rooms, bathrooms, and kitchens, become an aggregate of the energy of all the people who use them and the activities that take place within them.

Rather than allowing the energy to form willy-nilly without any sort of conscious direction, and living with whatever the result is, it's wise to take it in hand and guide the energy signature identity. In the next chapter, we'll explore the idea of how this impacts the spiritual health and well-being of the members of the family as well.

Energy is fluid and always moving, so the result is never permanent. Ongoing maintenance is ideal. And it's never too late to begin or to work to reverse the energy signature of a communal room that is unwelcoming or uncomfortable in some way.

Maintaining, guiding, and shaping the energy of a communal room is a form of caring for the health and well-being of the people who use it.

Caring for Those Inside Your Home

The practice of hearthcraft presupposes someone to care for, even if it is only yourself or your pets. Family is one of the cornerstones of hearthcraft.

Members of the family (and/or the residents of the home) are active participants in shaping and affecting the energy of the home. They maintain and continually nourish the spiritual element of the home by being active, communicative, loving, and physically present. They provide energy for the house witch to manage, which is one of the reasons for the practice. The living energy is important to the path. Without it, the home becomes more of a house.

The active, fluid, ever-changing dynamic of family ensures input and activity, essential elements of the spiritual well-being of a home. It is also important to remember that the family's interaction and support go beyond maintaining the general identity of the home, however: the family supports itself as individuals as well.

Think about Your Values

Increasingly, people are no longer members of a defined religious group, and thus it falls to the family to engage in spiritual support. This can be challenging, especially when you think about all the morals, ethics, and values that an organized religion defines and instills in its adherents. These three terms are slippery and sometimes are confused.

- **Morals:** standards of behavior or principles of right and wrong.
- **Ethics:** the moral principles governing or influencing conduct.
- **Values:** principles or standards of behavior. *Value (singular):* the regard that something is held to deserve; importance or worth.

Because these three definitions are so closely intertwined, let's simplify them:

- Morals are the principles of right and wrong.
- Ethics are the application of morals to one's behavior.
- Values are morals and ethics that an individual or society as a whole considers important and worthy of upholding.

Define what morals are important to you and actively demonstrate them through ethical behavior, especially at the hearth.

If your family is open to discussing spirituality, ask them for their input as well as you define the fundamental values you wish to associate with your hearth. It is only fair to include them and their beliefs, as what goes on at the hearth and in the home impacts and affects them as well. It can be quite illuminating to learn what morals and ethics your partner or children value, and they may surprise you by listing principles that you hadn't initially thought of.

Define Your Values

Here's an exercise you can engage in with your family or alone if you live by yourself. With your family, have a brainstorming session in which you talk about morals, ethics, and values, and make an overall list. Once the session is over, schedule another meeting for a couple of days later. Discuss the overall list that was created during the brainstorming session. From the global list, write down the issues that mean the most to the family. Put it on the fridge or pin it to a bulletin board so everyone can see it on a regular basis. For each item on the list, come up with a real-life example. For example, if one of the values is "eco-awareness," an example might be "taking lunch to work in a reusable lunch bag or bento box." An illustration for "compassion" might be "making someone a cup of tea and sitting down with them to show that someone cares about them."

Looking up each word on the list in the dictionary and reading out the definition may be illuminating as well, because the popular idea of the meaning of terms like *compassion* and *generosity* may not be what those terms actually mean. The family might discuss the difference between the dictionary definition and their understanding of the term and choose one meaning over the other if it bears more ethical weight with them and has a more positive influence on the way they wish to live their lives.

Caring for Those Outside Your Home

One of the essential elements of the hearthcraft path is a presupposition of a community of some kind to care for, whether it be yourself and a pet, your family, or your circle of friends. Most hearth-based house witches gravitate to the path because they feel the need to care for and nurture those who are close to them. A kitchen and a home are places where living people operate and interact. These people are literally the soul of the home, much as the hearth and fireplace are the heart of the house. As a result, the

hearth-based house witch and her work can have a significant impact on her family and extended community as they interact within her sphere. The energy you maintain in your home will affect them, just as the energy they bring to your spiritual hearth will help to fuel it.

Hearthcraft posits a certain connection to community. The term *community* can sometimes be misleading, because we often associate it with a collection of people at large from a general area. The term can comprise any collection of people who are associated in pursuit of a similar goal.

Blood isn't the only indicator of close ties. The term *kin* is sometimes employed to describe those who are members of your blood family unit, but the term *akin* means something or someone essentially similar. People who have interests or philosophies akin to yours, with whom you have a spark of connection, and whom you invite into your home constitute a community of sorts as well. You may have close friends who hold special places in your heart, like-minded individuals who support and love you. In essence, they are family without the blood or legal ties.

Chosen family is the term often used to describe this circle. Chosen family is one such example of a close circle or community for whom your hearthcraft practices resonate in some way, whether they consciously know of your spiritual focus or not. Caring for them in emotional and physical ways—the supportive phone call, the cup of tea, the casserole in times of stress—is another way in which hearthcraft expresses itself. Caring for family and community to foster an environment that supports healthy growth and development at all levels is one of the things a house witch does.

The Path of Nurturing and Nourishing

The path of the house witch is rooted in the parallel paths of nurturing and nourishing. What do these words mean? The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *to nurture* as “[to] rear and encourage the

development of (a child); [to] cherish (a hope, belief, or ambition).” The noun is defined as “the action or process of nurturing; upbringing, education, and environment as a factor determining personality.” It defines *to nourish* as to “provide with the food or other substances necessary for growth and health; [to] keep (a feeling or belief) in one’s mind for a long time.”

These two definitions describe a lot of hearthcraft in a nutshell: providing both physical and environmental sustenance in order to support growth, health, and development. Hearthcraft seeks to nourish and nurture on a spiritual level as well as the physical level. Let’s explore why the basics of caring for someone are so important.

The Power of Basic Needs

Food and shelter are two of the most basic things an individual requires in order to live a good life. The concept of hearth and home reflects both of these things: warmth, protection, and food. These may seem to be insignificant when compared to other, more lofty goals in life, but in reality, these basic needs have to be fulfilled in order for you to explore the higher potential of your life and spirit.

Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs demonstrates this requirement. Maslow proposed a chain of needs, each rooted in the previous one. The hierarchy of needs demonstrates that fundamental physical requirements such as food, shelter, and protection are valid needs that must be addressed in order to create the security and energy required to pursue the other higher needs that Maslow outlined, such as creating an aesthetically pleasing environment or pursuing understanding of the self within the community. Maslow’s theory isn’t absolute, but it does provide a useful explanation for humanity’s focus on the concept of hearth and home, and why it seems to be so ingrained in our cultures and psyches.

Maslow’s hierarchy is often expressed as a pyramid with basic, or lower-order, needs at the bottom and higher-order needs at the top:

1. Basic physical needs, such as food and shelter.

2. Safety needs, such as protection from the elements and a feeling of security from the unknown.
3. The need for love and belonging, within a small social unit and a larger community.
4. Self-esteem needs, or confirming the sense of acceptance within the community, from which issues the sense of self-worth.
5. The need for understanding, again from the community within which one operates.
6. Aesthetic needs, or being able to manipulate one's environment in a desired way to reflect beauty or another value.
7. The need for self-actualization, which can be interpreted as self-improvement and feeling rewarded or satisfied by your life, as well as having the impetus to strive for more.
8. Transcendence and peak experience, the culmination of the process of self-actualization and the ultimate spiritual escape from the material world: the absence of need.

Hearthcraft tends to focus on securing and maintaining the basic needs. This is far from being simplistic or primitive: every person requires at least the first two needs of food and protection in order to survive. Hearthcraft is rooted in these primary needs, making it a necessary and highly respected path. Without the assurance of these basic needs, you cannot go on to explore more exalted paths or seek more challenging paths in life. In the end, the focal issues addressed in hearthcraft are required by every person in some way, shape, or form.

Knowing this, it is still hard to believe that there are people who dismiss the idea that anyone who works to maintain a secure and happy home is missing something or limiting themselves in some way. The casual dismissal of men or women who have chosen to follow a domestic-centered path as second-class citizens, for example, is shameful when one looks at cultural mores and stories that describe the woman as queen within her home, who managed and ordered and made sure the family had a safe, warm, secure, and successful base from which to operate, thereby maximizing their

chances of success in their chosen paths. With basic needs met and accounted for, you can focus your energy on the higher, more spiritual needs, such as self-actualization and transcendence.

Practicing hearthcraft is an excellent method whereby confidence and self-esteem may be secured through answering basic needs. The more control you have over the energy and function of your home environment, the more likely you and your family are to be relaxed and happy. When you are relaxed, there are fewer obstacles to divert the life-renewing energy flowing through your life. Stress, anxiety, and fear commonly snarl up and divert the energy flowing through your life. Keeping a welcoming, serene, and happy hearth maximizes your potential to create a successful life, resting upon the firm foundation built at the hearth, in the spiritual heart of the home.

Kitchen Witchcraft

There are many other traditions that possess an element of hearthcraft to them, but the most familiar of them is likely to be kitchen witchcraft. As previously mentioned, the two paths are differentiated by emphasizing the spiritual element found in the path of the house witch, as opposed to the more magic-based path of the kitchen witch.

A kitchen witch is someone who practices magic through cooking, baking, and other kitchen-based activity. Patricia Telesco, arguably kitchen witchery's most visible practitioner, says in her book *A Kitchen Witch's Cookbook*, "Since we all have to prepare food at one time or another, why not make the best possible use of that time in the kitchen?"

The Kitchen Witch As Good Luck

The kitchen witch is also familiar for the use of her figure as a kitchen icon or good luck charm. Regardless of the spiritual path

followed by the family, many homes feature a small witch doll, usually astride a broom, hanging somewhere in the kitchen. This little talisman is said to bring successful cooking and good luck to the residents of and visitors to the kitchen. Perhaps more precisely, such dolls are said to guard against failed cooking or cooking disasters. German folklore has it that they guard specifically against dough failing to rise, milk curdling, and fallen cakes. The dolls are made of many different materials. Some are corn husk dolls; some have dried apples for heads; others are made entirely of fabric. The earliest appearances of these kitchen icons are in German and Scandinavian traditions.

There are other parallels to the kitchen witch doll. As a harvest custom, communities in Britain and Europe would tie together the last sheaf of wheat and keep it over the winter as good luck and protection. Sometimes the sheaf was draped with cloth or otherwise dressed and adorned. Other communities would weave the first or last stalks cut in the harvest into various shapes of different sizes, including geometric shapes and animal forms. Confusingly, these were also called corn dollies, even when they were not in human form. The term *dolly* is thought to be derived from the word *idol*. These customs stemmed from the belief that the first or last stalks of wheat that were cut contained the spirit of the crop. By keeping the dolly in a place of honor and safety over the winter, the farmers would in essence be protecting the success of the next year's crops. The dolly was often plowed into the fields when the time came to prepare them for the spring planting, or it was burned after the harvest as an offering to the harvest deities. Sometimes the sheaf is referred to as the harvest queen, the corn mother, or the corn maiden, and there are a wide variety of shapes into which the stalks are woven, according to local tradition. The art is still practiced today and is called both corn dolly plaiting and wheat weaving. Beautiful abstract shapes and designs are created, as well as figures and religious objects.

If you wish to make your own protective kitchen witch icon, a craft detailing how to make a corn husk doll can be found in Chapter 10. Making a new one every year is certainly a possibility, after

disposing of the old one by burning or shredding it and mixing it into your compost or mulch. It's a nice tradition to link to Thanksgiving, the autumnal equinox, or any of the harvest festivals found in various religious calendars. It may also be tied into a purification ritual, with the dismantling of the old, symbolizing the clearing of accumulated negativity or stale energy, and the introduction of the new, symbolizing a fresh start.