May Day
May Day traditions around the country

Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape
(Royal Irish Academy)
The May Bush is most common in Leinster, although it is also known in other parts of the country.

It is set up outside the house on May Eve and is decorated with flowers, ribbons, pieces of paper etc. Whitethorn is the most popular type of bush.

In the west of Ireland, it is traditional to festoon the doors and windows of the home with flowers.
Co. Kildare
(Bróna Nic Amhlaobh 1980)
‘We procure a branch preferably cross-shaped. Then we send the children to pluck a bunch of primroses and we string them onto the branch we have procured. The branch thus decorated is then erected in the midden [dunghill] before sunset. The belief was prevalent that neighbouring witches could steal the milk during the entire year if they succeeded in taking it on May-eve before sunset. It was believed that the witch could not exercise her charm near the homestead where a May Pole was erected. Another custom is to throw a handful of the same primroses at your neighbour’s door in honour of the Blessed Virgin.’ (Kilmacrennan, Donegal)
Bonfires on the evening of May Day, Sligo town
(Bairbre Ní Fhloinn 1995)
The ‘May Baby’
Céad de Cheoltaibh Uladh, Énrí Ó Muirgheasa (1915)

Song referring to the practice of dressing up a doll which would be paraded by a boy and girl as part of May Day celebrations.

74. **babóg na béaltaine.**

I.
**babóg na béaltaime, maighdean an t-rámpard,**
**Suár gáe cnoc, ír rior gáe gleann;**
**Cailini maípeaca bána-geala glearta,**
**ír tugamar féin an rámhad linn.**

*Sámpad buriú na neomín gle-geal,*
**ír tugamar féin an rámhad linn,**
*Ó baile go baile, ír un ar mbaile na diaró pin—*
**ír tugamar féin an rámhad linn.**
May Customs (Ballintra, Donegal)

May Day Customs (Ballycurrane, Waterford)

May Day (Oughterard, Galway)

Taking the Butter on a May Morning (Aghanlish, Leitrim)

May Day (Killorglin, Kerry)

May Day Customs and Superstitions (Rathangan, Kildare)

Festival Customs – May Day (Adare, Limerick)

‘It is the belief of the people of the district that if the face is washed in the dew on May morning, sunburn or freckles will not spoil the complexion in the Summer.’ (Carrick-on-Shannon, Leitrim)