

Ten Things Everyone Wants to Know about Leprechauns

BY MARTIN NELSON BURTON

*As a child, Martin Nelson Burton used to write to a leprechaun. He is the author of the classic St. Patrick's Day book, **Dear Mr. Leprechaun: Letters From My First Friendship**.*



1 What are leprechauns?

Leprechauns are small fairy-like creatures with magical powers and minds full of mischief. Some who have seen them say they are no bigger than a little finger; others say they can get as tall as a small child. Their favorite pastimes are counting their gold and playing tricks on humans.

2 Where do leprechauns live?

Leprechauns are known to live in the forests of Ireland, usually in hollowed-out trees, small caves, or under large bushes. Some are thought to live in quaint, unseen villages that become visible to human eyes only at certain times of the year. Because leprechauns are curious folk, they find ways to travel to distant lands, but remain carefully hidden from view.

3 Are there girl leprechauns?

Technically, no. A leprechaun, in the strict sense, is always male.

But, in a larger sense, leprechauns are just part of a much larger fairy kingdom. It is believed that, when a child is born into that kingdom, if the child is a boy, he becomes a leprechaun. If the child is a girl, she becomes a fairy.

4 What do leprechauns like to eat?

Leprechauns are not famous for their food; they get by on mushrooms, some nuts, and various wild flowers. But they are more well-known for what they drink. It is no secret that they make all kinds of creative beverages for themselves and have a grand time drinking away. In the afternoon, most leprechauns love a good, rich brew of dandelion tea.

5 Do leprechauns really come with a pot of gold?

Most people have heard that if you catch a leprechaun, you should ask him for his pot of gold. Actually, a typical leprechaun owns far more than a pot of gold. Most have vast storehouses filled with gold and other valuable treasures.

Leprechauns invented the myth about a “pot of gold” because a leprechaun who is caught has to give you all the gold you ask him for. If you think he has just one pot of gold, that’s all you’ll ask for. When he hands over the pot to you, the leprechaun will scream and cry like you’ve taken his last crumb of food, but inside he’ll be very relieved that you didn’t ask him for the hundreds of other pots of gold he has lying around.

6 What do leprechauns do with their time?

By profession, leprechauns are shoemakers. They provide the footwear for all the fairy kingdom.

That may not seem like such an exciting job, but remember that fairies are famous for their all-night dancing parties, and take great pride in showing off their latest fast-moving, foot stomping jigs for hours at a time. They need the finest, longest-lasting, most decorated shoes they can get.

And fairies are willing to pay handsomely for the right pair of shoes. A leprechaun who can satisfy the needs of the most demanding fairy dancers can make a very fine living indeed.

Find more on leprechauns at LondonTownPress.com
© 2006 by Martin Nelson Burton

7 Are all leprechauns mean?

Somehow, many people have it stuck in their minds that leprechauns are mean, nasty beings intent on doing evil. Some movies have even portrayed leprechauns as downright scary.

But nothing could be further from the truth. Leprechauns are tricksters, yes; they love to play practical jokes and can be very frustrating neighbors, to be sure. But at heart, leprechauns intend no harm, and in fact want nothing more than to live at peace with their neighbors, human or fairy.

8 Do leprechauns wear green?

Leprechauns come from Ireland, a rainy country known for its sparkling green forests, meadows, and hillsides. So of course leprechauns make sure their everyday clothing is green, to blend in with their surroundings and reduce the risk of being seen.

But late at night, when they go to the fairy parties for the dancing and the merry-making and the eating and the drinking, they aren't as worried about being seen. Then, leprechauns will get dressed up in their brightest crimsons, golds, and violets, sport top hats, coats and tails, and get ready for fun, fun, fun!

9 How do you find a leprechaun?

To find a leprechaun you must make sure you are not looking for one. Leprechauns can sense when they are being hunted, and hide themselves all the better. Those who find leprechauns always stumble upon them, and the leprechaun is usually more surprised than the human. Sometimes, you'll know there is a leprechaun around when you hear a soft tap-tap-tapping nearby as a leprechaun hammers a nail into a shoe. Sometimes, you'll see a sleeping leprechaun's shoes just poking out from under a bush. Stay alert wherever you are, but you just have to be lucky.

10 How do you catch a leprechaun?

When you find a leprechaun, all you have to do to keep him under your control is never let your eyes off him. You can set him down, and as long as your eyes never leave him, he is yours to keep.

This is much harder than it seems, as the leprechaun will do everything he can to distract you. Leprechauns are accomplished ventriloquists, and will imitate sounds of wild animals or your family members screaming as if they are right behind you; and when you turn around to look, the leprechaun will vanish. Or, a leprechaun might offer to play his bagpipes for you; but his music will carry a special spell with it, and get your feet to dancing all on their own, so that he'll send you down the street doing a silly jig to the "Leprechaun's Reel", while he waltzes merrily home.

BONUS How do you know so much about leprechauns?

I have studied leprechauns all my life. When I was young, I used to leave notes on the kitchen table at bedtime for my own leprechaun. When I woke up the next morning, I'd find an answer from him. My dad saved these notes for me, and when I was older, I wrote a story about my friendship with the leprechaun called *Dear Mr. Leprechaun: Letters From My First Friendship*. That is how I became an authority on the little people.

I have also written a book on a famous fairy, *Fooling the Tooth Fairy*, which is another true story from my own life. You can find out more about leprechauns and fairies on my website, www.LondonTownPress.com.

