

amount that is realistic for people to take the time to read, so just enjoy and choose what resonates with you. It is so interesting to learn different traditions, it reminds me that the planet is a lot bigger than just my day to day perception.

Thank you again for the generous support from you all, it is overwhelming the thousands of views and connections we receive, we work many hours some times seven days a week to offer you our extensive research.



Christmas in the United States of America

from <http://www.whychristmas.com>

The United States of America has many different traditions and ways that people celebrate Christmas, because of its multi-cultural nature, many customs are similar to ones in the UK, France, Italy, Holland, Poland and Mexico.

The traditional meal for Western European families is turkey or ham with cranberry sauce. Families from Eastern European origins favour turkey with trimmings, keilbasi (a Polish sausage), cabbage dishes, and soups; and some Italian families prefer lasagne!

Some Americans use pop-corn threaded on string to help

decorate their Christmas Tree!

In New England (the American States of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine), there are shops called 'Christmas Shops' that only sell Christmas decorations and toys all the year round!

People in America like to decorate the outside of their house with lights and sometimes even statues of Santa Claus, Snowmen and Reindeer elf .

Towns and cities often decorate the streets with lights to celebrate Christmas. Perhaps the most famous Christmas street lights in the USA are at the Rockefeller Center in New York where there is a huge Christmas Tree with a public ice skating rink in front of it over Christmas and the New Year.

In Hawaii, Santa is called Kanakaloka!

In the Southwest USA, there are some special customs which have some similarities to those in parts of Mexico. These include 'luminarias' or 'farolitos' which are paper sacks partly filled with sand and then have a candle put in them. They are lit on Christmas Eve and are put the edges of paths. They represent 'lighting the way' for somewhere for Mary and Joseph to stay.

A popular food at Christmas in the Southwest USA are tamales. You can find out more about Christmas traditions in the Southwest USA on www.lonestarwesterndecor.com/vibrant-christmas-traditions-of-the-southwest.html



Hindu: Pancha Ganapati

21–25 December –

modern five-day festival in honor of Lord Ganesha, celebrated by Hindus in USA.

Think of this as the Hindu Christmas, a modern winter holiday full of family-centered happenings, but with five days of gifts for the kids, not one. From December 21 to 25 Hindus worship Lord Ganesha, the elephant-headed Lord of culture and new beginnings. Family members work to mend past mistakes and bring His blessings of joy and harmony into five realms of their life, a wider circle each day: family, friends, associates, culture and religion.

Pancha Ganapati includes outings, picnics, feasts and exchange of cards and gifts with relatives, friends and business associates. A shrine is created in the main living room of the home and decorated in the spirit of this festive occasion. At

the center is placed a large wooden or bronze statue of Lord Panchamukha (“five-faced”) Ganapati, a form of Ganesha. Any large picture or statue of Ganesha will also do. Each morning the children decorate and dress Him in the color of that day, representing one of His five rays of energy, or shaktis.



Hindu: Makar Sankrat/Pongal

From <http://www.cookinglight.com>

This January 14 Hindu holiday celebrates the new solar year, considered to be the beginning of the new day for the gods and the end of their six-month night. It is observed and named differently in each region—Pongal in the south of India and Makar Sankrat in the north. But most festivities include a common theme of ceremonial cleansing, offerings, and celebrations of the harvest. Pongal, which means “to boil over,” refers both to the concept of bounty and to the traditional dish of rice boiled in milk, which is given to the

gods as an offering. Sesame seeds, or til, are looked upon as a symbol of health and friendship. Sweets made from sesame and jaggery—a special kind of sugar—are exchanged on the holiday along with the saying, “accept these sweets and speak sweet words.” The tradition reminds people to resolve past quarrels so that friendship can thrive.



Muslim: Eid ul-Fitr/Hari Raya Puasa

Ramadan is the month long Muslim holiday celebrating the revelation of the Koran to the prophet Muhammad. Devout Muslims fast each day from sunup to sundown for the full month and then break the fasting period with a three-day festival. Because the Muslim world spans many countries and cultures, the celebrations, foods, and even the name of the festival change from place to place—in Arab countries, it's called Eid ul-Fitr, and in Malaysia it's called Hari Raya Puasa. The dates change from year to year (falling sometime between October and December), depending on the Islamic calendar. Although the festival reaches a broad group of people who celebrate it in diverse ways, there are general things that all Muslims do during Eid," says Rabiah Ahmed, spokesperson for the Council on American-Islamic Relations, such as preparing the house, getting dressed up, and gathering with family and friends for a feast. After 30 days of fasting, food

is shared in abundance, and children exchange gifts and receive money from their elders.



Iranian: Shab-e Yalda

In Iran, the winter solstice, which falls on December 21, is hailed with Shab-e Yalda—the birthday of the sun. It's a celebration of the triumph of light over dark, good over evil. It is thought that on the longest night with evil at its zenith, light needs help to overcome darkness. On this day, families build a bonfire outside and gather until sunrise for a night of storytelling, dancing, and food. In Iranian culture, certain nutritional properties of foods are considered hot and others are considered cold (regardless of temperature or level of spice), much like Chinese yin or yang. Balance between the two is important. Summer foods are preserved throughout the year for the Shab-e Yalda feast,

where they mingle with the foods of winter to symbolize the balance of seasons. Saffron and carrots, for example, are warm foods served during Shab-e Yalda to counter the cold of winter.



Jewish: Hanukkah

More than 2,000 years ago in Palestine, Judas Maccabee and his followers triumphed over the tyrant Antiochus and his army, despite overwhelming odds. But when they returned to Jerusalem, they found their temple desecrated with pagan idols. In order to purge the temple of its defilement, the Maccabees rebuilt the altar and cleansed the temple, rededicating it during eight days of ceremonies. Tradition holds that there was only enough sanctified olive oil to light the temple for one day, but it burned miraculously for all eight days of the celebration. Today, those of the Jewish faith celebrate this victory during an eight-day holiday that begins on the 25th of Kislev (in late November or December). Each night of Hanukkah, people light one candle on the menorah in memory of the miracle of the oil. Since antiquity, the festival has also honored the significance of olive oil to the ancient Jewish culture as fuel, food, and even medicine, and

it shows in the foods of the feast. Dishes cooked in olive oil, and latkes (potato pancakes) in particular, are celebratory symbols of this gift of sustenance.



African: Kwanzaa

First celebrated in the United States in 1966, Kwanzaa was created for those of African descent around the world to reconnect with their common heritage. The name is derived from traditional harvest celebrations in Africa called *matunda ya kwanza*, literally “first fruits,” which were seven days of gathering, reverence, commemoration, recommitment, and celebration. Beginning on December 26 and lasting for seven days, modern Kwanzaa celebrations esteem one of the seven core principles of African American unity, the *Nguzo Saba*, on each night. Karamu, a lavish feast of traditional foods from African cultures around the world, takes place near the end of the holiday.



Different Ethnicity Santa Claus

Hoteiosho, Japan

Japan's holiday gift-giver is a fat Buddhist monk with eyes in the back of his head. Some say he travels with a red-nosed reindeer and some say he works alone, but he doesn't arrive on Christmas in either hybrid Christian-Buddhist tale. Christmas in Japan is spent with family doing charity work. But on New Year's Eve, the real action begins: the house is cleaned and decorated, then family members throw beans for good luck and await their gifts from the benevolent monk.



Native American – Hopi (Soyal, Soyala, Sol-ya-lang-eu)

From <http://www.brownielocks.com/nativeamerican.html>

The date of this observation is on December 22. It is celebrated by the Hopi Indians. Although a black Plumed Snake is the basic symbol of this ceremony. But it is not based on snake worship. (Just like their Snake Dance Ceremony isn't either.) It is a ceremony related to the sun as it relates to the winter solstice. It is one of the Hopi's most sacred ceremonies and is also called the "Prayer-Offering Ceremony" because it is a time for saying prayers for the New Year and for wishing each other prosperity and health.

CHRISTMAS FACTS

1 Each year, 30-35 million real Christmas trees are sold in the United States alone. There are 21,000 Christmas tree growers in the United States, and trees usually grow for about 15 years before they are sold.

2 Today, in the Greek and Russian orthodox churches, Christmas is celebrated 13 days after the 25th, which is also referred to as the Epiphany or Three Kings Day. This is the day it is believed that the three wise men finally found Jesus in the manger.

3 In the Middle Ages, Christmas celebrations were rowdy and raucous—a lot like today's Mardi Gras parties.

4 From 1659 to 1681, the celebration of Christmas was outlawed in Boston, and law-breakers were fined five shillings.

5 Christmas was declared a federal holiday in the United States on June 26, 1870.

6 The first eggnog made in the United States was consumed in Captain John Smith's 1607 Jamestown settlement.

7 Poinsettia plants are named after Joel R. Poinsett, an American minister to Mexico, who brought the red-and-green plant from Mexico to America in 1828.

8 The Salvation Army has been sending Santa Claus-clad donation collectors into the streets since the 1890s.

9 Rudolph, "the most famous reindeer of all," was the product of Robert L. May's imagination in 1939. The copywriter wrote a poem about the reindeer to help lure customers into the Montgomery Ward department store. 10 Construction workers started the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree tradition in 1931.

Holiday Recipes



Lentil and Mushroom Shepherd's Pie

Ingredients

- 8 large or 10 medium potatoes (Yukon gold works well)
- 2 tablespoons Earth Balance or other vegan buttery spread
- 1/2 cup unsweetened rice milk or other nondairy milk
- Salt to taste
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced

- 6 ounces cremini or baby bella mushrooms, sliced
- Two 15-ounce cans lentils, lightly drained
- 2 tablespoons dry red wine, optional
- 1 to 2 tablespoon reduced-sodium soy sauce or Bragg's liquid aminos
- 2 to 3 teaspoons all-purpose seasoning blend (such as Spike or Mrs. Dash)
- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch or arrowroot
- 8 to 10 ounces baby spinach or arugula leaves
- Freshly ground pepper to taste
- 1 cup fresh bread crumbs

Directions

Peel and dice the potatoes. Place in a large saucepan with enough water to cover. Bring to a simmer, then cover and simmer until tender, about 20 minutes. Drain and transfer to a small mixing bowl.

Stir the Earth Balance into the potatoes until melted, then add the rice milk and mash until fluffy. Season with salt, cover, and set aside until needed.

Preheat the oven to 400° F.

While the potatoes are cooking, heat the oil in a medium skillet. Add the onion and sauté over medium heat until translucent. Add the garlic and mushrooms and continue to sauté until the onion is golden.

Add the lentils and their liquid and bring to a gentle simmer. Stir in the optional wine, soy sauce, seasoning blend, thyme, and pepper. Cook gently for 5 minutes. Combine the cornstarch with just enough water to dissolve in a small container. Stir into the lentil mixture.

Add the spinach, a little at a time, cooking just until it's all wilted down. Remove from the heat; taste to adjust seasonings to your liking.

Lightly oil a 2-quart (preferably round) casserole dish, or two deep-dish pie plates. Scatter the breadcrumbs evenly over the bottom. Pour in the lentil mixture, then spread the potatoes evenly over the top. If using two pie plates, divide each mixture evenly between them.

Bake for 30 to 35 minutes, or until the potatoes begin to turn golden and slightly crusty. Let stand for 5 to 10 minutes, then cut into wedges to serve.

8 or more servings

Read [more](http://www.vegkitchen.com/recipes/lentil-and-mushroom-shepherd-pie/#KfpLlFEREyltxKZj.99) at <http://www.vegkitchen.com/recipes/lentil-and-mushroom-shepherd-pie/#KfpLlFEREyltxKZj.99>



Organic farmer Beverley Thurber shares her snappy-tasting ginger cookies.

Ingredients

1. 4 1/2 cups flour
2. 4 teaspoons ground ginger
3. 2 teaspoons baking soda
4. 1 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
5. 1 teaspoon ground cloves
6. 1/4 teaspoon salt
7. 1 1/2 cups shortening, at room temperature
8. 2 cups sugar
9. 2 Organic Valley Large Brown Eggs
10. 1/2 cup molasses
11. large, decorative sugar crystals or additional regular sugar

Directions

1. Heat oven to 350 degrees. Line two heavy baking sheets with parchment paper.
2. Use a whisk to combine flour, ginger, baking soda, cinnamon, cloves and salt in a medium bowl.
3. Place shortening in a large bowl. Cream the shortening with electric beaters at medium speed for 1-2 minutes. Continue beating as you slowly and gradually add the sugar, scraping down the sides of the bowl occasionally. After all the sugar is added, keep beating for other minutes or two.

4. Add eggs and molasses; beat well.
5. Reduce speed to low and beat in the flour mixture until just combined. Use a spatula to stir and “smooth out” the cookie dough.
6. Use a 2-inch-wide ice-cream scoop to make scoops of dough. You can scoop them directly onto the baking pans or roll the scoops into smooth balls first. Place them two inches apart on the baking pans. Sprinkle each mound with sugar crystals or regular sugar.
7. Bake until light brown and puffed, about 15-17 minutes.
8. Cool cookies in the pan on wire racks.

<http://www.organicvalley.coop/recipes/show/ginger-molasses-cookies/>

Great Gift Ideas



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Green & White Tea – Green Tea Tropical (9), Organic Spring Jasmine (10), Organic Hojicha Green Tea (10), White Orchard (10)

Herbal Infusions – Organic African Nectar (10), Organic Detox Infusion (10), Chamomile Citrus (9), Organic Mint Mélange (10)



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