


FOLKLORE,
FUN FACTS,
&
TRADITIONS



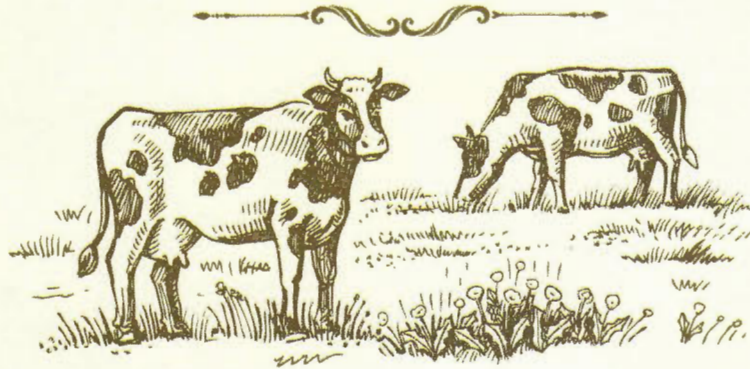
THE
OLD
FARMER'S
2020
ALMANAC
ROBERT B. THOMAS
FOUNDED IN
1792

COMPLIMENTS OF

BOYS  TOWN.
Saving Children  Healing Families
100
YEARS

CAN ANIMALS PREDICT THE WEATHER?

Centuries of observations suggest they can!



Centuries ago, farmers and others observed animal behavior and recognized patterns that corresponded to weather events. These observations were passed down through generations as advice, which survives today as adages. Are they true? Do they work? Read, watch, and see for yourself.

Can Cows Forecast Weather?

Many weather adages involve cows because they were common animals on farms.

- If a cow stands with its tail to the west, the weather is said to be fair.
- If a cow grazes with its tail to the east, the weather is likely to turn sour.
- If the bull leads the cows to pasture, expect rain; if the cows precede the bull, the weather will be uncertain.

There is some truth here. Animals graze with their tail toward the wind so that if a predator sneaks up behind them, the wind will help catch the scent of the predator and prevent an attack.

Other Animal Indicators

- Expect rain when dogs eat grass, cats purr and wash, sheep turn into the wind, oxen sniff the air, and swine are restless.
- When cats sneeze, it is a sign of rain.

- When cattle lie down in the pasture, it indicates early rain.
- When horses and cattle stretch out their necks and sniff the air, it will rain.
- Woolly bear caterpillars are said to be winter weather predictors: The more brown they have on their bodies, the milder winter will be. Read more about woolly bears in the related article on page 3!
- If the mole digs its hole 2½ feet deep, expect severe weather; if two feet deep, not so severe; if one foot deep, a mild winter.
- When pigs gather leaves and straw in fall, expect a cold winter.
- When rabbits are fat in October and November, expect a long, cold winter.
- If sheep ascend hills and scatter, expect clear weather.
- Bats flying late in the evening indicates fair weather.
- Wolves always howl more before a storm.

Learn More

Birds and insects may be the best weather predictors of them all. See how birds predict weather on page 4.

Did you know that you can also predict the temperature by measuring how often crickets chirp? See how to use a cricket as a thermometer on page 27.

WOOLLY BEAR CATERPILLARS AND WEATHER PREDICTION

Nature's Woolly Meteorologist



The woolly bear caterpillar—also called woolly worm and fuzzy worm—has the reputation of being able to forecast the coming winter weather. Whether this is fact or folklore, learn more about this legendary caterpillar and how to “read” the worm.

Here's the legend:

The Woolly Bear caterpillar has 13 distinct segments of either rusty brown or black. The wider the rusty brown sections (or the more brown segments there are), the milder the coming winter will be. The more black there is, the more severe the winter.

How the Woolly Bear Caterpillar Became “Famous”

- In the fall of 1948, Dr. C. H. Curran, curator of insects at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, took his wife 40 miles north of the city to Bear Mountain State Park to look at woolly bear caterpillars.
- Dr. Curran collected as many caterpillars as he could in a day, determined the average number of reddish-brown segments, and forecast the coming winter weather through a reporter friend at *The New York Herald Tribune*.
- Dr. Curran's experiment, which he continued over the next eight years, attempted to prove scientifically a weather rule of thumb that was as old as the hills around Bear Mountain. The resulting publicity made the woolly worm the most recognizable caterpillar in North America.



WINTER LORE

Three white frosts and next a storm.

*Heavy frosts are generally followed
by fine, clear weather.*

*The north wind doth blow,
and we shall have snow.*

*Snow for a se'nnight (week)
is a mother to the earth,
forever after a stepmother.*

*When snow falls in the mud,
it remains all winter.*

*When the first snowflakes are large,
the snowstorm will be a lasting one.*

*When they are small, the storm
will be a short one.*

*If snow begins at mid of day,
expect a foot of it to lay.*

*When the snow falls dry,
it means to lie.*

*But flakes light and soft
bring rain oft.*

*If the wind blows much on
Stephen's Day (December 26), the
grapes will be bad in the next year.*



HOW BIRDS PREDICT WEATHER: WEATHER PROVERBS ABOUT BIRDS

Did you know that bird behavior can help to predict the weather?



Closely observe nature and your feathered friends—and you might be surprised by what you learn! Look up one of these days. Watch birds in flight. Birds flying high in the sky usually indicate fair weather.

As the adages go ...

- Hawks flying high means a clear sky. When they fly low, prepare for a blow.
- Geese fly higher in fair weather than in foul.

Air pressure does indeed affect birds. For example, swallows have sensitive ears; when the barometric pressure drops, they fly as close to the ground as possible, where air density is greatest. Generally, low-flying birds are signs of rain; high flyers indicate fair weather.

Migrating birds can fly more easily in dense, high pressure conditions. Therefore, geese may fly high when a high pressure system moves to the area. High pressure systems are associated with fair weather.

Birds tend to stop flying and take refuge at the coast if a storm is coming. They'll also fly low to avoid the discomfort of the falling air pressure.

- When seagulls fly inland, expect a storm.
- When fowls roost in daytime, expect rain.
- Petrels gathering under the stern of a ship indicates bad weather.

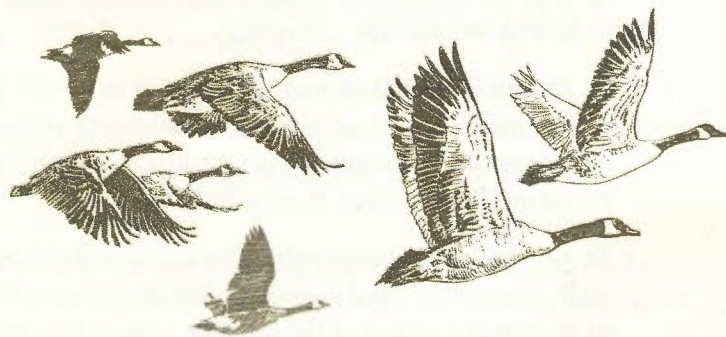
Birds tend to get very quiet before a big storm. If you've ever been walking in the woods before a storm, you know that the natural world is eerily silent! Birds also sing if the weather is improving.

- Birds singing in the rain indicates fair weather approaching.

Here are more bird proverbs and prognostics.

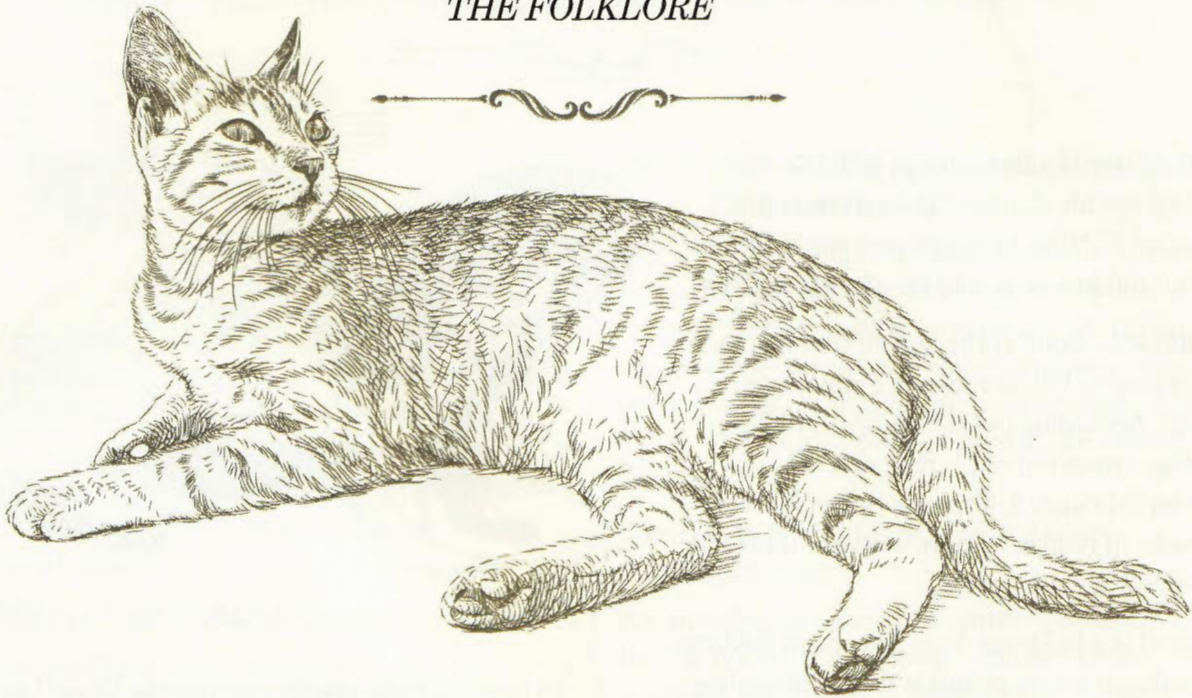
Enjoy!

- If crows fly in pairs, expect fine weather; a crow flying alone is a sign of foul weather.
- The whiteness of a goose's breastbone indicates the kind of winter: A red or dark-spotted bone means a cold and stormy winter; few or light-colored spots mean a mild winter.
- Partridges drumming in the fall means a mild and open winter.
- When domestic geese walk east and fly west, expect cold weather.
- If birds in the autumn grow tame, the winter will be too cold for game.
- When the rooster goes crowing to bed, he will rise with watery head.
- When the swallow's nest is high, the summer is very dry. When the swallow buildeth low, you can safely reap and sow.



CATS AND WEATHER

THE FOLKLORE



What Does It Mean to "Rain Cats and Dogs"?

Some authorities tie the idea to Norse mythology. Odin, the Viking god of storms, was often pictured with dogs and wolves, symbols of wind. Witches, who supposedly rode their brooms during storms, had black cats, which became signs of heavy rain. Therefore, "raining cats and dogs" referred to a storm with wind (dogs) and heavy rain (cats).

While the story sounds good, the expression didn't become popular until the 1700s, when Jonathan Swift (author of *Gulliver's Travels*) used it in a satire. He pictured snobby upper-class aristocrats solemnly fretting that it would "rain cats and dogs." Suddenly the saying caught on. Apparently, the English spent a lot of time chatting about rain, and it became the newest hit phrase.

Felines and Weather Folklore

The cat/witch connection created a lot of superstitions. Many European cultures believed that

cats could influence or even forecast the weather. In Britain, especially Wales, it was believed that rain was likely if a cat busily washed its ears. In Holland, cats could predict the wind by clawing at carpets and curtains. In early America, if a cat sat with its back to the fire, it was foretelling a cold snap, and if it slept with all four paws tucked under, bad weather was coming.

Sailors were particularly superstitious or just so bored that they spent a lot of time watching the ship's cat. If a cat licked its fur against the grain, it meant a hailstorm was coming; if it sneezed, rain was on the way; and if it was frisky, the wind would soon blow. Some believed cats could start storms through magic, so sailors always made sure cats were content.

Another common legend was that when a cat stared out the window, it would rain. That's one that any cat owner can observe. If you believe it—or, it turns out to be true—don't forget to close the car windows!

EL NIÑO AND THE GROUNDHOG

Science and Folklore



Groundhog Day is a fun holiday! Will the groundhog see his shadow? If we were in the middle of an El Niño, he might just see it. Behind the rodent folklore is an odd bit of science trivia.

The Folklore—Look at the legend that has had folks trekking to Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, since 1887. According to the folklore, if Phil the groundhog comes out of his hole and sees his shadow on February 2, it means there will be six more weeks of really crummy weather. If not, the rest of winter will melt away.

This legend is a holdover from European folklore. Since medieval times, people watched hedgehogs, badgers, bears, or wolves to see if they saw their shadows on Candlemas, February 2. Once people settled in America, the local groundhogs took the place of bears, badgers, and other critters.

According to the National Climate Data Center (NCDC), the tradition became publicized in 1887 when a newspaperman wrote about local hunters who celebrated February 2 by going on a groundhog hunt, followed by a jolly groundhog barbecue. He embellished the story with tales of the forecasting skills of Punxsutawney Phil. The rest is history.

The Science—When people continue a weather tradition, it is usually because it contains at least a grain of truth. Historically, the grain of truth for Groundhog Day in America is related to the El Niño.

The El Niño, an abnormally warm tropical Pacific current, warps global wind and weather patterns. In North America, it usually produces a warm winter starting along the West Coast and expanding eastward. By midwinter, the warmth of a moderate



to large El Niño usually reaches the Great Lakes and Midwest. Then, as the El Niño weakens, the warmth retreats and normal winter returns to the East

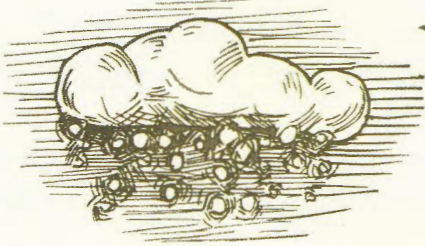
In large parts of the East, this means that El Niño frequently produces a cool early winter, warm midwinter and cool late winter. If a large rodent was wandering around in the relatively mild mid-winter, there might be enough sunshine to see his shadow. Then the El Niño would weaken and winter would literally come storming back.

It should be remembered that the groundhog tradition persisted in America during the 1700s and 1800s, during the last stages of the “Little Ice Age.” What occasionally worked during those chilly times may not work now. The NCDC claims that since 1988, groundhogs have only had a 39% accuracy rate.

Accurate or not—It’s a great holiday and a good excuse for a party or barbecue. Is the weather mild enough that a groundhog would see his shadow in your area? Do you think the rest of winter will be harsh or will it finally ease up?

THE FACTS BEHIND WEATHER FOLKLORE

Scientists now—finally—admit that many weather proverbs are TRUE!



Weather proverbs—the delightful, often rhyming, couplets and colorful statements that typically link a natural event with a meteorological condition—originated centuries ago when people watched the skies, oceans, plants, and animals for clues of what to expect weatherwise. Here's why we, too, can rely on these age-old adages.

PROVERB: A Year of Snow, Crops Will Grow.

Why: A several-inch layer of snow contains more air than ice. Trapped between the interlocking snowflakes, the air serves to insulate the plants beneath it. When the snow melts, the water helps to keep the ground moist.

PROVERB: If There is Thunder in Winter, Snow Will Fall 7 Days Later.

Why: According to Topper Shutt, chief meteorologist for WUSA-TV in Washington, D.C., this is true about 70 percent of the time, especially from the East Coast to the Plains. Thunder in winter is an anomaly often caused by a big dip and a big rise in the jet stream (a powerful wind current that acts like railroad tracks, guiding high and low pressure systems from west to east across North America and separating cold air in the north from warm air in the south). As cold air moves south, it replaces warm air and lifts it up, often causing thunderstorms. The cold air behind the front settles in. Depending on the strength of the front, it may hang around for many days. When the next weather system arrives several—if not exactly 7—days later, temperatures may still be cold enough to cause the moisture in the system to fall as snow.

PROVERB: A Ring Around the Moon Means Rain Will Come Real Soon.

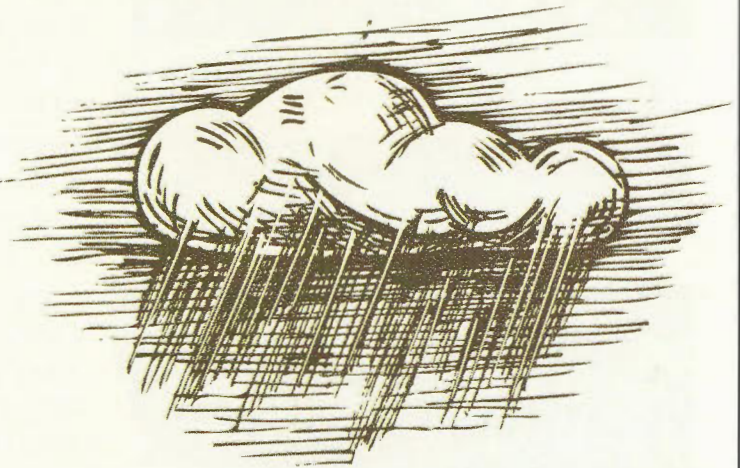
Why: A ring, or halo, around the Moon is caused when the light of the Moon refracts through ice crystals present in high-level clouds. Although these clouds do not produce precipitation, they often occur in advance of an approaching low pressure system, which often brings precipitation in the form of rain or snow.

Here are a few clues to making your own predictions:

Pay attention to winds and clouds. These are the big predictors of changes in barometric pressure and resulting weather. For instance, the adage “No weather is ill, if the wind be still” indicates a high pressure system, a broad area of descending air characterized by calm winds and little cloud formation.

Observe sheep, cats, and cows.

Their bodies are affected by changes in air pressure. When rain is on the way, old sheep turn their backs to the wind, cats sneeze, and cows lie down.



WEATHER PROVERBS FOR EACH MONTH

*We're big fans of weather folklore, proverbs, and sayings! So, we've created a Weather Lore Calendar just for you—with folklore for every month of the year!
Do any of these weather proverbs ring true to you?*



WEATHER LORE CALENDAR

For centuries, farmers and sailors—people whose livelihoods depended on the weather—relied on lore to forecast the weather. They quickly connected changes in nature with rhythms or patterns of the weather. Here is a collection of proverbs relating to months, weeks, and days.



JANUARY

- Fog in January brings a wet spring.
- [13th] St. Hilary, the coldest day of the year.
- [22nd] If the Sun shine on St. Vincent, there shall be much wind.



FEBRUARY

- There is always one fine week in February.
- If bees get out in February, the next day will be windy and rainy.
- Fogs in February mean frosts in May.
- Winter's back breaks about the middle of February.



MARCH

- When March has April weather, April will have March weather.
- Thunder in March betokens a fruitful year.
- Dust in March brings grass and foliage.
- A March Sun sticks like a lock of wool.



APRIL

- If it thunders on All Fools' Day, expect good crops of corn and hay.
- Moist April, clear June.
- Cloudy April, dewy May.
- Snow in April is manure.



MAY

- Hoar frost on May 1st indicates a good harvest.
- A swarm of bees in May is worth a load of hay.
- In the middle of May comes the tail of winter.



JUNE

- A good leak in June, sets all in tune.
- When it is hottest in June, it will be coldest in the corresponding days of the next February.
- [24th] If rain on St. John's Day, we may expect a wet harvest.



JULY

- If the 1st of July be rainy weather, it will rain more or less for three weeks together.
- Ne'er trust a July sky.
- [3rd] Dog days bright and clear, indicate a happy year



AUGUST

- If the first week in August is unusually warm, the winter will be white and long.
- [24th] Thunderstorms after St. Bartholomew are mostly violent.
- When it rains in August, it rains honey and wine.



SEPTEMBER

- Fair on September 1st, fair for the month.
- Heavy September rains bring drought.
- If on September 19th there is a storm from the south, a mild winter may be expected.
- [29th] If St. Michael's brings many acorns, Christmas will cover the fields with snow.



OCTOBER

- Much rain in October, much wind in December.
- For every fog in October, a snow in the winter.
- Full Moon in October without frost, no frost till full Moon in November.



NOVEMBER

- A heavy November snow will last till April.
- Thunder in November, a fertile year to come.
- Flowers in bloom late in autumn indicate a bad winter.



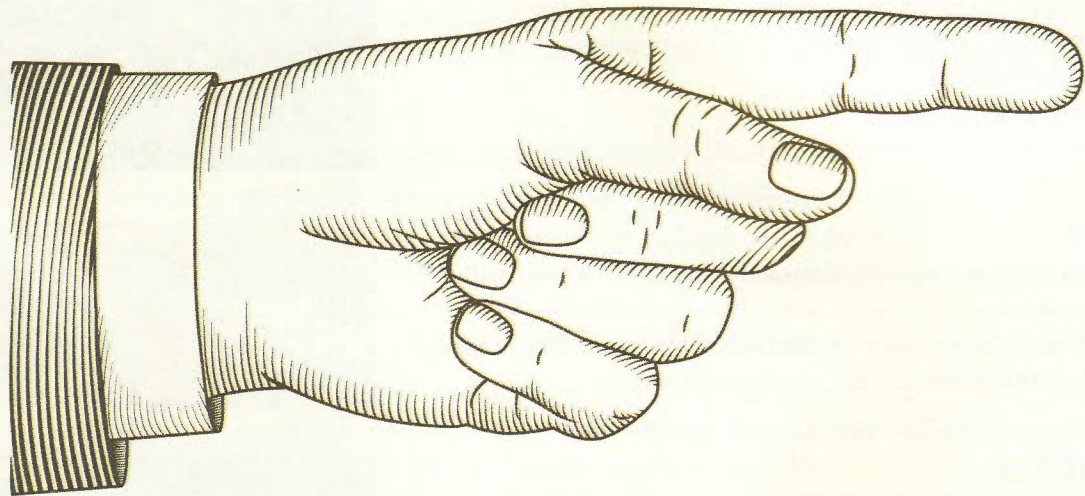
DECEMBER

- Thunder in December presages fine weather.
- A green Christmas, a white Easter.
- As the days lengthen, so the cold strengthens.
- If it rains much during the twelve days after Christmas, it will be a wet year.



LEFT-HANDED FACTS AND FOLKLORE: WHY ARE SOME PEOPLE LEFT-HANDED?

Here are some fun facts and folklore about being left-handed.



Right on, left-handers! Years ago, some teachers insisted that all students, including left-handers, learn to write with their right hand. Teachers thought that students would have an easier time if they were not “different” from right-handed writers. Some thought that using the left hand was just a bad habit. Some even slapped or punished left-handed kids who had trouble! Now we know that everyone should use whichever hand is most comfortable. Today, 10 to 12 percent of the world’s population is left-handed. It’s not surprising that lefties sometimes feel “left out.” Plenty of superstitions and odd terms exist.

Left-Hander Superstitions and Terms

- Many people believe that the devil is left-handed.
- The Latin word for left, *sinistram*, also means unlucky, evil, and suspicious.
- The French word for left, *gauche*, also means clumsy.
- A left-handed compliment is an insult.
- A left-handed baseball pitcher is called a southpaw. (There’s no such thing as a northpaw.)

Left-Handed Facts and Trivia

The Left Test

There’s no sure way to measure “handedness.” One of the most widely used tests is called the Edinburgh Handedness Inventory (developed in Edinburgh, Scotland, in the 1970s). This test asks participants which hand they most often use for a series of activities, including writing, eating, drawing, throwing, cutting with scissors, brushing teeth, and unscrewing a lid.

Left-handed Burgers? Baloney!

A full-page ad in *USA Today* in 1998 claimed that Burger King had developed the “left-handed whopper.” The burger had the same fixings, but they were turned 180 degrees so that they wouldn’t drip out on left-handed customers.

It was a joke! The ad ran on April 1 (April Fools’ Day).

Lefties Day

August 13 is International Left-Handers Day. The tradition was started by the Left-Handers Club, a group in the United Kingdom. Club members around the world give interviews and play left-handed games.

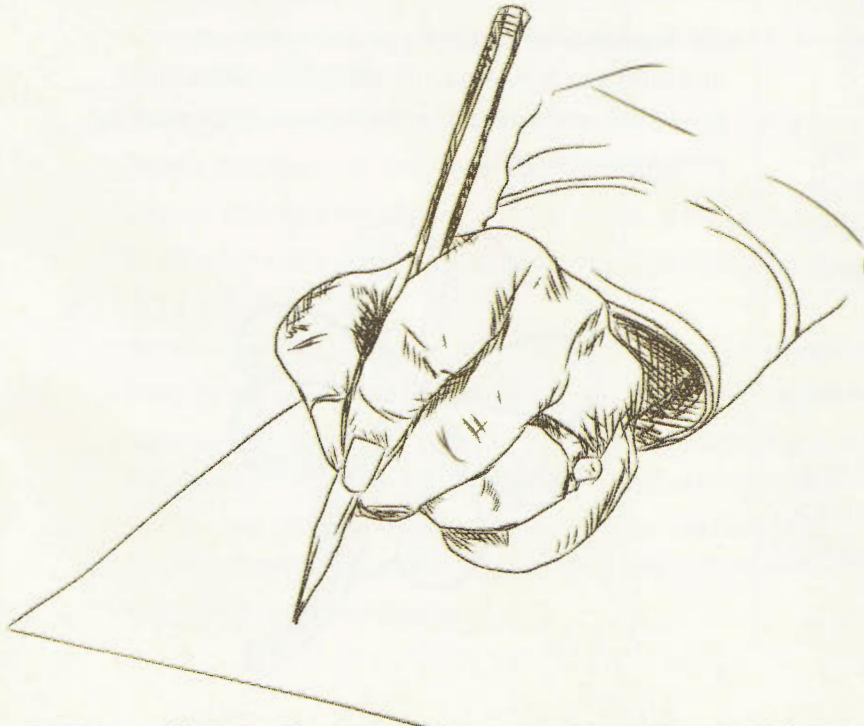
Left-hander Heaven?

Lefties might want to travel to Left Hand, West Virginia, where there is a church, a school, and a post office.

The village was so named because it sits on the left-hand fork of the Big Sandy River, not because of the way its citizens write.

Left-handed Reward

A few left-handers attending Juniata College in Pennsylvania have benefited from a scholarship just for left-handers established in 1979 by Mary and Frederick Beckley, two left-handers who met when they attended tennis class together in 1919.



AUTUMN FOLKLORE AND VERSE

*Autumn days come quickly, like the
running of a hound on the moor.*

—Irish proverb

*Trees snapping and cracking in the
autumn indicate dry weather.*

*If, in the fall of the leaves in October,
many of them wither on the boughs and
hang there, it betokens a frosty winter
and much snow.*

*Spring rain damps;
Autumn rain soaks.*

*Of autumn’s wine, now
drink your fill;
the frost’s on the pumpkin,
and snow’s on the hill.*



ST. PATRICK'S DAY

Here are some fun facts about St. Patrick's Day.



Who Was Saint Patrick?

Was there really a St. Patrick? Definitely. Did he really drive the snakes out of Ireland? Probably not, since snakes weren't native to Ireland.

St. Patrick was born in Britain as Maewyn Succat. At age 16 (around AD 400), he was kidnapped from his home on the west coast and carried off to Ireland to work as a shepherd. After six years, he escaped; upon returning home, he received his call (in a dream) to preach the gospel. He spent the next 15 or so years in a monastery, preparing for his missionary work. When he became a priest, his name was changed to Patricius, and eventually, Patrick. Some Christians lived in Ireland at the time, and Patricius traveled from village to village to share the teachings of the Lord.



The Shamrock

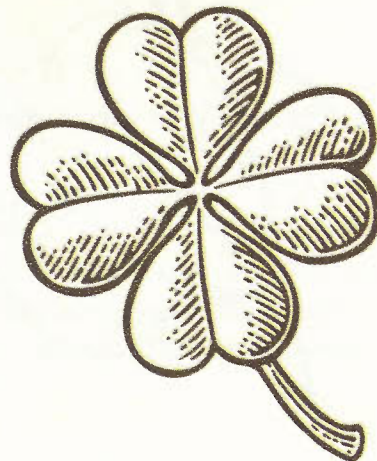
We wear a shamrock on St. Patrick's Day because, legend says, St. Patrick used its three leaves to explain the Holy Trinity. [The Trinity is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit as three divine persons who are one divine being (God).] The truth of the St. Patrick legend, however, is in question, as there is no direct record that the saint actually used the shamrock as a teaching tool.

St. Patrick's Day Facts, Fun, and Folklore

Blue was the color originally associated with St. Patrick, but green is now favored.

St. Patrick's Day, March 17, is the traditional day for planting peas.

Cabbage seeds are often planted today, too, and old-time farmers believed that to make them grow well, you needed to plant them while wearing your nightclothes!



LUNAR LUCK

Can the Moon change your fortune?



Moon Lore

To dream of a clear Moon portends success, say some, while a red or “bloody” Moon warns of a catastrophe or war. A new Moon in your dreams promises increased wealth or a happy marriage. Dreams of an eclipsed Moon are said to predict a contagious disease close at hand.

It's LUCKY to:

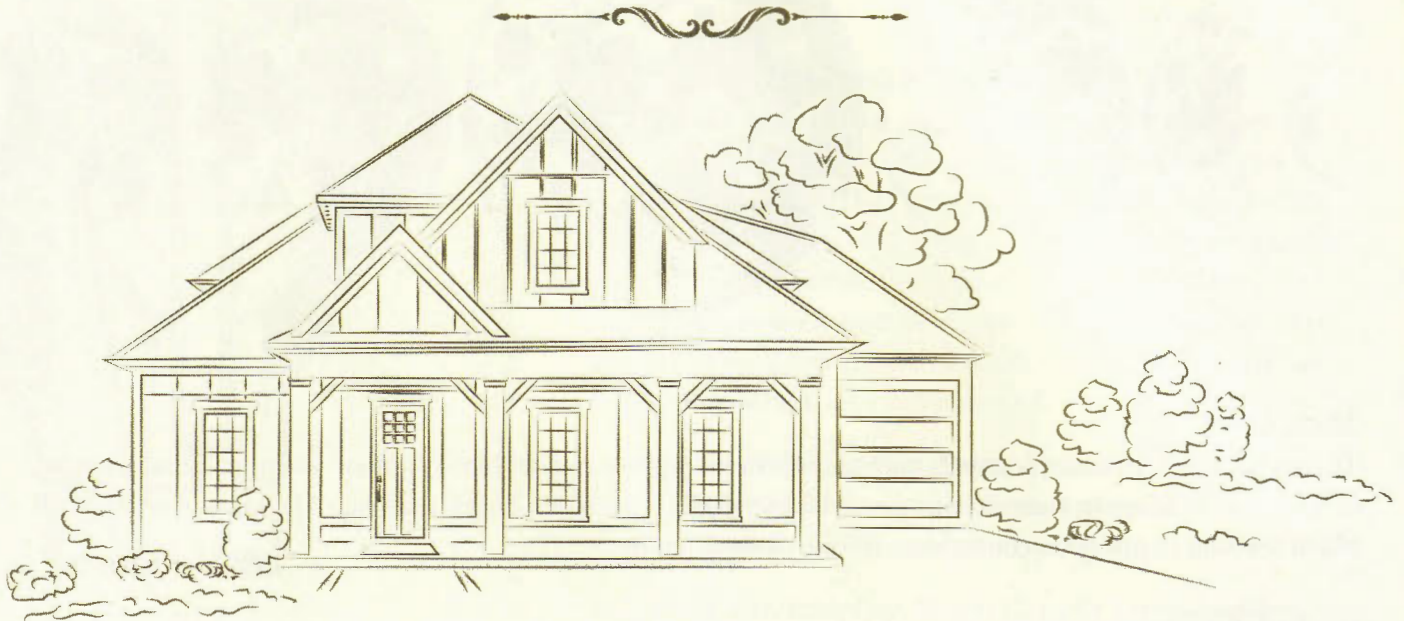
- See the first sliver of a new Moon “clear of the brush,” or unencumbered by foliage.
- Own a rabbit's foot, especially if the rabbit was killed in a cemetery by a cross-eyed person at the dark of the Moon.
- Hold a moonstone in your mouth at the full Moon; it will reveal the future.
- Have a full Moon on the “Moon day” (Monday).
- Expose your newborn to the waxing Moon. It will give the baby strength.
- Move your residence during the new Moon; prosperity will increase as the Moon waxes.

It's UNLUCKY to:

- See the first sliver of a new Moon through a window; you'll break a dish.
- Point at the new Moon or view any Moon over your shoulder.
- Sleep in the moonlight, or worse, be born in the moonlight. If a woman must sleep in the moonlight, she should rub spit on her belly or she risks becoming pregnant.
- See “the old Moon in the arms of the new” or the faint image of the full disk while the new crescent Moon is illuminated, especially if you're a sailor. Storms are predicted.
- Have a full Moon on Sunday.

SUPERSTITIONS AND OLD WIVES' TALES AROUND THE HOME

*There are many superstitions and old wives' tales about the house and home.
Are they fact or fiction? Often, only time will tell.*



These sayings for good luck in your home come from *The Old Farmer's Almanac*.

- Scatter Solomon's seal on the floor to banish serpents and venomous creatures from the room.
- To protect your house from lightning, gather hazel tree branches on Palm Sunday and keep them in water.
- Add caraway seeds to chicken feed to keep poultry from wandering. Feed the seeds to homing pigeons to help them find their way back.
- Stuff fennel in your keyhole or hang it over your door to protect against evil spirits. (Of course, we now know that fennel has many natural remedy benefits to help keep us healthy!)
- Never carry a hoe into the house. If you do so by mistake, carry it out again, walking backward to avoid bad luck.
- Never walk under a ladder, which is Satan's territory. If you must do it, cross your fingers or make the sign of the fig (closed fist, with thumb between index and middle fingers).
- If you give a steel blade to a friend, make the recipient pay you a penny to avoid cutting the friendship.
- Never give a knife as a housewarming present, or your new neighbor will become an enemy.
- Never pound a nail after sundown, or you will wake the tree gods.
- Nail an evergreen branch to new rafters to bring good luck. An empty hornets' nest, hung high, also will bring good luck to a house of any age.
- When you move to a new house, always enter first with a loaf of bread and a new broom. Never bring an old broom into the house.

THE HISTORY OF THANKSGIVING

Why do we celebrate Thanksgiving Day in the United States?

Here's a brief history of this all-important American holiday.

(In Canada, Thanksgiving is celebrated on the second Monday of October.)



In a 1789 proclamation, President George Washington called on the people of the United States to acknowledge God for affording them “an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness” by observing a day of thanksgiving. Devoting a day to “public thanksgiving and prayer,” as Washington called it, became a yearly tradition in many communities.

Thanksgiving became a national holiday in 1863. In that year, during the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln made his Thanksgiving Day Proclamation. He asked his fellow citizens “to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a day of thanksgiving and praise . . .”

It was not until 1941 that Congress finally designated the fourth Thursday in November as Thanksgiving Day, thus creating a federal holiday.

Of course, Thanksgiving is not born of presidential proclamations. Native American harvest festivals had been celebrated for centuries, and colonial services date to the late 16th century. Thanksgiving

Day, as we know it today, began in the early 1600s when settlers in both Massachusetts and Virginia came together to give thanks for their survival, for the fertility of their fields, and for their faith. The most widely known early Thanksgiving is that of the Pilgrims in Plymouth, Massachusetts, who feasted for 3 days with the Wampanoag people in 1621.

Why Is Thanksgiving Celebrated with Turkey?

Turkey has become the traditional Thanksgiving fare because at one time it was a rare treat. During the 1830s, an 8- to 10-pound bird cost a day's wages. Even though turkeys are affordable today, they still remain a celebratory symbol of bounty. In fact, astronauts Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin ate roast turkey in foil packets for their first meal on the Moon.



WHY WE KISS BENEATH IT

Of all the plants used as Christmas decorations, none has the long and interesting history of mistletoe. Discover the meaning of mistletoe, fascinating folklore, and why people kiss beneath it.



WHAT IS MISTLETOE?

An evergreen with yellow flowers and white berries, mistletoe is a parasitic plant usually found in fruit trees, maples, and sometimes oaks.

Mistletoe is most easily seen in winter. Look for ball-shaped green masses on otherwise bare tree branches. How do they get there? Birds eat the white berries and spread the seeds while sitting on the branches.

CAN MISTLETOE KILL A TREE?

Yes and no. Mistletoe makes most of its own food but depends on the host plant for water and minerals. This can weaken and eventually kill the host tree. A healthy tree won't have a problem, and mistletoe even encourages birds and beneficial insects. However, an infestation of mistletoe can be harmful. To rid your tree of mistletoe, it's essential to prune the infected branches in wintertime; just pruning off the plant will not destroy the parasite, which has now become a harmful pest.

MISTLETOE MEANING, LEGEND, AND LORE

Mistletoe is considered a symbol of life because even when its host is leafless, it is evergreen and bears fruit in the winter. The word "mistletoe" is from the Saxon word *mistl-tan* meaning "different twig."

Druid priests thought mistletoe to be a sacred plant because it didn't grow from roots in the ground. When they found some growing on an oak—their most sacred tree—they considered it to be the soul of the tree. The high priest would climb the tree on the 6th night of the new Moon after the winter solstice and cut the mistletoe with a golden sickle. Worshippers caught the pieces in their long white robes or on a white cloth spread under the tree because it was bad luck to let even the smallest piece touch the ground. The faithful would wear mistletoe charms for good luck and protection from witches and evil spirits. Sprays of mistletoe hung over the doorway ensured that only happiness could enter the home.

The Swiss traditionally shot mistletoe out of the trees with an arrow, and for good luck they had to catch it in the left hand before it hit the ground. In Sweden, it was associated with lightning and fire and called *thunder-besom*. In some parts of northern Europe, it was used as a divining rod to find treasure and as a master key to open locks.

According to the language of flowers, mistletoe symbolizes overcoming difficulties.



WHY DO PEOPLE KISS UNDER MISTLETOE?

We all know about the tradition of kissing under the mistletoe, but do you know how that came about?

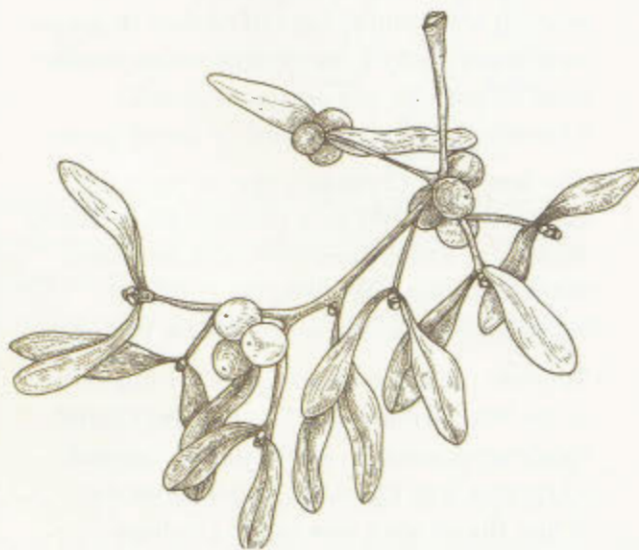
In an old Norse legend, Frigga, the goddess of love, had a son named Balder who was the god of innocence and light. To protect him, Frigga demanded that all creatures—and even inanimate objects—swear an oath not to harm him, but she forgot to include mistletoe. Loki, god of evil and destruction, learned of this and made an arrow from a sprig of mistletoe. He then tricked Hoth, Balder's blind brother, into shooting the mistletoe arrow and guided it to kill Balder. The death of Balder meant the death of sunlight—explaining the long winter nights in the north.

Frigga's tears fell onto the mistletoe and turned into white berries. She decreed that it should never cause harm again but should promote love and peace instead. From then on, anyone standing under mistletoe would get a kiss. Even mortal enemies meeting under mistletoe by accident had to put their weapons aside and exchange a kiss of peace, declaring a truce for the day.

IS MISTLETOE POISONOUS?

One caution—raw mistletoe berries are very poisonous and tend to fall off the plant easily. They have been known to cause seizures or death when ingested and can be especially lethal to children and pets.

To be on the safe side, ask your florist to replace the real berries with imitation ones or just use artificial mistletoe in your decorations.



CHRISTMAS LORE

The weather on Christmas foretells the weather for the coming year.

Green Christmas, white Easter.

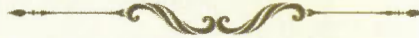
If windy on Christmas, trees will bring much fruit.

If there is ice hanging on trees on Christmas day, there will be clover tall enough to cut by Easter.



CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

Here is a little bit about the history of Christmas traditions in America, from Christmas trees to greeting cards, that we all know and love today.



Christmas Trees

- The first American Christmas tree can be credited to a Hessian soldier by the name of Henrick Roddmore, who was captured at the Battle of Bennington in 1776. He then went to work on the farm of Samuel Denslow in Windsor Locks, Connecticut, where for the next 14 years he put up and decorated Christmas trees in the Denslow family home.
- The first retail Christmas tree lot was established in 1851 by a Pennsylvanian named Mark Carr, who hauled two ox sleds loaded with Christmas trees from the Catskill Mountains to the sidewalks of New York City.
- The first president to set up a Christmas tree in the White House was Franklin Pierce, and the first president to establish the National Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony on the White House lawn was Calvin Coolidge.
- In 1882, the first tree lights were sold in New York City.

Christmas Cards

- The first American to print and sell Christmas cards was Louis Prang of Roxbury, Massachusetts, who began publishing cards in 1875.
- President Dwight D. Eisenhower is given credit for sending the first "official" Christmas card from the White House. An art print also became the standard Christmas gift for the president's staff, a practice continued to this day.

Here Comes Santa Claus . . .

- The first department store Santa was James Edgar, who, during Christmas seasons beginning in 1890, would wander about his store (the Boston Store) in Brockton, Massachusetts, dressed as Santa Claus, talking to the children of customers.

Other Christmas Customs

Ever wonder how the custom of giving Christmas gifts originated?

- The ancient Romans gave each other gifts on the calends (first day) of January, and the practice spread throughout the Roman Empire.
- Eventually, Christians moved the custom to December 25, although many Christians still give gifts on January 6, the feast of the Epiphany, commemorating the manifestation of Jesus' divine nature to the Magi.

*As many mince pies as you taste at Christmas,
so many happy months will you have.*



WHY IS FRIDAY THE 13TH UNLUCKY?

Origin of Friday the 13TH

Why is Friday the 13th considered a “bad luck” day? Discover the origins of this superstitious day! Friday the 13th occurs one to three times each year. The date is considered bad luck in many countries, a day when all sorts of misfortunes are said to occur.

Friday the 13TH Origins

Although no one knows for certain, the fear of the number 13 and the fear of Friday likely combined around the late 1800s into this new phobia; no clear mention of it had been discussed in published works before then.

One 20th-century theory suggests that it stemmed from an event that had occurred on Friday, October 13, 1307, when thousands belonging to an influential religious military order called the Knights Templar (officially, the Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon) were arrested for blasphemy and other affronts at the command of France’s king, Philip IV. Many were later tortured, coerced into making false confessions, and executed.

Fear of Friday the 13TH

No matter how the phobia came about, superstitions abound concerning it. On Friday the 13th, some people refuse to cut their hair or nails, dine out, travel, buy a house, start a job, conduct business, marry, or participate in any event. Other folks are so terrorized that they fear going anywhere on this day or even crawling out of bed. More than 60 million people worldwide have a phobia of Friday the 13th to varying degrees.

The fear of Friday the 13th is officially called “friggatriskaidekaphobia”; “Frigga” was the Norse god for which Friday is named and “triskaidekaphobia”



means fear of the number 13. An alternate term for the anxiety is “paraskevi” “dekatria” “phobia.” Originating from Greek, paraskevi means Friday, dekatria refers to “thirteen,” and phobia translates as “fear.”

It Isn't All Bad

Many of those who were born on Friday the 13th, or whose birthdays fall on the 13th and occasionally occur on a Friday, consider themselves immune to any negative repercussions.

In certain countries, the day is considered normal or even lucky, with some other date being ill-fated instead. For example, in some Hispanic countries, Tuesday the 13th is the unlucky one. In fact, the title of the 1980 American horror film *Friday the 13th* (now a cult classic) was changed to *Martes 13* (“Tuesday the 13th”) for Spanish-speaking audiences.

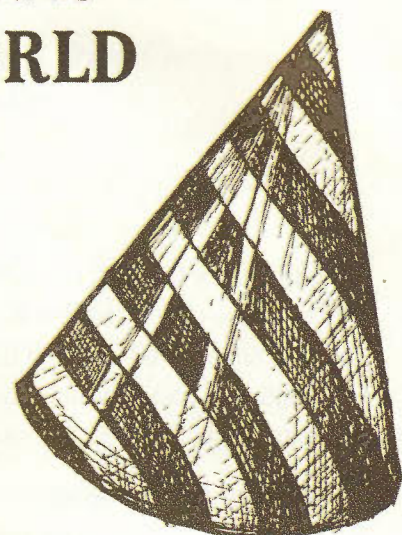
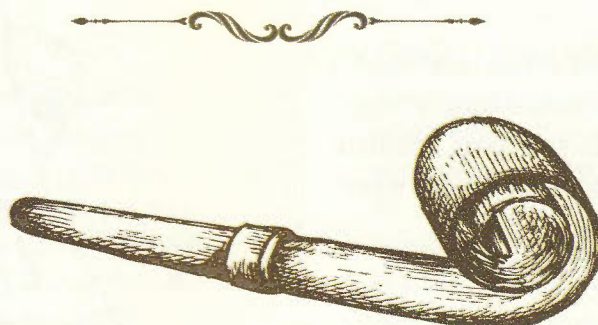
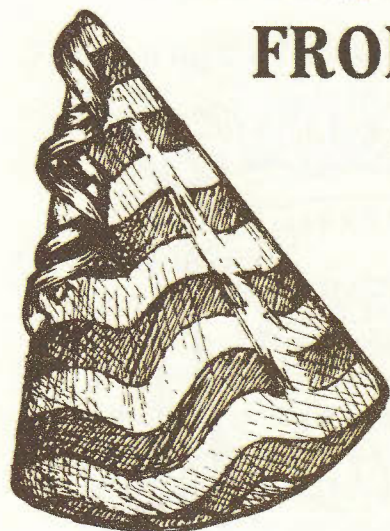
When is the Next Friday the 13TH?

There are 14 possible configurations for the annual calendar that determine how many Friday the 13ths will occur in the year.

- 6 of 14 years have one Friday the 13th.
- 6 of 14 years have two Fridays the 13th.
- 2 of 14 years have three Fridays the 13th.
- Months that have a Friday the 13th begin on a Sunday.

NEW YEAR'S TRADITIONS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

How to Have a Happy New Year Anywhere!



Many New Year's traditions that we take for granted actually date back to ancient times. This year, ring out the old and ring in the new with a new New Year's tradition—or two!

Make Some Noise

Making a lot of noise—from fireworks to gun shots to church bells—seems to be a favorite pastime around the world.

- In ancient Thailand, guns were fired to frighten off demons.
- In China, firecrackers routed the forces of darkness.
- In the early American colonies, the sound of pistol shots rang through the air.
- Today, Italians let their church bells peal, the Swiss beat drums, and the North Americans sound sirens and party horns to bid the old year farewell.

Eat Lucky Food

Many New Year's traditions surround food. Here are a few:

- The tradition of eating 12 grapes at midnight comes from Spain. Revelers stuff their mouths with 12 grapes in the final moments of the year—one grape for every chime of the clock!
- In the southern US, black-eyed peas and pork foretell good fortune.
- In Scotland—where Hogmanay is celebrated—people parade down the streets swinging balls of fire.
- Eating any ring-shaped treat (such as a doughnut) symbolizes “coming full circle” and leads to good fortune. In Dutch homes, fritters called *olie bollen* are served.
- The Irish enjoy pastries called bannocks.
- In India and Pakistan, rice promises prosperity.
- Apples dipped in honey are a Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) tradition.
- In Swiss homes, dollops of whipped cream, symbolizing the richness of the year to come, are dropped on the floors—and allowed to remain there!

Have a Drink

Although the pop of a champagne cork signals the arrival of the New Year around the world, some countries have their own beverage-based traditions.

- Wassail, a punch-like drink named after the Gaelic term for “good health,” is served in some parts of England.
- Spiced “hot pint” is the Scottish version of Wassail. Traditionally, the Scots drank to each other’s prosperity and also offered this warm drink to neighbors along with a small gift.
- In Holland, toasts are made with hot, spiced wine.

Give a Gift

New Year’s Day was once the time to swap presents.

- Gifts of gilded nuts or coins marked the start of the new year in Rome.
- Eggs, the symbol of fertility, were exchanged by the Persians.
- Early Egyptians traded earthenware flasks.
- In Scotland, coal, shortbread, and silverware were traditionally exchanged for good luck.

Put Your Best Foot Forward

In Scotland, the custom of first-footing is an important part of the celebration of Hogmanay, or New Year’s Eve day. After midnight, family and friends visit each other’s home. The “first foot” to cross a threshold after midnight will predict the next year’s fortune. Although the tradition varies, those deemed especially fortunate as “first footers” are new brides, new mothers, those who are tall and dark (and handsome?), or anyone born on January 1.

Turn Over a New Leaf

The dawn of a new year is an opportune time to take stock of your life.

- Jews who observe Rosh Hashanah make time for personal introspection and prayer, as well as visiting graves.
- Christian churches hold “watch-night” services, a custom that began in 1770 at Old St. George’s Methodist Church in Philadelphia.
- The practice of making New Year’s resolutions, said to have begun with the Babylonians as early as 2600 B.C., is another way to reflect on the past and plan ahead.

New Year’s Folklore

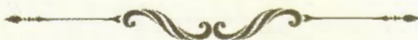
Some customs and beliefs are simply passed down through the ages. Here are some of our favorite age-old sayings and proverbs.

- On New Year’s Eve, kiss the person you hope to keep kissing.
- If New Year’s Eve night wind blow south, It betokeneth warmth and growth.
- For abundance in the new year, fill your pockets and cupboards today.
- If the old year goes out like a lion, the new year will come in like a lamb.
- Begin the new year square with every man [i.e., pay your debts!].
–Robert B. Thomas, founder of *The Old Farmer’s Almanac*

So, whether we resolve to return borrowed farm equipment (as did the Babylonians) or drop a few pounds, we’re tapping into an ancient and powerful longing for a fresh start!

NEW YEAR'S DAY WEATHER FOLKLORE

A new year is always ripe with possibilities. Though we have our forecasts, we also enjoy the tradition of looking to winter weather folklore.



New Year's Weather Folklore

Weather folklore often looks to the wind.

Try this. Step outside as the sun sets on New Year's Eve.

Feel the wind and recite:

If New Year's Eve the wind blows south

It betokens warmth and growth.

If west, much milk and fish in the sea.

If north, cold and storms there will be.

If east, the trees will bear much fruit.

If northeast, then flee it, man and brute.

Then go out and party!

Other adages suggest that the time to check out the wind was at sunrise on New Year's Day, but if you had any fun the night before, it will be hard to wake up at dawn. If you forgot to check the wind, don't worry.

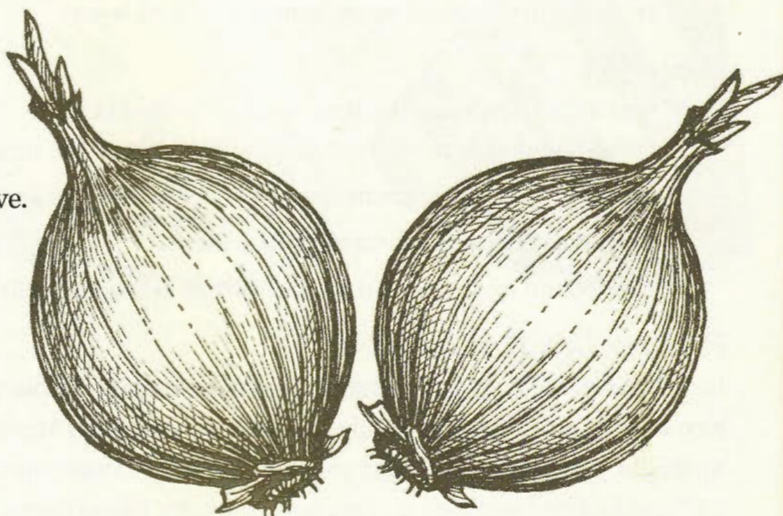
Other lore says that the first 12 days of the year are just as useful. The weather on the first, good or bad, will reflect how January will feel. The second day forecasts February, and so on.

An Age-old Onion Tradition

Get twelve onions. Between 11:00 pm and midnight on New Year's Eve, cut off the tops and scoop out a depression in the centers. Get out your compass and line the onions in an east-west orientation. Assign each to a month: The first will be January, etc. Place an equal amount of salt in each depression. Then explain to your fellow partiers why you smell like an onion!

Don't look at the vegetables until the next morning. The salt has dissolved to varying degrees in each onion. The more water in each onion, the wetter the corresponding month will be in the coming year. After this, carefully add potatoes and other root veggies, rub with olive oil and spices, and bake.

Whether the onions are right or wrong, you'll have a nice New Year's Day feast.



CAR COLOR REVEALS PERSONALITY OF DRIVER

Did you know that the color of your car says more about you than just personal preference?



According to *The Old Farmer's Almanac*, information from over 130,000 insurance claims reveals what car color says about the owner's personality as well as which colors are the most accident-prone.



Black Cars

Denote an aggressive personality or someone who's an outsider or rebel.



Gray Cars

Represent those who are calm, sober, and dedicated to their work.



Silver Cars

Indicate someone who's cool, calm, and slightly aloof.



Red Cars

Denote those who are full of zest, energy, and drive and who think, move, and talk quickly.



Green Cars

Often the choice of people with hysterical tendencies.



Pink Cars

Chosen by gentle, loving, and affectionate drivers.



Yellow Cars

Signify someone who is idealistic and novelty-loving.



Cream-Color Cars

Denote self-contained and -controlled drivers.



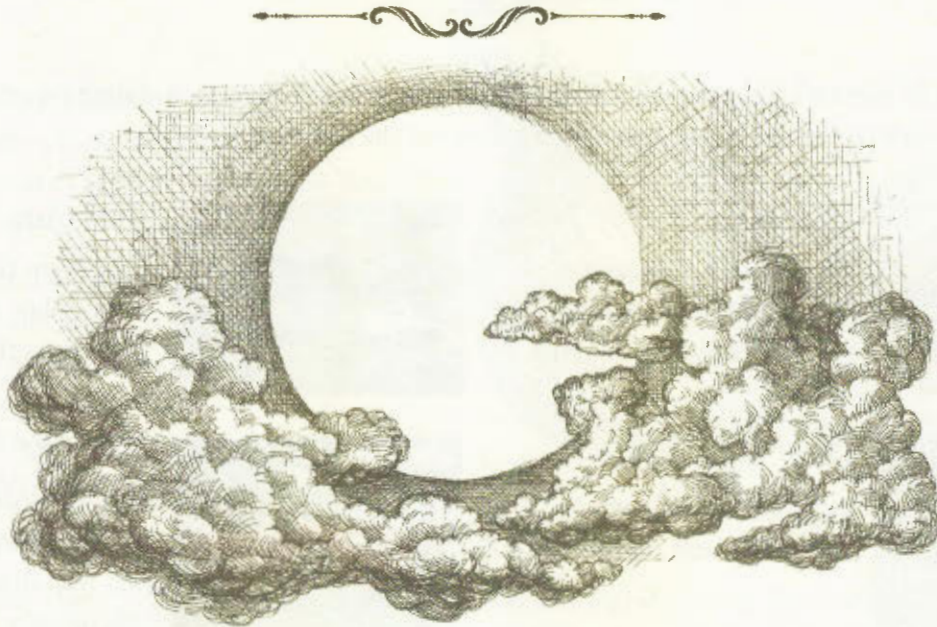
Blue Cars

Chosen by the more introspective, reflective, and cautious drivers.



THE FULL MOON, CHILDBIRTH, AND MARRIAGE

The Moon has a personal relationship with us all, and folklore has it that childbirth and even marriage are influenced by the Moon.



Does the Full Moon Affect Childbirth?

- Though nobody can be sure of when a baby will be born, some Moon lore suggests that births are more likely to occur 7 days before through 7 days after a full Moon.
- In fact, many cultures believe that the full Moon's pull on a woman's amniotic fluids increases the chances of giving birth at this time.
- Some nurses and midwives claim that the new Moon is also an active time for births.
- According to folklore, babies born the day after the full Moon enjoy success and endurance.

Does a Full Moon Affect Relationships and Marriage?

As the Moon regulates water, it's an age-old belief that it also regulates the rise and fall of our emotional tides.

- According to some lore, the full Moon is an ideal time to accept a proposal of marriage as love is amplified. This certainly does not mean that marriages that do not happen on full Moon nights are not successful, although it could be less than auspicious to get married when there's no Moon in the sky at all.
- Further, the full Moon is the best time to consummate marriage, according to the ancient Greeks, while the new Moon is the best time to drain out stale energy and belief systems.
- The new Moon phase is also the one best for breaking up.
- According to folklore, if a young woman sees a dove and glimpses the new Moon at the same instant, she should repeat: "Bright Moon, clear Moon, Bright and fair, Lift up your right foot, There'll be a hair." When she removes her shoe, she'll find a hair the color of her future husband's.

WEDDING FOLKLORE

The wedding tradition is an old one, so there is much lore and age-old wisdom surrounding it.



*Happy is the bride that the sun shines on;
Blessed is the corpse that the rain rains on.*

Wedding Superstitions

- Snow on your wedding day is a sign of fertility and prosperity.
- Walking is thought to be the best way of getting to church, as there's more chance of spotting lucky omens, such as seeing a rainbow, having the Sun shine, and meeting a black cat or a chimney sweep.
- Wear gold earrings on your wedding day to ensure wedded bliss.
- Put marigolds in your wedding bouquet to keep your true love.
- Speak wedding vows on the upward strokes of the clock hands and you'll work well together in marriage.
- An engagement ring purchased on a Tuesday will guarantee a marriage filled with peace and contentment.
- Burning the mistletoe on Twelfth Night ensures marriage for those who have kissed beneath it.

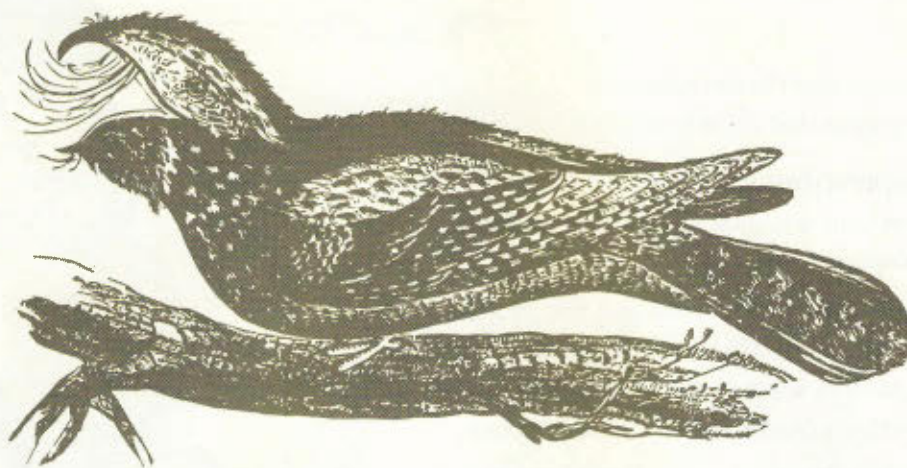
Proposal Lore

If a young girl receives a wedding proposal and cannot decide whether to have the man, she is sometimes advised to "leave it to the cat." She then takes three hairs from the cat's tail and wraps them in a bit of white paper. The packet is left under the doorstep for the night. When she opens the paper in the morning, she will note that the hairs have arranged themselves either in an N for no or a Y for yes. Old-timers advise that she would do well to heed the advice.



WHEN THE WHIPPOORWILL CALLS

It could mean many things, according to the wealth of myth surrounding this night flyer.



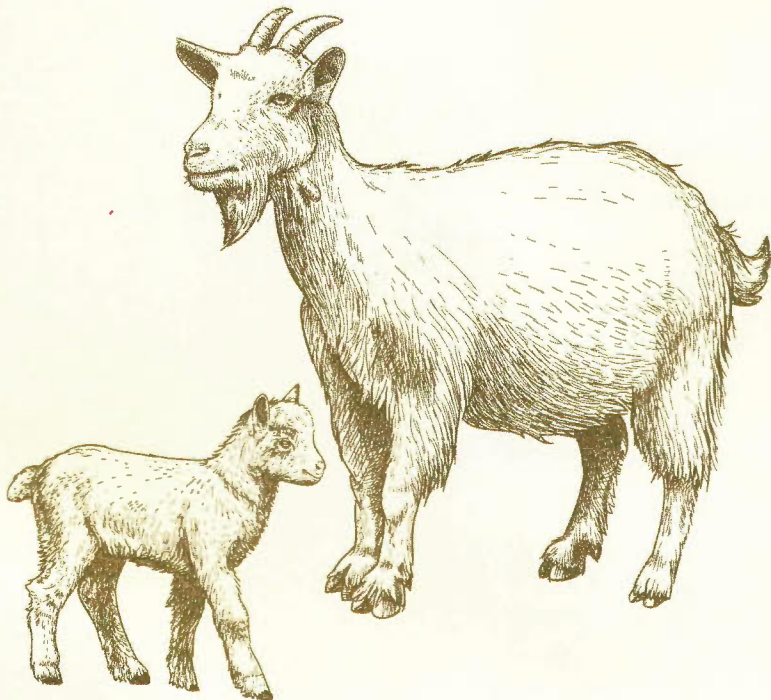
Does the whippoorwill suck goat's milk? Does it foretell death, marriage, or woe? Can your aching back be cured by its call? Few birds have spun such a crazed web of mythology and myth-information. At the heart of this confusion and misdirection is a medium-size bird, aka goatsucker.

Merit or blame for this bird's name belongs to Aristotle. The wise philosopher took a frivolous side trip into illogic to report a ridiculous story about the whippoorwill: "Flying to the udders of she-goats, it sucks them and so it gets its name," he reported. Probably, whippoorwills (or even more likely their crepuscular cousins, the nighthawks) were snagging insects as the insects congregated around the thin-haired bellies of goats. But Aristotle's authoritative nonsense stuck with the Caprimulgidae family (the Latin word comes from *capri* for goat and *mulgere*, to milk), and the common name for the bird family is the inelegant "goatsucker." Old wives worked overtime to whipstitch the tattered fabric of whippoorwill folklore. Here are some examples . . .

- When a single woman heard her first whippoorwill in springtime, she must have felt her heart lurch in panic, for if the bird did not call again, she would remain single for a year. If the birdsong continued, she was fated to remain single unless she had been quick-thinking and made a wish upon hearing the first call. If she kept that wish secret, she ultimately would be married.
- Whippoorwills singing near a house were an omen of death, or at least of bad luck.
- A man could rid himself of an aching back if he turned somersaults in time to whippoorwill calls.
- If an Omaha tribe Native American heard a whippoorwill's called invitation, he or she was advised to decline it. If the bird then stopped calling, a person who had answered would die. But if the calls continued, the person would have a long life.

- The Colorado Utes believed that the whippoorwill was one of the gods of the night and could transform a frog into the Moon.
- The Iroquois believed that moccasin flowers were the shoes of whippoorwills.

Whippoorwills range east of the Mississippi and from southern Canada south to northern Louisiana. The night is theirs, although in both daylight and dark the birds depend on their superb camouflage to see them through. Whippoorwills do their courting after sunset. The male's spring ritual is an elaborate one, involving strutting, throat-puffing, and a variety of noises designed to convince the silent female that he is The Male among a woods swarming with calling males. It's almost impossible for a spring woods traveler to escape the questionable music of one of the family to which the whippoorwill belongs. If you venture into a forest in the spring, keep an ear cocked for the whippoorwill's call and be prepared to make a wish, do a somersault, or see the Moon in a frog pond.



USING A CRICKET AS A THERMOMETER

Did You Know That You Can Tell the Temperature by Counting the Chirps of a Cricket?

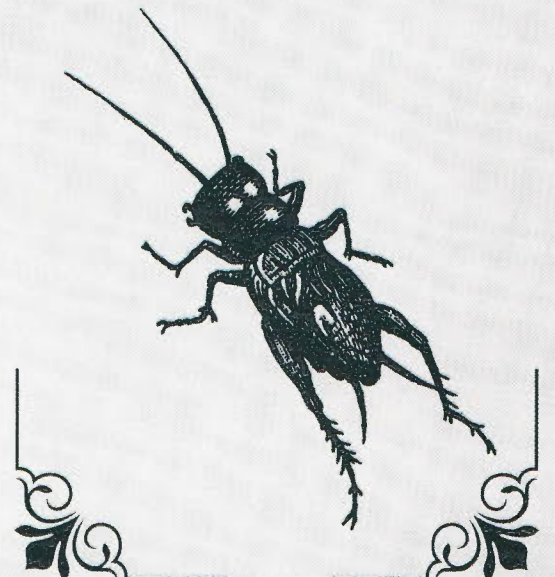
Back in 1897, a scientist named Amos Dolbear published an article titled "The Cricket as a Thermometer" that noted the correlation between the ambient temperature and the rate at which crickets chirp.

The formula expressed in that article became known as Dolbear's Law.

It's surprisingly simple:

- To convert cricket chirps to degrees Fahrenheit, just count the number of chirps in 14 seconds, then add 40 to get the temperature.
- The number you get will be an approximation of the outside temperature.

Example: 30 chirps + 40 = 70° F



THE OLD FARMER'S ALMANAC



ROBERT B. THOMAS

founder of *The Old Farmer's Almanac*

(1766-1846)

IN 1792, Robert B. Thomas, a bookseller, schoolteacher, and amateur astronomer living near Boston, Massachusetts, began a North American institution when he published the first issue of his *Farmer's Almanac*. (The word *Old* was added in 1832.) He soon distinguished his Almanac from all others, writing in one of the early issues: "We must strive always to be useful, with a pleasant degree of humor." That timeless formula has made *The Old Farmer's Almanac* an indispensable reference for generations of readers.

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