

Nowruz

Nowruz is the Persian New Year celebration. It takes place in the spring. Read this article and find out how people celebrate this important day.

Before you read

Match the words with the definitions.

to celebrate	an old name for the country of Iran
Farsi	the official language of Iran
spring	to do something fun for a special day
to symbolize something	the season when plants start to grow again after the winter
Persia	to represent something; to be a sign or a symbol of something
a coin	a plant whose grain is used for making flour, bread, pasta, etc.
prosperity	a flat disc or piece of metal used as money.
wheat	success

Article

- When is it?

Nowruz begins at the exact day, hour and minute of the spring equinox, when night and day are of equal length. This is usually on 21 March. It's the day when winter changes into spring, and it feels like a new beginning.

- Spring cleaning

People prepare for Nowruz by cleaning the whole house, and everyone in the family helps out. Carpets, windows and curtains are cleaned. Anything broken is repaired or replaced. Silverware is polished. The house is decorated with flowers. By doing this spring cleaning, people wash away the bad things from the previous year and prepare for better things to come in the new year. They also put on brand new clothes to symbolize a fresh start.

- Fire jumping

In the evening of the last Wednesday before Nowruz, bonfires are lit and people jump over the flames. The flames burn away sickness and bad luck.

- Nowruz and the seven Ss

It's important to start the year well: clean, smart, relaxed, happy and surrounded by loved ones. So, just before Nowruz, the whole family comes together. They celebrate around a special table in their house. It's called the *haftseen*, which means 'seven Ss'. On it, there are seven special objects, all of which begin with

the ‘s’ sound in the Farsi language and which symbolize something. There are actually more than seven, but here are some of the most common.

Persian name	What it is	What it symbolizes
<i>somaq</i>	a bright red spice made from crushed berries	sunrise and the spice of life
<i>sonbol</i>	hyacinth	spring
<i>sekeh</i>	coins	prosperity
<i>senjed</i>	the sweet dry fruit of the lotus tree	love
<i>seeb</i>	apples	health and beauty
<i>samanu</i>	a sweet pudding made from wheat	the sweetness of life
<i>sabzeh</i>	sprouted wheat grass	rebirth and the renewal of nature

Some other symbolic objects are placed on the table, depending on the traditions of each family. These include a goldfish, painted eggs, candles and a mirror.

- Nowruz in the UK

In the UK, Nowruz is celebrated by families from Iran and other countries. They set up a *haftseen* table in their homes too, but it’s difficult to find some of the objects in British supermarkets so they usually have to go to special Iranian shops to buy them. They send greetings to other family members living far away by phone or message. Nowruz is a happy and exciting time, even though there aren’t any school holidays for it in the UK. Sometimes around Nowruz, events are organized to promote Iranian culture. These can include concerts, film screenings and museum exhibitions.

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After you read

Do you celebrate Nowruz? How do you celebrate it? Talk to a friend and see if they celebrate it in the same way or differently. Also, try to use three new words that you have learned from the article.