

Nowruz Special Edition



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Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MFA DIGEST

CENTRE FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

HAPPY NOWRUZ; PERSIAN NEW YEAR 1404
(STARTING 21 MARCH 2025)



**A TYPICAL NOWRUZ TABLE SPREAD ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE
IRANIAN NEW YEAR**

Issue #101, March 1 – 15, 2025

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Nowruz Traditions

NOWRUZ RITUAL

Nowruz is a festival that has been celebrated for thousands of years. It is a holiday that is enjoyed by people of several different faiths and as such can take on additional interpretations through the lens of religion. Nowruz is partly rooted in the religious tradition of Zoroastrianism. Among other ideas, Zoroastrianism emphasizes broad concepts such as the corresponding work of good and evil in the world, and the connection of humans to nature which was not contradicting Islamic beliefs and accordingly helped Iranians to make Islamic thoughts aligned with their ancient traditions.



People all over the world celebrate Nowruz, but it originated in the geographical area called Persia in the Middle East and Central Asia. The distinct culture based on the language, food, music and leisure activities that developed among the many people and ethnic groups who lived in this area is known as Persian. Nowruz became a popular celebration among the communities that grew from these Persian influenced cultural areas. While the physical region called Persia no longer exists, the traditions of Nowruz are strong among people in Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, India, Pakistan, Türkiye, Canada and the United States. Nowruz is a holiday that is celebrated by people from diverse ethnic communities and religious backgrounds. For the Parsi community, however, Nowruz is very special and is known as their spiritual New Year. Nowruz is a time for family and friends to gather and celebrate the end of one year and the beginning of the next. Children have a fourteen-day vacation from school, and most adults do not work during the Nowruz festivities. Throughout the holiday period friends and family gather at each other's houses for meals and conversation. Preparing for Nowruz starts a few weeks prior to the New Year with a traditional spring cleaning of the home. At this time it is also customary to purchase new clothing for the family and new furniture for the home.





Nowruz Ritual

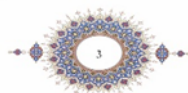
Nowruz, Nowrouz, Novruz, Nawrouz, Nouruz, Nawrouz, Nauryz, Nooruz— whatever it is transcribed, the Persian New Year or the Festival of Nowruz (literally meaning the New Day) is the most beautiful, largest and most colorful Iranian festival. This springtime celebration symbolizes the rebirth and the link between human and nature.

Described by the 11th-century Iranian astronomer and poet Omar Khayyam as "the renewal of the world", Nowruz dates back thousands of years at least to the Achaemenid era. Being one of the oldest festivals of mankind, now Nowruz is celebrated by millions of people.



HOW DO PERSIANS CELEBRATE NOWRUZ AND WHAT ARE THE TRADITIONS?

- Khan-e Tekani (Spring dusting of the house)
- Chahar Shanbeh Suri (Wednesday Fire)
- Amu Nowruz (Persian Santa Claus)
- Sizdah Bedar (Last Day of Nowruz)





Nowruz Traditions

PERSIAN CALENDAR

Iran uses a calendar of its own which is slightly more exact than the Gregorian calendar. The present Iranian calendar, also called the Jalali calendar, dates back to the eleventh century, when Jalal-ed-din Malek Shah Seljuq commissioned a panel of scientists in 1074-1079 AD to create a calendar more accurate than those in use at the time. Prominent among the scientists was Omar Khayyám, best known today for his poetry, especially The Rubaiyat.



The Iranian year begins on the day of the vernal equinox - the first day of spring. The beginning of spring or Nowrūz, a day in which the Sun enters the first degree of Aries before noon. It consists of 12 months which have retained their old Persian names. They are: Farvardin, Ordibehesht, Xordad; Tir, Mordad, Shahrivar; Mehr, Aban, Azar; Dey, Bahman, and Esfand. The first six months are each 31 days, the next five 30 days, and the last 29 (except in leap years, when it is 30 days). They roughly correspond to the signs of the zodiac.

Unlike the Gregorian calendar, which follows a set of predetermined rules to stay in sync with the solar year, the Solar Hijri calendar is based on astronomical observations. The year begins at midnight closest to the vernal equinox in Iran – specifically at the Iran Standard Time meridian at longitude 52.5° east, which runs about 250 miles (400 km) east of Tehran. The first day of the new year is called Nowruz, and it is celebrated around the world by Iranian people.



Nowruz Traditions

KHANCH TAKANI (SPRING DUSTING OF HOUSE)

As we move into the month of March, spring is more felt. The dark and cold days of winter are passing while brighter days of spring are promising. To respect this renewal, Iranians prepare to welcome spring and doing the extensive cleaning in the name of Khan-e Tekani. The carpets and curtains will be washed, the cupboards will get rid of unused materials to make space, the walls will be painted if they need. This process has both physical and spiritual benefits.



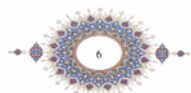


Nowruz Traditions

CHAHAR SHANBE SURI: THE FIRE JUMPING TRADITION



On the night of the last Wednesday of the old year Chahar Shanbe Suri, in Persian, is celebrated. During the night of Chahar Shanbe Suri people traditionally gather and light small bonfires in the streets and jump over the flames shouting: “Zardie man az to, sorkhie to az man” in Persian, which means, “May my sickly pallor be yours and your red glow be mine.” With this phrase, the flames symbolically take away all of the unpleasant things that happened in the past year. Because jumping over a fire is dangerous, many people today simply light the bonfire and shout the special phrase without getting too close to the flames.



Nowruz Traditions

AMU NOWRUZ: PERSIAN SANTA CLAUS

Of course, the children should not miss out on the festive season. Similar to Santa Claus, especially in Iran "Amu Nowruz" (Uncle Nowruz) delights the little ones with gifts. The bearded man walks through the streets with his musician and dancing companion "Haji Firuz". According to tradition, he approaches his beloved sleeping wife "Naneh Sarma" (coldness mommy) once a year and leave her again.





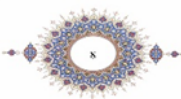
Nowruz Traditions

THE FINAL DAY OF NOWRUZ: SIZDAH BEDAR

The haft-seen table remains in the family home for thirteen days after the beginning of Nowruz. The thirteenth day is called Sizdah Bedar, which literally means in Persian “getting rid of the thirteenth.” The celebrations that take place on Sizdah Bedar are just as festive as those on the first day of Nowruz.



On this day, families pack a special picnic and go to the parks to enjoy food, singing and dancing with other families. It is customary to bring new sprouts, or sabzeh, grown especially for this occasion. At the park, the green blades of the sabzeh are thrown on the ground or in a nearby river or lake to symbolize the return of the plant to nature. Sizdeh Bedar marks the end of the Nowruz celebrations, and the next day children return to school and adults return to their jobs. In the Iranian calendar, Sizdah Bedar is named after the Day of Family.



Nowruz Traditions

TAHVIL: THE EXACT MOMENT OF THE NEW YEAR



Families return home after the events of Chahar Shanbe Suri and wait together for the exact moment when the vernal equinox occurs, in Persian called Tahvil. Today people know the moment of Tahvil through searching on the Internet or looking in the newspaper. However, before these sources of information were available, families knew that the New Year was close when a special person called Haji Firooz came to the neighborhood to sing, dance and spread the news of Nowruz. Haji Firooz is usually dressed in a red satin outfit with his/her face painted as a disguise.

When the New Year is just minutes away families and friends gather together and wait for Tahvil to occur. Right after the moment of Nowruz, the family exchanges well wishes such as “Happy New Year” or “Sal-e No Mobarak!” in Persian. Next, the eldest in the family distributes special sweets and candies to everyone, and young children are given coins as presents. It is also traditional for families and neighbors to visit each other and exchange special gifts.



Nowruz Traditions

ALL ABOUT HAFT-SIN: THE 7 'S' OF IRANIAN NEW YEAR

The most important activity in the celebration of Nowruz is making the haft-seen table. Haft is the Persian word for the number seven and seen is the Persian word for the letter S. Literally, the haft-seen table means a “table of seven things that start with the letter S’. Creating the haft-seen table is a family activity that begins by spreading a special family cloth on the table. Next the table is set with the seven S items. Here are some of the items and what they symbolize:

Sumac (crushed spice of berries): For the sunrise and the spice of life



Senjed (sweet dry fruit of the lotus tree): For love and affection



Serkeh (vinegar): For patience and age





Nowruz Traditions

ALL ABOUT HAFT-SIN: THE 7 'S' OF IRANIAN NEW YEAR

Seeb (apples): For health and beauty



Seer (garlic): For good health



Samanu (wheat pudding): For fertility and the sweetness of life



Sabzeh (sprouted wheat grass): For rebirth and renewal of nature





Nowruz Traditions

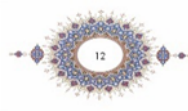
ALL ABOUT HAFT-SIN: THE 7 'S' OF IRANIAN NEW YEAR

In addition to these S items, there are other symbolic items that go on the haft-seen table, depending on the tradition of each family.

It is customary to place a **mirror** on the table to symbolize reflection on the past year, an **orange** in a bowl of water to symbolize the Earth, a bowl of real **goldfish** to symbolize new life, **colored eggs** to represent fertility, **coins** for prosperity in the New Year, **special flowers** called hyacinths to symbolize spring and **candles** to radiate light and happiness.

Each family places other items on the table that are special, for example the **Qur'an**, the holy book of Islam, or the **Shahnameh**, an epic Persian story of colorful kings and princes written around the year 1000 CE.

Another important item to place on the haft-seen table is a book of poetry by the famous poet Shams ud-Din **Hafez**. Hafez lived in Persian lands during the 14th Century CE and wrote many volumes of poetry and prose narratives. Many Persians consider Hafez to be their national poet, and his historical status is similar to the importance of Shakespeare in the English-speaking world.





Nowruz Traditions

SABZI POLO BA MAHI: THE ICONIC NOWRUZ DINNER



Annually on March 20 or 21, Iranian people celebrate the beginning of the Persian New Year, known as Nowruz. Just like other people around the world, people in Iran cook their own traditional foods, such as Sabzi Polo, to mark the arrival of spring and the beginning of their new year.

Meaning Herbed Rice, Sabzi Polo is an inseparable part of Iranian's table on Nowrouz. It is one of Iranian's favorite foods and through your visit to Iran, tasting Sabzi Polo is a must. They typically serve it with fish but you can also serve it with chicken or meat.

Same as so many other delicious Persian foods like Albaloo Polo and Khoresht Bamieh, it is symbolizing prominent elements of Iranian culture. The herb used in the food is a great representative of rebirth and the fish is symbolizing life for Iranians. So, in case you want to get closer to Persian Culture, it might be a good idea to cook Sabzi Polo with Mahi on March, 20.





Nowruz Traditions

KUKU SABZI - PERSIAN MIXED HERB FRITTATA

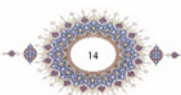


Kuku sabzi

A herbed omelette dish, kuku sabzi is traditionally served on the first day of spring and Persian new year. Once again, it is a typical dish for Nowruz because of the herbs symbolising rebirth, while the eggs represent fertility or new life. Completely vegetarian, this dish is filled with enough herbs and greens to tick your five a day off the list too. If you're looking to use up more leftover fresh herbs and leaves in your kitchen, there's no harm in adding spinach and other greens too (though they are not the traditionally included).

Ingredients:

300g flat leaf parsley, 300g spring onions (green parts) or chives, 200g coriander, 5 eggs, 2 lettuces, 2 tbsp turmeric, 2 tbsp walnuts, chopped, 1 tbsp barberries, 1 tbsp flour, 13 tbsp oil (of choice), Salt and pepper, to taste.



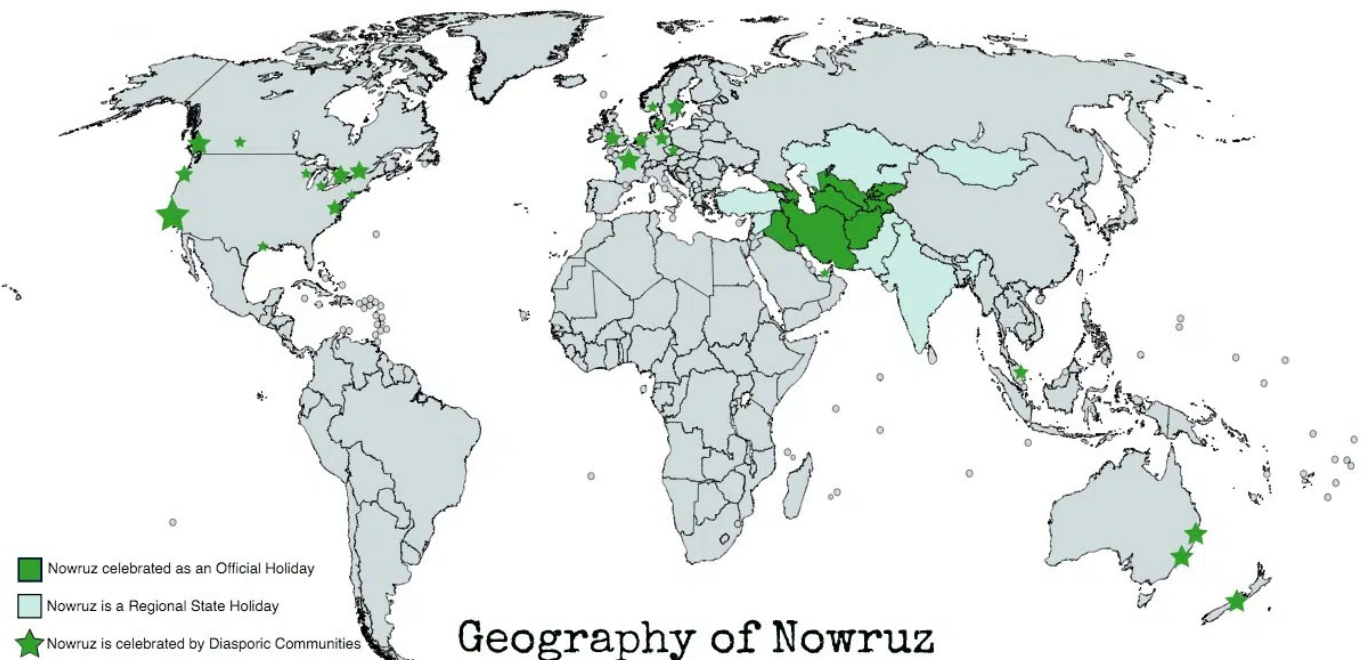


Nowruz Traditions

NOWRUZ UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE

Since 2009, Nowruz has been part of the Oral and intangible cultural heritage of UNESCO. The focal point of the festival is the affirmation of life in harmony with nature, the awareness of the inseparable link between constructive labor and natural cycles of renewal and the solicitous and respectful attitude towards natural sources of life, as stated in the justification for inclusion in the list of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

"The festival of Nowruz unites the individuals and peoples of the 12 countries that together nominated the festival for inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity to celebrate values of sharing and harmony," said Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO, on the occasion of the International Day of Nowruz .



Nowruz Traditions

NOWRUZ FESTIVITIES AROUND THE WORLD

