



## New Year's Day: a Time for Renewal

### New Beginnings

New Year's Day in the United States is a time for fresh beginnings: hope for a better future and resolutions to improve one's behavior.

Observed January 1, New Year's celebrations actually begin the night of December 31 with parties, concerts, fireworks and special events of all kinds. The day is marked in many American towns and cities with parades and U.S.-style football games.

In some communities the first baby to be born on New Year's Day is honored with gifts and media coverage. The New Year itself is often symbolized by a baby wearing just a diaper, a festive hat and a sash imprinted with the year. In contrast, the concluding "old year" is depicted by illustrations of



"Father Time," an old, white-bearded man in a robe, carrying an hourglass and a scythe.

### History and Customs

The celebration of New Year's Day in Western cultures goes back at least to Roman times, when the day was dedicated to Janus, the two-faced god of transitions and beginnings — one face looks forward and the other backward. January is named for Janus.

In the United States today, the first of January remains a time to reflect on the year just completed. Newspapers and television shows review the main events of the previous year and memorialize famous people who died.

New Year's Day abounds with rituals and superstitions brought to the United States by immigrants. For example, it is considered good luck to eat black-eyed peas on New

Top: A New Year tradition, the Rose Parade in Pasadena, California, features floats created entirely of flowers, such as this entry, "Jewels of Nature."



Immigrants of various nationalities believed that loud noises — firecrackers or gunfire — drive away the bad spirits of the past year and ensure a new year free of evil. “Shooting away bad spirits” became so popular with early Americans that by the mid-1700s some localities banned it to minimize the noise and the danger. But noise to herald the New Year remains ingrained in New Year’s celebrations, in the form of fireworks, whistles and party noisemakers.

New York City famously counts down to the midnight hour in Times Square, where thousands gather to watch a faceted crystal ball drop at the appointed hour. The tradition dates from 1907.

People sing “Auld Lang Syne,” lyrics from Scottish poet Robert Burns set to an old folk tune, to usher in the New Year. It is a widespread custom to toast the New Year with champagne. Another custom is kissing a loved one at the stroke of midnight on New Year’s Eve.

Millions of flowers are used to fabricate parade floats for the Tournament of Roses Parade, staged annually since 1890 in Pasadena, California, on New Year’s Day. The Rose Bowl collegiate football game usually follows the parade. Viewing the parade and game on television is a long-established New Year pastime.

Customs adopted from the diverse immigrant cultures of Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America enhance annual New Year celebrations, which are enjoyed by all, across the United States.

Year’s Day in southern states, a tradition with roots in Asia and Africa. Cabbage and sauerkraut, to

represent prosperity and long life, are Eastern European contributions to New Year’s dinner.

