

YOUR LETTERHEAD

Name of your community * Address * Phone number * Fax number * Other information



Celebrating December

Write a Friend Month

Bingo Month

Safe Toys and Gifts Month

Eat a Red Apple Day

December 1

International Volunteer Day

December 5

Hanukkah

December 12–20

Look for an Evergreen Day

December 19

Christmas Day

December 25

**Make Cut-Out
Snowflakes Day**

December 27

Iceland's Yule Lads

Children eagerly anticipate the arrival of Santa Claus on December 25, but in Iceland children await no fewer than 13 different Santa Claus-like visits. Beginning on December 12 and for 13 nights leading up to Christmas Day, homes are visited by the elf-like Yule Lads, mischievous sprites who are naughty and nice.

The Yule Lads, like Snow White's dwarves, have unique names and personalities and get into unique mischief. According to the National Museum of Iceland, they are: Sheep-Cote Clod, who disturbs sheep; Gully Gawk, who steals foam from buckets of cow's milk; Stubby, who steals food from frying pans; Spoon Licker, who licks batter from spoons; Pot Licker, who licks food from unwashed pots; Bowl Licker, who steals food from under the bed; Door Slammer, who stomps around the house and keeps everyone awake; Skyr Gobbler, who eats up all the Icelandic yogurt; Sausage Swiper, who steals sausages; Window Peeper, who peers into windows and sometimes steals things he finds inside; Door Sniffer, who has a big nose and steals baked goods; Meat Hook, who steals leftover smoked lamb; and Candle Beggar, who steals candles. These Yule Lads arrive to fill a good child's shoe, left on the windowsill, with a gift or treat. Bad children find their shoes filled with potatoes or turnips. This may sound like a harmless Yuletide tradition, but in the past, the Yule Lads were far more terrifying.

In olden days, the Yule Lads—the offspring of two ogres—were joined on Christmas Eve by the Yule Cat, a giant black beast. According to legend, they would gobble up any person found not wearing one new item of clothing. The Icelanders definitely take their myths seriously. Magnus Skarphedinnsson, a top elf researcher and headmaster of Iceland's Elf School, says that 54% of Icelanders believe in these beings. The image of the Yule Lads may have changed from naughty to nice over the centuries, but many still fret over their arrival each December.

The Lyric of the Nation



While not everybody appreciates the fine lyricism of poetry, governments all around the world acknowledge the importance of this art form by nominating *poets laureate*, poets who are expected to compose poems for important national events and occasions. In

recognition of their patriotic contributions, December 20 is Poet Laureate Day.

The term *laureate* refers to the crowing of poets and other heroes with laurel leaves, a practice which began in ancient Greece. The notion of nominating a poet laureate regained popularity during the 1300s in Renaissance Italy when Albertino Mussato was made the poet laureate of Padua. Mussato was a poet, historian, and statesman who acted as an ambassador between Padua in Italy and the court of Henry VII, the King of Germany and Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Mussato's works and influence were deemed so important to the legacy of Padua's politics that he was officially appointed poet laureate, the first such appointment made after the Greeks.

Nowadays, governments all over the world appoint poets laureate. In general, these poets strive to increase the appreciation of poetry among the citizenry and many of them work within a nation's national library as a consultant in preserving poetry. The position in the United States has been filled by Archibald MacLeish, Gwendolyn Brooks, and today by Juan Felipe Herrera. In England, the title has been bestowed upon Geoffrey Chaucer, William Wordsworth, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and today by Dame Carol Ann Duffy. In Canada, poets must be able to write in both English and French. Canada's current laureate is Michel Pleau. While the honor of being poet laureate is always temporary, the service these poets provide is timeless. According to England's Carol Ann Duffy, "Poets sing out human music for us."

The Meaning of Messy

December 21 is the shortest day of the year in the northern hemisphere, so why bother making your bed when you'll soon be back under the covers? That was the rationale behind fifth grader Shannon Barba's appeal to the United States Congress asking to make Don't Make Your Bed Day an official holiday. Perhaps Barba doesn't appreciate what making a bed in the morning reveals about an individual's personality. Some psychologists claim that those who make their beds set a positive tone for the rest of the day. Bed-makers are organized go-getters. What about those who don't make their beds? These people are not necessarily unorganized, but instead enjoy not knowing what happens next. They enjoy surprises that bring excitement and energy to the day.

When Brown is Best



On December 4, it's time to add a new color of footwear to your shoe closet, it's Wear Brown Shoes Day! Most men play it safe when dressing and opt for black shoes. Black is versatile

and goes with most any outfit. But sometimes black just won't do and brown shoes are the perfect finishing touch. When choosing a pair of shoes one must always first consider the colors of the outfit. Are you wearing a smart, suave ensemble for a night out in the city? Follow the maxims "No brown in town" or "No brown after six." Black is likely best. But are you wearing earth tones like khaki, tan or green? Then go brown. Brown even pairs well with varying shades of red, white, and navy. Also, are you wearing brown suede? Brown brogues? Antique brown patina oxfords? As you can see, brown shoes can be just as fancy as black. So on December 4, don't play it safe. Take a fashion risk and wear a pair of brown shoes. If you're particularly stylish, pair those brown shoes with some colorful shoelaces.

On Top of Technology



December 3 is Roof Over Your Head Day, a day to give thanks for the gift of shelter. The biting cold and driving snow of winter are sober reminders of the

warmth and safety that a good roof can bring. Nowadays, however, roofs provide more than overhead shelter. Technological advances allow roofs to provide us with renewable energy, a cleaner environment, and even fresh food.

Entrepreneur Elon Musk is best known for his company Tesla, its electric cars, and his aspirations to colonize Mars. Lesser known, but just as visionary, is his work to produce a new kind of roof. Tesla is designing solar glass roof shingles that look exactly like traditional roof shingles, but with the benefit of harnessing the sun's power and turning it into valuable energy to run a home. The durable glass is specially designed to withstand hailstones falling at over 100 mph. At \$42 per square foot, these tiles are much costlier than the average asphalt shingle, which costs \$5 per square foot. And while these tiles also cost more than the large, rectangular solar panels now perched atop many roofs, they look nicer and more natural than the clunky rooftop panels.

Another innovative roof option is the "green roof," where shingles are completely eschewed for a roof composed of soil, plants and shrubs. Residential home owners and urban building managers are opting for living rooftop gardens, where plants help clean the air, manage stormwater runoff, reduce air conditioning and heating costs, absorb heat, provide habitat for birds and animals, offer park space for people, and even provide fresh fruits and vegetables via rooftop farms. Innovations do not stop at green roofs; there are also designs for green walls, bridges, and railroad tracks. In all of these cases, success depends on the expertise of the engineer in considering a roof's ability to retain moisture, allow drainage, prevent erosion, repel pests, and determine which plants will be most successful. In the near future, homes will provide more than just a roof over our heads.

Sticky Business

Begin December 17 with pancakes, waffles, or French toast covered in a puddle of maple syrup because it's Maple Syrup Day. Maple syrup typically comes from sugar maple, red maple, or black maple trees. In cold climates, these trees store starch in their trunks and roots. When the weather warms, this starch is converted to sugar and then rises in sap to feed the tree. Maple sap is collected by boring a hole into the tree trunk and attaching a *spile*, or tap, through which the sap "runs." This dripping sap is collected and boiled down to remove excess water and create a concentrated syrup. It takes almost 40 gallons of maple sap to create one gallon of maple syrup. In South Korea, the sap is not even boiled down to syrup. Instead, maple trees known as *gorosoe* are tapped and the sap is drunk fresh from the tree. In some regions of South Korea where the sap is believed to have health and spiritual benefits, people drink as much as five gallons at once. It is also an economic boon. The city of Hadong alone produces 317,000 gallons of sap, which fetches between \$6 and \$7 a gallon.

Operation Santa Paws



The December holiday season may be one of good cheer for humans, but a group of animal lovers has made sure that the warmth of the season extends to pets as well. In 2001, Justin Rudd spearheaded a movement to solicit donations to animal shelters during the holiday season. Since then, every December, animal shelters and rescue groups participate in Operation Santa Paws, an effort to collect toys, treats, and supplies for neglected and abandoned animals, especially those pets given as gifts and then left out in the cold. Providing a happier holiday season for sheltered and rescued animals can even increase the likelihood of adoption.

Seeing the Light



On the 8th day of the 12th month, Buddhists celebrate Rohatsu, also known as Bodhi Day, which commemorates the Buddha's Awakening. This is the moment that the first Buddha,

Siddhartha Gautama, achieved Enlightenment, or *bodhi*, as it is called in Sanskrit.

Scholars know relatively little about Siddhartha Gautama. He was the son of a clan chieftan and a princess and so became a prince in his own right. But at age 29, Prince Siddhartha left his palace to walk among the people and was appalled at their pain and suffering. He abandoned his kingdom, family, and riches to become a wandering holy man searching for a means to release humanity from pain and suffering. At one critical moment, Siddhartha seated himself under a pipal tree, now known famously as the Bodhi tree, and vowed to never arise until he discovered the truth. After 49 days of deep meditation he supposedly attained Enlightenment and became known as the Buddha, or *Awakened One*.

What is Enlightenment, in this Buddhist sense? Some believe that at his moment he achieved liberation from the endless cycle of rebirth, suffering, and dying again. He achieved *nirvana*, extinguishing any sense of self and, along with it, any feelings of desire, hatred, or ignorance, which lead to suffering. Rather than abandon humanity and continue on his own path to enlightenment, the Buddha returned to the world to teach others this path to the end of suffering. For the remaining 45 years of his life, the Buddha travelled throughout India sharing his insights and teachings.

Modern day Rohatsu traditions include deep meditation in the manner of the Buddha. While very few ever reach Enlightenment, it is in this practice that we come to a better understanding of how to ease the suffering of ourselves and others. Perhaps the best way to commemorate Bodhi Day is to extend simple kindnesses that ease the suffering of others

December Birthdays

In astrology, those born between December 1–21 are Archers of Sagittarius. Sagittarians are travelers, open-minded, and constantly in search for meaning. Extroverted and optimistic, Archers seek change and take concrete steps to achieve their goals. Those born between December 22–31 are Capricorn's Goats. Goats are practical, determined and focused on their ambitious goals. They follow a straightforward, well-planned path and persevere with grit and honesty. Their sympathetic and caring natures make them devoted friends.

Bette Midler (entertainer) – December 1, 1945
Dave Brubeck (musician) – December 6, 1920
Eli Whitney (inventor) – December 8, 1765
Rita Moreno (actress) – December 11, 1931
Dave Clark (musician) – December 15, 1942
Ty Cobb (ballplayer) – December 18, 1886
Barbara Billingsley (actress) – December 22, 1922
Humphrey Bogart (actor) – December 25, 1899
Tiger Woods (golfer) – December 30, 1975
Donna Summer (singer) – December 31, 1948

Keep Your Footing



Scotland's Hogmanay is one of the world's greatest New Year's celebrations. *Hogmanay* is the Scottish word for the last day of the year. In Scotland,

the celebration of Hogmanay was traditionally even more important than Christmas. The most important ritual of Hogmanay is the practice of *first-footing*, which begins immediately after midnight. This entails being the first person to cross over a friend or neighbor's threshold. Any first-footer must arrive bearing symbolic gifts of salt, coal, shortbread, whiskey, and black bun. Another ritual is *redding the house*, which involves cleaning the home and hearth, and then "reading" your fortune on the hearth's ashes. No Hogmanay is complete without singing "Auld Lang Syne," composed by Scotland's own national poet Robert Burns.