

CULTURAL CELEBRATIONS

Globally, there is an intricate relationship between cultural celebrations and trees. Cultural celebrations worldwide often incorporate trees as symbolic elements, reflecting deep-rooted connections between communities and the natural world. In Alberta, as in many regions across the planet, these celebrations serve as vibrant expressions of a mosaic of cultural heritages.

Tu B'Shevat

Tu B'Shevat is a Jewish holiday celebrated during the month of Shevat to revel and rejoice in the wonder of trees. The secondary name of this occasion, *Rosh Hashana La'llanot*, translates literally to the 'New Year of the Trees' in the modern state of Israel. The Seven Species of this holiday contain five tree species, each representing a vital aspect of Jewish culture. The fig tree stands for endurance, the pomegranate for glory, the date palm for kingdom, the grape tree for beauty, and the olive for foundation and stability. Each characteristic is attributed to a specific facet of its respective plant. This holiday is contemporarily observed as a day of ecological awareness and respect for nature, and tree-planting events are often held to commemorate this critical Jewish Arbor Day.



Yunsa

Yunsa is a prominent celebration in the Peruvian culture and takes place at the tail end of the Carnival festival. The purpose of this festival is to celebrate new life while paying respect to nature and trees that have sustained life and well-being throughout Peru. Ecological well-being is a secondary focus to the cultural symbolism of fresh starts but remains a focal point of the celebration. It was started by rural people in the area and carries with it a tradition of taking which gifts one may want with the promise to 'bring two' the following year. This is done to ensure the Yunsa grows each year, and the couple that ends up being the two to chop the tree down enters the important role of planning the Yunsa for the next event. This celebration is significant in the Andean and African communities and acts as an entwining tool to unite the two cultures and is vital to agricultural groups and players. As such, it should come as no surprise that the cutting down of the tree signifies a new harvest, beginning, and ultimately, rebirth.

Chinese New Year

Dedicated to wishing wealth and prosperity to those who observe it for the coming year, Chinese New Year finds that kumquat trees are a popular choice for decoration and gifts within the Chinese community and those associated with it. This is due to the gold nature of the kumquat fruit, which closely resembles the mineral gold and is synonymous with both spiritual and financial fortune. Citrus fruits such as mandarins are also often associated with the Chinese New Year, and gifting fruits in even numbers is a heritage-appropriate way to avoid bad luck, while giving two trees symbolizes a 'doubling' of wealth!

Trees play a vital role in this celebration as a significant portion of the holiday is filled with those participating in the festivities placing wishes on the branches of a sacred tree to promote fulfillment over the coming months. Money trees are customarily decorated with red envelopes containing hopes for the year, while the culturally significant bamboo plant is gifted to heighten future chances of lucky circumstances.



Hanami

In Japan, a mystical festivity is devoted to the reflective and intentional observation of cherry blossoms. Cherry blossom trees are of substantial significance in Japan through the lens of both ecological and cultural perspectives. Hanami translates to 'flower viewing' and refers to an ancient practice of appreciating the ethereal and surreal beauty of the blooming buds. This holiday began in early Japanese societies as an opportunity for farmers to value cherry blossoms and treat them as divine beings to be prayed to and made offerings to, in exchange for a plentiful growing season. It has become an event that all members of Japanese heritage celebrate and look forward to. Religious origins saw cherry blossoms as symbols of agricultural productivity, which provided seats for the Gods who could dole out a successful harvest. These days, Hanami is an opportunity for those participating to come together to view the blossoms while engaging in lively activities with family and friends, such as sharing beverages or having a cherry blossom-shaded feast. Ultimately, Hanami exists to behold and cherish the exquisite splendour of this Japanese species.

Van Mahotsav

Van Mahotsav is a summer event which is celebrated mainly in India but recognized worldwide by the United Nations as a holiday to foster environmental cognizance. With a focus on tree planting to mitigate ecological injury and issues, the 1950's Union Minister for Agriculture and Food began this week-long festival to promote the integral nature of woodlands and forests across various lifestyles, geographical regions, and cultural backgrounds. There are continuous events involving public education in the form of seminars and regional activities to progress knowledge of concepts in the field of environmental science and how tree planting can assist in conservation and nature's welfare.

Every individual of Indian descent is expected to plant one tree during Van Mahotsav to contribute to the planet's security and its inhabitants' well-being. However, this holiday is not limited to those of Indian heritage, as the UN has been known to promote the festival worldwide to encourage everyone to contribute to the stability of future generations. This fairly new holiday aims to acknowledge how forests can lead to a decrease in poverty and an increase in the likelihood of achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Destructive human activities and deforestation have led to an impediment to the services provided by forests. Van Mahotsav has become essential in working against these stark contemporary realities. This festival will continue long into the future and remain a hope in our world's fight against climate change.



Arbor Day

Arbor Day is a unique holiday of a non-religious nature that seeks to develop an appreciation for trees on a global scale. Appropriate organizations, associations, and societies often encourage people to plant trees or take steps to showcase their gratitude for the wonders of these magnificent plants.

The roots of Arbor Day stem from the state of Nebraska in the year 1872; early pioneers to the land took on homesteading and were henceforth urged by the state to plant location-specific trees to provide shelter, food, and other resources for those then living in the region. This was also an effort to beautify the area using various tree species that would provide aesthetic value and environmentally vital services. Today, Arbor Day is a holiday enthusiastically observed by a multitude of communities, the majority of which have taken on personal, organizational, and governmental oaths to enhance the health and productivity of modern landscapes concerning the ecological needs of each respective region. Arbor Day exists to show love and appreciation for trees while promoting and actively working to enhance our planet and the flora upon it.

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