



How to...



WOW!
Fairbanks, Alaska, will have only 3 hours and 42 minutes of sunlight on the shortest day of the year.

Enjoy the winter solstice

Try a new family tradition on December 21, the shortest day of the year.

This year, winter officially begins on December 21, which is the winter solstice. That day is the shortest day—and longest night—of the year for people living in the northern hemisphere (the half of the planet that's above the equator, an imaginary line that circles Earth). But the winter solstice also means that the days will start to have more sunlight after that, which is a great reason to celebrate. Here are some activities to try.

Learn some history

Ancient civilizations likely celebrated the winter solstice to mark the return of longer days and more sunlight. Some monuments that were built thousands of years ago are still standing today. These include Stonehenge in England (a ring of giant rocks that align with the sun's rays on the winter solstice), Newgrange in Ireland, and Maeshowe in Scotland. You can find books about them at your local library or ask an adult to help you search for information and photos online.

Watch the sun

December 21 is an ideal day to watch the sunrise or sunset, since you won't have to get up too early or stay up late. The time will be different depending on what part of the country you live in. You can look up the times for your town at tinyurl.com/TWJUS-Solstice. Then

decide with your family where to go to watch. The view will be best from a location that lets you see far into the distance, such as a hill overlooking a park or the beach, rather than in a neighborhood, where trees and houses may be in the way. Bring warm blankets to sit on.

Decorate a yule tree

Decorating a tree outside with food for birds and animals is a popular winter solstice ritual. Try making garlands out of dried or fresh orange slices to hang on the tree, or create mini bird feeders by covering pine cones with peanut butter and rolling them in bird seed before hanging them.

Have a candlelit feast

Many traditional solstice celebrations are centered around candles as a tribute to the lighter days to come. Ask an adult to bring out some candles and light them with you. Then switch off the lights in your house, gather around the table, and enjoy a fun dinner together.

Set goals

Some people use the winter solstice as a time to reflect on the past year and create goals for next year. Your candlelit feast is a good time to discuss what each family member hopes to accomplish next year. Or you can write down your thoughts and hopes in a journal.



String oranges for birds.

How other cultures welcome winter



Dong Zhi

This Chinese celebration translates to "winter arrives." Families feast on foods like brightly colored rice balls.



Toji

On December 22, people in Japan light bonfires on Mount Fuji to encourage the sun's return to nurture crops.



Shab-e Yalda

This Iranian festival means "night of birth." People serve red fruit and nuts to bring good health and prosperity.



A painting of a shalako dancer

Shalako

The Zuni, a Native American tribe in New Mexico, perform a joyous dance called *shalako* while wearing amazing masks.