

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving or Thanksgiving Day is a holiday celebrated in the United States and many other countries on various dates. Due to the efforts of Sarah Josepha Hale, it has officially been an annual tradition since 1863, when during the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a National Day of Thanksgiving to be celebrated on the last Thursday in November.

The first documented thanksgiving feasts in territory currently belonging to the United States were conducted by Spaniards in the 16th century. Thanksgiving services were routine in what was to become the Commonwealth of Virginia as early as 1607 with the first permanent settlement at Jamestown, Virginia holding a thanksgiving in 1610.

The event that Americans commonly call the “First Thanksgiving” was celebrated to give thanks to God for guiding them safely to the New World. The first Thanksgiving feast allegedly lasted three days, providing enough food for 13 Pilgrims and 90 Native Americans. The feast may have consisted of fish [cod, eels, and bass] and shellfish [clams, lobster, and mussels], wild fowl [ducks, geese, swans, and turkeys], venison, berries and fruit, vegetables [peas, pumpkin, beetroot], and possibly, wild, or cultivated onion, harvest grains [barley and wheat], and the New World “Three Sisters”: beans, dried Indian maize or corn, and squash. The New England colonists were accustomed to regularly celebrating ‘thanksgivings’--days of prayer thanking God for blessings such as military victory or the end of a drought.

George Washington, leader of the revolutionary forces in the American Revolutionary War, proclaimed a Thanksgiving in December 1777 as a victory celebration honoring the defeat of the British at Saratoga.

As President, on October 3, 1789, George Washington made a proclamation and created the first Thanksgiving Day designated by the national government of the United States of America.

Since 1924, in New York City, the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade is held annually every Thanksgiving Day from the Upper West Side of Manhattan to Macy’s

flagship store in Herald Square and is now televised nationally by NBC. The Parade features parade floats with specific themes, scenes from Broadway plays, performers, large balloons of cartoon characters and high school marching bands. The float that traditionally ends the Macy's Parade is the Santa Claus float, the arrival of which is an unofficial sign of the beginning of the Christmas season.

Since 1947, The National Thanksgiving Turkey Federation has presented the President of the United States with one live turkey and two dressed turkeys, in a ceremony known as the National Thanksgiving Turkey Presentation. In a tradition that began as a one-off joke by Ronald Reagan in 1987 and made permanent by George H. W. Bush in 1988, the live turkey is "pardoned" and lives out the rest of its days on a nearby peaceful farm. There are legends that state that the "pardoning" tradition dates to the Harry Truman administration or even to an anecdote of President Abraham Lincoln pardoning his son's pet turkey: both stories have been quoted in more recent presidential speeches, but neither has any evidence in the Presidential record. In more recent years, two turkeys have been pardoned in case the original turkey becomes unavailable for presidential pardoning.

As a federal and popular holiday in the U.S., Thanksgiving is one of the major holidays of the year. Together with Christmas and the New Year, Thanksgiving is a part of the broader holiday season.