

## What Is the Origin of Thanksgiving?

The Pilgrims are an important part of the Thanksgiving tradition. Most people would credit them with beginning of Thanksgiving; there's no direct line, however, between their end of the harvest celebration in 1621 and today's modern holiday. After their first rough winter in 1620, the Pilgrims experienced a bountiful harvest in the fall of 1621. They held a three day feast with the local natives, without whom they couldn't have survived. They ate wild game, cooked pumpkins, lobster, corn, berries, plums and other foods they gathered from the area.

The next time Thanksgiving shows up in American history isn't until June of 1676 when the colonists in Massachusetts held a Thanksgiving celebration to mark their victory over the natives. The colonies held a collective day of Thanksgiving in October of 1777. George Washington tried to establish a national day of Thanksgiving, in honor of the Pilgrims, in 1789 but it wasn't a popular idea. Washington and John Adams both gave proclamations for national days of Thanksgiving during their terms in office, but Thomas Jefferson refused when he was president. For the next century, proclamations of days of Thanksgiving were made by a few presidents, several state governors and even mayors of cities. These days were celebrated at different times throughout the year and normally commemorated the harvest or another special event.

It wasn't until 1863 that the idea of a permanent, national holiday became a reality. Abraham Lincoln issued a declaration of a day of Thanksgiving to be held on the last Thursday of November. The subsequent presidents followed his lead as they all tried to restore national unity after the Civil War. In 1939, Franklin D. Roosevelt tried to move the holiday up a week to give stores extra time to sell Christmas presents, in order to help get the post-Depression economy moving. However, in 1941 Congress voted to permanently make the holiday on the fourth Thursday of November. It's been celebrated on that date ever since. "We often think of Thanksgiving as an American holiday, begun by the Pilgrims in Plymouth in 1621. At that time, so the story runs, the survivors of the Mayflower passengers celebrated their first [harvest](#) in the New World with a feast to which Governor Bradford invited the Indian Chief Massasoit and ninety of his braves.

That was the first Thanksgiving Day in the New World. But actually a thanksgiving for the annual harvest is one of the oldest holidays known to mankind, though celebrated on different dates. In Chaldea, in ancient Egypt and in Greece, the harvest festival was celebrated with great rejoicing. The Hindus and the Chinese observe the gathered harvest with a holiday."

"The **Romans** celebrated their Thanksgiving early in October. The holiday was dedicated to the goddess of harvest, Ceres, and the holiday was called Cerelia."

"In England the 'Harvest Home' has been observed continuously for centuries. The custom was to select a harvest queen for this holiday. She was decorated with the grain of their fields and the fruit of their trees. On Thanksgiving Day she was paraded through the streets in a carriage drawn by white horses. This was a remnant of the Roman ceremonies in honor of Ceres...the Pilgrims brought the "Harvest in" to Massachusetts.' (Little, Brown & [Company](#), Boston, 1953. Pps. 159- 160)." [The harvest queen represented the Queen of Heaven, mentioned in the Bible as idolatrous and Semiramis.]

Marian Schibsly and Hanny Cohrsen in their book, *Foreign Festival Customs and Dishes*, states:

"Long before the Christian era, harvest gods were worshiped with curious and varied rites. Customs now in use at harvest festivals have their counterparts in pagan countries; in many cases their origin and their significance is shrouded in mists of antiquity. The American Thanksgiving Day is usually ascribed to the Massachusetts colony of pilgrims, who, in gratitude for their first harvest on American soil, devoted the day of December 13, 1621 to praise and rejoicing. [Actually ran 3 days]

The idea underlying such a celebration did, however, not originate with them. Thanksgiving day -- by that or some other name -- was known to virtually all the people who have come to America since 1492 and is known to those now coming...it becomes apparent that a day of thanksgiving is a custom in almost all the countries of Europe. It usually has to do with the [harvests](#) -- with the planting of crops or their gathering -- and therefore is observed in rural districts rather than in cities. (American Council For Nationalities Service, N.Y. 1974. P.46). "

Based on [information](#) that I have been able to find, it appears that the premise for the Thanksgiving holiday was **NOT** new, but practiced long before the christian era by various pagan religions.