

# Nowruz; timeless celebration of renewal and unity

**Iranica Desk** *Nowruz is an ancient and historical celebration passed down from our ancestors. With unique customs added over time, it has become an integral part of Iranian culture. Today, it serves as a symbol of connection and solidarity among various Iranian ethnic groups. The beginning of Nowruz falls on the first of Farvardin in the Iranian calendar (March 21). This celebration is one of the oldest festivities in ancient Iran and has been joyfully celebrated for many years, continuing into the future. Although Nowruz was first celebrated in ancient Iran, this beautiful festival is also observed in neighboring countries like Afghanistan and Tajikistan. While many people might assume, based on the name of this ancient festival, that Nowruz means “new day”, this belief arises because Nowruz coincides with the first day of spring, representing renewal, freshness, and the vibrant beauty of nature and the world. This celebration takes place in various parts of the world, particularly within the civilizations of Iran and Central Asia, featuring different rituals but sharing a common message. It symbolizes new beginnings, the renewal of nature, friendship, peace, and solidarity among nations. These qualities elevate Nowruz beyond a mere national festival, transforming it into a significant element of cultural identity. In this context, Nowruz serves not merely as a national celebration; it acts as a tool for cultural diplomacy and international relations. Countries in the Nowruz region can leverage this shared heritage to strengthen their cultural and economic ties. Nowruz encompasses many rituals and traditions observed in nearly all parts of Iran, including:*



Preparing sprouts  
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Khaneh-tekani  
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### Spring cleaning

Spring cleaning (known in Persian as *khaneh-tekani*) is a tradition that is hard to forget, characterized by the effort it requires from household members and the satisfying results it offers. Just as Iranians celebrate the renewal, freshness, and greenery of spring and nature, they also engage in spring cleaning. They empty their cupboards of unnecessary items, wash carpets, paint walls in fresh colors, and clean windows of dust and dirt, allowing the bright spring sun to beautifully fill their homes.

In ancient times, Iranians believed that the spirits of the deceased would return to Earth in the last days of the year, particularly in the five days leading up to the new year, visiting their homes. In preparation for their arrival, family members would engage in various tasks to welcome these spirits, with spring cleaning being one of the most notable practices.

### Celebrating Chaharshanbe Suri

Chaharshanbe Suri is one of the Nowruz traditions that

has many admirers, especially among the younger generation. It is celebrated on the last Tuesday night of the year, where families gather around bonfires, exchange flowers and good wishes, jump over the fire, and wish for good health for themselves and others. On Chaharshanbe Suri, various treats such as sweets, chocolates, nuts, and *aash reshteh* (a type of noodle soup) are typically enjoyed. *Qashogh-zani* (spoon-tapping) is another custom celebrated on this festive night. In this tradition, a man, woman, child, or adult visits their neighbors' homes with their head and face covered.

### Preparing sprouts

As previously mentioned, the tradition of sprouting greens, known as *sabzeh*, for Nowruz has been practiced for thousands of years. People begin to sprout wheat, mung beans, lentils, and other seeds about 20 to 25 days before the New Year. As the symbol of rebirth and renewal is one of the most inspiring elements of the Haft Seen Table. The presence of *sabzeh* in the home holds great significance for those celebrating Nowruz around the world. Greenery symbolizes good character, joy, and vitality; it serves as a miniature representation



Visiting relatives and friends  
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in the most honored spot and then arrange the accompanying items around it.

**Sabzeh:** Represents purity and freshness.  
**Senjed (dried oleaster):** Symbolizes rebirth and new beginnings.  
**Samanu (sweet wheat pudding):** Represents health and growth.  
**Sekkeh (coin):** Symbolizes wealth and prosperity.  
**Sib (apple):** Represents love and knowledge.  
**Somaq (sumac):** Symbolizes joy and happiness.  
**Sir (garlic):** Represents health and protection.  
This beautiful spread also includes other items, such as dyed eggs, which are often colored and designed by children, symbolizing rebirth. A bowl of clear water signifies the purity and honesty of family members. The mirror, which brings light into the home accompanied by candles that multiply the light and reflect upon the Haft Seen items.

### Wearing new clothes

On the first day of spring and during the Nowruz celebration, nature itself is renewed. Wearing new clothes is an ancient tradition in the Nowruz celebrations of Iran, deeply rooted in this concept of renewal. The revival of the Earth and the greening of trees symbolize a fresh start for Iranians. Inspired by this natural rebirth, they associate the arrival of spring with donning new clothes, which they regard as a significant part of the celebration. During this time, both the rich and the poor prepare to wear new outfits. Historically, providing clothing for those less fortunate, especially children,

has been of great importance.

### Visiting

Visiting relatives and friends, known as *'did and bazdid'*, is a significant custom of Nowruz. This tradition commences with visits to the elders of the family or community, as well as other respected social figures. These gatherings are held among relatives, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and both near and distant acquaintances. Typically, these visits take place from the first to the thirteenth of Farvardin and may continue until the end of Farvardin. It is heartwarming when these visits extend beyond Nowruz and persist throughout the year, fostering deeper connections and friendships.

### Giving gifts

One of the beloved customs during Nowruz is giving gifts, which brings joy to everyone involved. Gifting money, known as *'eidi'*, is a tradition that has been part of Iranian culture for a long time. Elders traditionally give gifts to the younger members of the family, who visit the elders to show respect and receive their blessings. While the act of receiving a gift from elders has always held significance, this tradition has evolved over time, with cash gifts now replacing older customs. Among Iranians, *eidi* is not limited to family and relatives; it also extends to the caretaker, local waste collector, mail carrier, and other hardworking members of society. This practice is considered auspicious and is believed to bring good fortune, reflecting the spirit of generosity that characterizes the Nowruz celebrations.



Haft Seen table  
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Without introducing themselves or making any noise, they receive their gift and return. While moving through the neighborhood, they continuously tap a spoon against a metal bowl or pot to create noise. This sound signals to the homeowners that the spoon-knocker has arrived at their house to collect gifts. The gifts can include chocolates, snacks, and toys for children, or cash and nuts for adults.

### Establishing peace and reconciliation

The Iranian tradition of spring cleaning is not limited to their homes; these kind-hearted individuals also practice cleansing their hearts of any hatred, malice, or doubt. Instead, they cultivate seeds of hope, peace, love, and friendship within themselves. For this reason, friends, acquaintances, and especially those who have had disagreements strive to reach out to each other to promote peace and reconciliation.

of a tree. We should learn from the tree that, whether in times of abundance or extreme hardship, we should not hold back from sharing our kindness, love, and resources. Traditionally, the *sabzeh* is kept until the thirteenth day of Nowruz, known as *sizdah bedar*, during which it is cast away along with negativity and grudges. Additionally, some believe that tying the *sabzeh* during *sizdah bedar* can open pathways to fortune for young singles.

### Arranging Haft Seen table

Haft Seen table is an arrangement of seven symbolic items, all of which start with the letter 'S,' positioned next to the Holy Qur'an, mirror and candles. The Holy Qur'an is one of the main elements of the Haft Seen table for Iranian Muslims. When setting up the table, Iranians place the Holy Qur'an first and foremost on it. This act signifies reliance and supplication to God at the beginning of the year as they position the Holy Qur'an