



How to...

DID YOU KNOW?
The word "solstice" comes from the Latin words *sol* ("Sun") and *stitium* ("to stand still").



Mark the summer solstice

This astronomical event is a great opportunity to welcome the new season.

The day with the most hours of sunlight in the northern hemisphere (the half of our planet that lies above the equator) is called the summer solstice, and it marks the official start of summer. This year, it occurs on Thursday, June 20. Many people around the world celebrate the solstice because it ushers in a season of longer days with more natural light to enjoy and to help plants grow. Here's how to get started with your own celebration.

Understand the science

The Earth is constantly rotating as it orbits around the Sun in space. The summer solstice is the time of year when the Earth is tilted most toward the Sun. On this day, the northern hemisphere gets the most hours of daylight all year. (The winter solstice, in December, has the fewest hours of daylight.)

Know the history

It's believed that people started celebrating the summer solstice as far back as the Stone Age. In ancient times, celebrations included bonfires and ritual dances that were thought to grant extra power to the Sun, which would make for a better growing season and ward off evil spirits. Today, though, most celebrations focus on the joy of the summer season.



Enjoy longer days.

Borrow a tradition

In Sweden, the summer solstice is celebrated with a national holiday called Midsummer. People gather at parks or country homes, wear crowns made of flowers, and dance around a tall pole called a maypole. The flower crowns, and the holiday itself, symbolize the start of a new season. You could borrow from this tradition and head outside for a picnic with your family to celebrate. Bring along traditional Midsummer

foods like salmon, potatoes, and strawberries, as well as supplies to make floral crowns for everyone. Many towns and cities in the US—such as Fairbanks, Alaska; Austin, Texas; and New York City—also host Midsummer or solstice festivals.

Soak up the sunshine

A big part of celebrating the summer solstice is spending more time outside to take advantage of the extra hours of daylight. You and your family could enjoy one of your favorite outdoor activities, whether that's hiking, heading to the beach, bike riding, or gardening. You could also consider some outdoor crafts to celebrate the day, such as decorating your front sidewalk or driveway with chalk suns, rainbows, and flowers.

World celebrations



Here is how three other countries mark the longest day of the year.

Mexico

On the solstice, visitors head to the pyramids of Chichén Itzá (above) on Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula. The Sun casts shadows on the main pyramid, making it appear evenly divided in darkness and light.

Russia

The Ivan Kupala festival takes place shortly after the solstice to mark the end of winter. Plants are burned to ensure a good summer harvest.

United Kingdom

A ring of giant rocks constructed in about 2500 BCE perfectly frames the rising Sun during the summer solstice at Stonehenge, where thousands gather to watch.