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On September 6, 1620, the Mayflower set sail from Plymouth, England. The 102 passengers set off to seek religious freedom and fortune in the New World. The voyage took most of September and all of October, 66 days in all.

Storms threw them off their course and instead of reaching the Virginia Colony, which was their original destination, they landed in Provincetown Harbor in November, 1620. While on board the Mayflower in Provincetown Harbor, the Pilgrims drew up the Mayflower Compact and all the men aboard the ship signed it on November 11,1620. This document created the way for the Pilgrims to govern themselves. After exploring the area, the Pilgrims decided to settle in Plymouth.

Massasoit was the chief of a local Indian tribe called the Wampanoags. The Wampanoags lived on Cape Cod, Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard, and inland. In early [spring](http://homeschooling.about.com/od/holidays/ss/springprint.htm) of 1621, the Pilgrims met with Massasoit and agreed to live peaceably with the Wampanoags and to help each other. "Massasoit" in the Wampanoag language means "great leader" and "Wampanoag" means "People of the Dawn".

The first winter was filled with hardship. In the spring, however, with help from the Indians, the Pilgrims planted corn (maize), peas, and barley. They also hunted fowl and deer, searched for wild berries and fruits, and fished. In late fall after the corn harvest, the Pilgrims gave thanks by celebrating the first Thanksgiving feast with the Indians. When they ate, the Pilgrims did not use forks. They used a knife, spoon, a large napkin, and fingers. They also shared plates and drinking vessels. The Pilgrims did not eat cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie at the first Thanksgiving. They ate roasted wild fowl such as duck, goose, and turkey, cornmeal, cod, sea bass, and venison brought by the Indians.

The first harvest was very important to the Pilgrims. It gave them enough food to store for the long, cold winter so that they would not have to leave America. The first national Thanksgiving was proclaimed by the Continental Congress in 1777. Thanksgiving Day is a reminder to be thankful for the courage of our forefathers and foremothers, which enabled them to build this nation into what it is today.

1. What is the name of the ship on which the Pilgrims sailed to the New World?
2. When did the Pilgrims land in Provincetown Harbor?
3. What is the name of the document that created the way for the Pilgrims to govern themselves?
4. What is the name of the Indian tribe that befriended the Pilgrims?
5. What does that name mean?
6. Can you name any streets or places in your area which are named after Indians?
7. Who helped the Pilgrims plant corn (maize), peas, and barley?
8. What did the Pilgrims eat at the first Thanksgiving feast?
9. Do we still eat those foods today?
10. What do you eat at your Thanksgiving dinner?
11. Squirrels gather nuts and acorns to store for food for long winters. Why did the Pilgrims store food in the fall of 1621?
12. What do you think it would have been like to have been a Pilgrim?
13. The Mayflower, which is also the name of the state flower.
14. November, 1620.
15. The Mayflower Compact.
16. Wampanoag
17. "People of the Dawn".
18. Answers will vary.
19. Wampanoag Indians.
20. Roasted wild fowl such as duck, goose, and turkey, cornmeal, cod, sea bass, and venison.
21. Answers will vary.
22. Answers will vary.
23. For nourishment during the long, cold winter so that they would not have to leave America.
24. Answers will vary.

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| Cranberries | Stuffing |
| Pilgrims | Indians |
| Colonies | Feast |
| Corn | Harvest |
| Horn of Plenty | Mayflower |
| November | Plymouth |

In America today, Thanksgiving is generally seen as a time to get together with loved ones, eat a ridiculously large amount of food, watch some football, and of course give thanks for all the blessings in our lives. Many homes will be decorated with horns of plenty, dried corn, and other 'symbols' of Thanksgiving. Schoolchildren across America will 'reenact' Thanksgiving by dressing as either pilgrims or Wampanoag Indians and sharing a meal of some sort. All of this is wonderful for helping create a sense of family, national identity, and of course remembering to say thanks at least once a year. However, as with many other holidays and events in American History, many of these commonly believed traditions about the origins and celebration of this holiday are based more on myth than fact. Let's look at the truth behind our celebration of Thanksgiving.

### Origins of Thanksgiving

The first interesting thing to point out is that the feast shared with the Wampanoag Indians and the first mention of Thanksgiving are really not the same event. During the first winter in 1621, 46 of the 102 pilgrims died. Thankfully, the following year resulted in a plentiful harvest. The pilgrims decided to celebrate with a feast that would include 90 natives who helped the pilgrims survive during that first winter. One of the most celebrated of those natives was a Wampanoag who the settlers called Squanto. He taught the pilgrims where to fish and hunt and where to plant New World crops like corn and squash. He also helped negotiate a treaty between the pilgrims and chief Massasoit.

This first feast included many fowl, though it is not certain that it included turkey, along with venison, corn, and pumpkin. This was all prepared by the four women settlers and two teenage girls. This idea of holding a harvest feast was not something new to the pilgrims. Many cultures throughout history had held feasts and banquets honoring their individual deities or simply being thankful for the bounty. Many in England celebrated the British Harvest Home tradition.

### The First Thanksgiving

The first actual mention of the word thanksgiving in early colonial history was not associated with the first feast described above. The first time this term was associated with a a feast or celebration was in 1623. That year the pilgrims were living through a terrible drought that continued from May through July. The pilgrims decided to spend an entire day in July fasting and praying for rain. The next day, a light rain occurred. Further, additional settlers and supplies arrived from the Netherlands. At that point, Governor Bradford proclaimed a day of Thanksgiving to offer prayers and thanks to God. However, this was by no means a yearly occurrence.

The next recorded day of Thanksgiving occurred in 1631 when a ship full of supplies that was feared to be lost at sea actually pulled into Boston Harbor. Governor Bradford again ordered a day of Thanksgiving and prayer.

### Was the Pilgrim Thanksgiving the First?

While most Americans think of the Pilgrims as celebrating the first Thanksgiving in America, there are some claims that others in the New World should be recognized as first. For example, in Texas there is a marker that says, "[Feast of the First Thanksgiving – 1541](http://www.memory.loc.gov/learn/features/thanksgiving/timeline/1541.html)." Further, other states and territories had their own traditions about their first thanksgiving. The truth is that many times when a group was delivered from drought or hardship, a day of prayer and thanksgiving might be proclaimed.

### Beginning of the Yearly Tradition

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Unlike some holidays such as New Year's Eve and Fourth of July when people traditionally go out somewhere to celebrate,[Thanksgiving](http://christianity.about.com/od/thanksgiving/p/creativethanksg.htm) is most commonly celebrated at home, with family and friends. This is one of the things I like best about Thanksgiving--I get to share wonderful traditions with those closest to me.

These Thanksgiving traditions and trivia include well-known traditions and little-known trivia about the Thanksgiving Day holiday. They are presented to enhance your appreciation and enjoyment of Thanksgiving. Consider sharing these ideas, stories, and trivia with your friends and family during the Thanksgiving holiday.

### Thanksgiving Day

In the United States, Thanksgiving Day is celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November. But did you know that seven other nations also celebrate an official Thanksgiving Day? Those nations are Argentina, Brazil, [Canada](http://gocanada.about.com/od/canadatravelplanner/a/thanksgiving.htm), Japan, Korea, Liberia, and Switzerland.

### History of Thanksgiving in America

According to most historians, the [pilgrims](http://christianity.about.com/od/thanksgiving/a/Pilgrims-Religion.htm) never observed an annual Thanksgiving feast in autumn. In the year 1621, they did celebrate a feast near Plymouth, Massachusetts, following their first harvest. But this feast most people refer to as the first Thanksgiving was never repeated.

Oddly enough, most devoutly religious pilgrims observed a day of thanksgiving with prayer and [fasting](http://christianity.about.com/od/whatdoesthebiblesay/a/spiritualfasting.htm), not feasting. Yet even though this harvest feast was never called Thanksgiving by the pilgrims of 1621, it has become the model for the traditional Thanksgiving celebrations in the United States. Firsthand accounts of this feast, by Edward Winslow and William Bradford, can be found on [Pilgrim Hall Museum](http://www.pilgrimhall.org/1stthnks.htm).
• [Learn About the Pilgrim's Religion](http://christianity.about.com/od/thanksgiving/a/Pilgrims-Religion.htm)

### Timeline of Thanksgiving in America

• 1541 - Spanish explorer, Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, led a thanksgiving [Communion](http://christianity.about.com/od/faqhelpdesk/f/whatiscommunion.htm)celebration at the Palo Duro Canyon, West Texas.
• 1565 - Pedro Menendez de Aviles and 800 settlers gathered for a meal with the Timucuan Indians in the Spanish colony of St. Augustine, Florida.
• 1621 - Pilgrims and Native Americans celebrated a harvest feast in Plymouth, Massachusetts.
• 1630 - Settlers observed the first Thanksgiving of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in New England on July 8, 1630.
• 1777 - George Washington and his army on the way to Valley Forge, stopped in blistering weather in open fields to observe the first Thanksgiving of the new United States of America.
• 1789 - President Washington declared November 26, 1789, as a national day of "thanksgiving and prayer."
• 1800s - The annual presidential thanksgiving proclamations ceased for 45 years in the early 1800s.
• 1863 - President Abraham Lincoln resumed the tradition of Thanksgiving proclamations in 1863. Since this date, Thanksgiving has been observed annually in the United States.
• 1941 - President Roosevelt established the fourth Thursday in November as Thanksgiving Day.

### Giving Thanks

Naturally, one of the most common traditions of Thanksgiving Day celebrations is the giving of thanks. Here are a few Thanksgiving Day prayers, poems, and Bible verses to help you give thanks on Thanksgiving Day:
• [Thanksgiving Day Prayers](http://christianity.about.com/od/thanksgivingverses/a/thanksgivingpra.htm)
• [Bible Verses for Thanksgiving](http://christianity.about.com/od/thanksgivingverses/a/thanksgivingver.htm)
• [Share Your Favorite Thanksgiving Verse](http://christianity.about.com/u/ua/readerstoriesadvice/thanksgivingverses.htm)
• [Poem - Pause and Give Thanks](http://christianity.about.com/od/membersubmittedprayers/qt/pausegivethanks.htm)
• [Prayer - I Thank Thee](http://christianity.about.com/od/thanksgivingverses/qt/ithanktheepoem.htm)
• [A Thanksgiving Prayer](http://christianity.about.com/od/thanksgivingverses/qt/A-Thanksgiving-Prayer.htm)
• [Thanksgiving Table Blessing](http://christianity.about.com/od/thanksgivingverses/qt/Thanksgiving-Blessing.htm)

### Thanksgiving Quotations

*"I do not think of all the misery, but of the glory that remains. Go outside into the fields, nature and the sun, go out and seek happiness in yourself and in God. Think of the beauty that again and again discharges itself within and without you and be happy."*
- Anne Frank

*"Let us remember that, as much has been given us, much will be expected from us, and that true homage comes from the heart as well as from the lips, and shows itself in deeds."*
- Theodore Roosevelt

*"Your friend is your field which you sow with love and reap with thanksgiving."*
- Kahlil Gibran

*"Thanksgiving Day comes, by statute, once a year; to the honest man it comes as frequently as the heart of gratitude will allow."*
- Edward Sandford Martin

### Thanksgiving Shopping

Another well celebrated tradition in the United States is the start of the Christmas shopping season the day after Thanksgiving, known as the busiest shopping day of the year.

### Thanksgiving Parades

In Midtown Manhattan, New York City, the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade is held annually every Thanksgiving Day. Thanksgiving parades are also held in cities like [Houston](http://gotexas.about.com/od/entertai5/a/HouTdayParade.htm), Philadelphia and Detroit.
• [Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade Official Site](http://social.macys.com/parade2011/#/home)
• [America's Thanksgiving Parade Official Site](http://www.theparade.org/)

### Thanksgiving Football

[Football](http://football.about.com/cs/news/a/thanksgiving.htm) is an important part of many Thanksgiving Day celebrations in the United States.
• The [Detroit Lions](http://www.detroitlions.com/document_display.cfm?document_id=3259) of the American National Football League have hosted a game every Thanksgiving Day since 1934 (except 1939-1944, during World War II).
• The Dallas Cowboys have hosted a game every Thanksgiving Day since 1966 (except 1975 and 1977).
• Many regional and rival college and high school football games are played on Thanksgiving weekend.