

Cultural Celebrations: May



What's on in May?

May celebrates cultural diversity, heritage, and the connections between food, community, and the land. Asian Heritage Month is a time to learn about and celebrate the histories and traditions, and cultures of Asian communities across Canada, whose cuisines and foodways reflect diverse identities and cultures.

May also includes World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue & Development and World Day for Biological Diversity, reminding us that cultural and biological diversity are deeply interconnected, and that colonial agricultural practices have contributed to the loss of both Indigenous food systems and biodiversity. In the WSÁNEĆ calendar, May is PEN'AWEN – the Moon of the Camas Harvest, a time connected to traditional harvesting practices and relationships with the land. Celebrations such as Cinco de Mayo and Vesak / Buddha Day further highlight the importance of culture, tradition, spirituality, and shared meals in strengthening community and understanding.

Heritage Month:

- **Asian Heritage Month** (Canada)

International Days:

- **May 1** – International Workers' Day
- **May 15** – International Day of Families
- **May 20** – World Bee Day
- **May 21** – World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development
- **May 22** – International Day for Biological Diversity

Cultural & Religious Celebrations

- **May 5** – Cinco de Mayo
- **May 12** – Vesak / Buddha Day

Asian Heritage Month May

May is a time to celebrate Asian Heritage Month, honoring the rich cultural legacies and contributions of Asian communities across Canada. From the cuisines of East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, food tells stories of migration, resilience, and identity. Asian Canadian chefs, farmers, and cultural leaders have helped shape Canada's culinary landscape, from community kitchens to fusion restaurants and family tables.

Asian Heritage Month invites us to explore and appreciate this diversity through storytelling, shared meals, and cultural learning. It's also a time to reflect on the challenges faced by Asian communities, including racism and exclusion, and to amplify voices, histories, and contributions that have often been overlooked.

Community in Canada and the diaspora:

Asian communities in Canada are incredibly diverse, including people with roots in countries such as China, India, the Philippines, Pakistan, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, and many more. Across the diaspora, communities have built strong cultural networks, community centers, faith institutions, businesses, and grassroots organizations that support cultural preservation, intergenerational connection, and mutual aid. From Chinatown's community kitchens to South Asian youth advocacy groups, these spaces are vital for connection and cultural resilience.

Resource:

- [Asian Heritage Month](#)
- [26 Delicious Recipes to Make to Celebrate Asian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month](#)



Pad Thai - Thailand



Saag Paneer - India



Adobo - Philippines



Pho - Vietnam



Dumplings - China

Cultural Celebrations: **May** International Days

World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue & Development May 21st



World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development highlights the richness that cultural diversity brings to our societies, including our food systems. Food is a powerful vehicle for sharing and celebrating cultural heritage, with every dish telling a story of tradition, identity, and history. In diverse communities, food fosters dialogue, builds connections, and strengthens resilience.

Supporting cultural food systems means valuing local, traditional practices and promoting the exchange of knowledge across cultures, especially in the context of sustainable and equitable food systems. By celebrating cultural diversity in food, we also ensure more inclusive, sustainable, and thriving food systems that benefit everyone.

Resource: [@IYE Creative: Culturally Relevant Crops Project](#)
[@The Intersection of food, culture & cuisine](#)



World Day for Biological Diversity May 22nd



The International Day for Biological Diversity is a vital reminder of the deep connection between biodiversity and our food systems.

Industrial-scale agriculture, dominated by monocropping and chemical inputs, depletes biodiversity by replacing diverse ecosystems with single-species crops, degrading soil health, polluting water, and threatening pollinators and native species. In contrast, local and regenerative farming practices work with nature—preserving seed diversity, protecting habitats, enriching soil, and supporting pollinators and beneficial insects. By supporting small-scale, ecological agriculture, we help protect biodiversity, strengthen food security, and build more sustainable and resilient food systems for future generations.

Colonial agricultural practices & biodiversity loss

In the context of Canada, it's important to recognize that Indigenous Peoples have long practiced sustainable food systems that foster biodiversity and care for the land. Through methods like intercropping, seasonal harvesting, controlled burns, and careful stewardship of plants and animals, Indigenous communities maintained healthy, diverse ecosystems for generations.

Colonization disrupted these systems—introducing extractive agricultural practices, displacing communities, and severing relationships with traditional food sources. *Supporting biodiversity today also means respecting Indigenous food sovereignty, learning from traditional ecological knowledge, and working toward the restoration of land-based practices rooted in balance and reciprocity.*

Resource: [@Biodiversity loss in Canada - Food Policy for Canada](#)
[@Cultivating diversity: How Indigenous Food Systems can inspire food systems transformation](#)

May in the WSÁNEĆ Calendar

PEN'AWEN – Moon of the Camas Harvest (May)

During this moon, the earth is warming, and it is known as the moon of camas harvest, the time to dig KLO,EL (camas) from the ground. The camas plant is a bulb with a blue flower above, and the bulb traditionally served as a main source of starch in the Saanich People's diet. During this moon, families would travel to special family locations to harvest the bulbs. This time is cherished as it symbolizes the time when people could travel across their territories again, after a cold and wet winter.



Saanich families had different traditional grounds which were used at different times of the year. During this moon, winter villages were left for Spring camps, where bulbs were harvested, as well as fresh gull eggs which could be found in these fields. Important to note that there are different types of camas: the blue, which was harvested and eaten, and the white, which are poisonous. During this moon, XIWE (purple sea urchins) and SQITI (green sea urchins) were also harvested.

Source: [13 Moons of the WSÁNEĆ \(Garry Fletcher\)](#)

Cultural Celebrations: May

Cinco De Mayo *May 5th*

Cinco de Mayo commemorates the Mexican victory over French forces at the Battle of Puebla in 1862, and today it's widely celebrated as a tribute to Mexican culture, resilience, and heritage. Food is at the heart of many Cinco de Mayo gatherings, showcasing the richness and diversity of Mexican cuisine—from tamales and tacos to mole and fresh salsas.

Food is central to Cinco de Mayo celebrations, offering a delicious way to honour Mexican culture and culinary heritage. Traditional dishes like mole poblano, tacos al pastor, tamales, elotes (grilled corn), and fresh guacamole reflect regional flavours and centuries of Indigenous and mestizo food traditions. Sharing these foods brings people together and helps preserve the rich diversity of Mexican cuisine. Celebrating with intention means supporting local Mexican-owned restaurants and food makers, and taking time to appreciate the cultural significance behind every dish.

Resource: [🔗 What is Cinco de Mayo?](#)

Recipes: [🔗 Mole Poblano Recipe](#)
[🔗 Tamales Recipe](#)
[🔗 Tacos al Pastor Recipe](#)

Guacamole

Tamales

Mole Poblano

Vesak / Buddha Day *May 1st 2026*

Vesak, or Buddha Day, is the most sacred Buddhist holiday, marking the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha. Celebrated with temple visits, prayers, and acts of compassion, it's also a day of generosity and reflection. Many observe it with simple vegetarian meals, often shared freely with others as a gesture of kindness and community.

On Vesak, food plays a role in reflecting the Buddhist values of generosity and compassion. Many Buddhists prepare and share vegetarian meals to honor the principle of non-violence, as it is a day focused on peace and mindfulness. In some traditions, temples offer free meals to the public, symbolizing the sharing of kindness. Simple dishes, such as rice, vegetables, and fruit, are often served, emphasizing the connection between nourishment and spiritual practice.

Vesak and Food

On Vesak, food practices focus on simplicity and generosity. Common dishes include vegetarian rice and curry, sweet rice porridge, and fruit offerings like bananas and coconuts. Rice cakes and sweet dumplings are also prepared as desserts. Meals are often shared with the community or offered to monks, reflecting the Buddhist values of kindness and non-violence.

Resource: [🔗 What is Vesak?](#)

Vegetarian Curries

Coconut

