



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

Nowruz

Inclusive Employer Guide

NB: The difference between Persia and Iran

In 1935, the state of Persia officially changed its name to Iran. Iran is the contemporary country, while Persia refers to a broader culture, many ethnic groups and an ancient history. The language spoken by Iranians is called Farsi, or Persian.

What is Nowruz, or Persian New Year?

Every year, millions celebrate Persian New Year, or Nowruz (also Norooz), the holiday of spring and renewal that dates back around 3000 years. The exact beginning of the New Year occurs when the season changes from winter to spring on the vernal equinox, which usually happens on March 20 or 21 each year. In 2021, it falls on March 20.

Nowruz's origin is partly rooted in Zoroastrianism, an ancient Persian religion that predates Christianity and Islam, but Nowruz is now largely seen as a secular holiday. In Iran, the New Year begins with the advent of spring, and those who celebrate the holiday elsewhere around the world welcome a season of new life and renewal for the year ahead. The ceremonies surrounding Nowruz centre on community, family, and deep respect for tradition.

In March 2009, the federal government of Canada passed a bill to designate the first day of spring each year as "Nowruz Day." The United Nations formally recognized Nowruz as an international holiday in 2010.

How is it celebrated?

Preparations for Nowruz begin about three weeks prior with spring-cleaning, a process called *Khoneh Takooni*, which translates as "shaking of the house" and it is also customary for families to purchase new clothing.

In the same weeks leading up to the actual day, families also set aside space for a "haft-seen (seven S) table" or a collection of seven items that symbolize a different hope for the New Year. The seven hopes are rebirth, love, health, beauty, patience, prosperity, and sunrise.

The day of Nowruz kicks off a 13-day celebration of dinners, family visits, and reflections on the year ahead. On the 13th day, it is customary to take the *sabzeh* (sprouted wheat grass, symbolizing rebirth and renewal of nature) that has been growing on the haft-seen table to a body of water and let it float away to release the old and welcome the New Year.

There are many common dishes eaten on Nowruz, including *sabzi polo mahi*, white fish served with green herbed rice, representing the greenness of nature in spring. Special sweets are also served.

Common greetings include "*Nowruz Mubarak*" (Happy Nowruz, Happy New Year), "*Eid-eh Shoma Mubarak*" (Happy New Year to you), "*Nowruz Pirooz*" (Wishing you a Prosperous New Year), and "*Sad Saal be in Saal-ha*" (Wishing you 100 more Happy New Years).

HOW CAN WE CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT?

1

Get Educated. Ensure staff who supervise those who celebrate Nowruz are aware of it and how they can be supportive.

2

Intentional planning. Avoid booking meetings and scheduling events during Nowruz, if possible.

3

Be flexible. Accommodate requests for time off for cultural observances. If shift work is the norm, staff may want to swap shifts to observe Nowruz. Look for solutions that suit all parties.

4

Don't make assumptions. For personal reasons, not all who celebrate Nowruz will do so in the same way. Some may take time off, others may not.