



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

NOWRUZ IN THE WORKPLACE

Inclusive Employer Guide

Note: 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 official language of Iran is called Farsi (or Persian).

EQUITY · DIVERSITY · INCLUSION

WHAT IS NOWRUZ OR PERSIAN NEW YEAR?

Every year, millions celebrate the Persian New Year, also known as Nowruz or Norooz. The holiday marks the change in seasons from winter to spring on the vernal equinox. In 2024, Nowruz will take place on March 21.

The origin of Nowruz 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 NOWRUZ CELEBRATED?

Preparations for Nowruz begin about three weeks prior with spring-cleaning, a process called “**Khoneh Takooni**” which translates as “shaking of the house.”

In the 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. 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.

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 and accommodations.** Update your scheduling tools to reflect religious observance dates and to support the planning activities. Avoid booking meetings and scheduling events on Nowruz if possible.

The University of Toronto recognizes its obligation to prevent discriminatory impacts on members of its community that arise from the failure to accommodate based on religion or creed. It is the responsibility of both the Manager and the individual seeking accommodation to work cooperatively and respectfully to explore and implement appropriate accommodation options. Accommodate requests for time off for religious observances. If shift work is the norm, staff may want to switch shifts to observe Nowruz. Look for solutions that suit all parties.

3 **Be thoughtful.** To wish someone a “Happy Nowruz” you can say “Nowruz Mubarak” [NO-rooz MOO-bar-UHK] or “Eid-eh Shoma Mubarak” [EED-ay SHOO-mah MOO-bar-UHK].

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.