

Swinging Through Time



What is jazz music without the Lindy Hop? Born in Harlem, New York, in the 1920s and '30s, the Lindy Hop combined jazz, tap dancing, and the Charleston to become one of the most beloved forms of swing dancing in the world. On May 26, World Lindy Hop Day, aficionados from all around the

world will spread the message that the Lindy Hop is not only alive and well but is also one of the world's most joyous and enduring dance styles.

On June 17, 1928, a famed dancer named "Shorty" George Snowden was performing in a dance marathon at the Manhattan Casino ballroom in Harlem. The event was captured on film, and afterward someone asked Shorty to describe his dancing style, which involved breaking away from his partner, flinging her out, and improvising a few steps on his own. Shorty called it the "The Lindy."

Whether Shorty intended it or not, his "Lindy" was forever associated with Charles Lindbergh's flight across the Atlantic Ocean. Lindy, as Lindbergh was called, completed his "hop" in 1927, and the name stuck.

The dance, however, continued to evolve along with jazz music. During the big band era in New York, bandleaders like Count Basie, Chick Webb (at his world-famous Savoy Ballroom), and Benny Goodman led orchestras that encouraged dancers to Lindy Hop. And dancers didn't just dance—the best competed both formally and informally for bragging rights.

The Lindy Hop made the jump from Harlem's fabulous ballrooms to the mainstream thanks largely to Hollywood. Actor Dean Collins danced the Lindy Hop across the silver screen. Then, when World War II broke out, American servicemen took the Lindy Hop across the globe. In 1943, *Life* magazine called the Lindy Hop America's national folk dance.

May Birthdays

Those born between May 1–20 are Bulls of Taurus. Bulls show a steady persistence in both professional and personal endeavors. After working hard, they like to reward themselves for a job well done. If you were born between May 21–31, you are a Twin of Gemini. Geminis make communicative and lively companions. Intellectual and imaginative, they are the ones to sit near at a party.

- James Brown (musician) – May 3, 1933
- Gary Cooper (actor) – May 7, 1901
- Don Rickles (comedian) – May 8, 1926
- Joe Louis (boxer) – May 13, 1914
- Tori Spelling (actress) – May 16, 1973
- Cher (singer) – May 20, 1946
- Mary Cassatt (artist) – May 22, 1844
- Ian Fleming (writer) – May 28, 1908
- Mel Blanc (voice actor) – May 30, 1908
- Brooke Shields (model) – May 31, 1965

The Irresistible Iris



What is it about the iris that is so alluring? Van Gogh often painted beautiful flowers. The fleur-de-lis, a stylized iris, is a symbol associated with France, New Orleans, Florence, and even the Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, and

Girl Scouts. Perhaps it should come as no surprise that this popular flower enjoys its own holiday on May 8.

The word *iris* comes from a Greek word meaning "rainbow," which is fitting since irises come in shades of purple, yellow, white, pink, and blue. In Japan, iris flowers are believed to ward off evil spirits, and the leaves are put in bathwater to prevent illness.

With Mother's Day fast approaching on May 12, perhaps May 8 is the perfect occasion to run to the flower shop and buy a beautiful bouquet of irises.

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Playful May

As the vibrant blooms of May usher in warmer days, it's the perfect time to embrace the great outdoors, starting right in your backyard. Here's a roundup of backyard games and activities that will turn your outdoor space into a hub of entertainment and relaxation.

First up, consider organizing a lawn bowling extravaganza. Gather your friends and family for some friendly competition. The satisfying clatter of pins and the strategic precision employed make it enjoyable for all ages. Set up a makeshift alley, and let the good times roll!

Next, why not create your own picnic paradise? May is the ideal month for a delightful backyard picnic. Spread out a cozy blanket, pack a basket with your favorite treats, and bask in the sunshine. Invite friends over for an afternoon of al fresco dining, complete with refreshing beverages and delicious snacks.

For those who enjoy a challenge, organize a giant Jenga jamboree. The towering wooden blocks add an exciting twist to the classic game, requiring steady hands and careful thinking. Challenge your friends to a game, and watch the tension rise with each precarious pull.

If you're in the mood for some physical activity, plan a badminton bonanza. The game is a fantastic way to get active. Whether you're a seasoned pro or a novice, the backyard is the perfect setting for a spirited match.

Finally, as the sun sets, make the yard into a cozy haven for a campfire and stargazing. Set up a fire pit, roast marshmallows, and share stories under the stars. If you have a telescope, see what constellations you can identify... or just marvel at the beauty of the night sky.

May in the backyard is all about play, laughter, and making memories. Dust off those outdoor games, invite your favorite people, and let the backyard festivities begin!

Wriggle and Roll



On May 11, give your feet a rest and let your belly do the dancing. It's World Belly Dance Day. The term *belly dance* is believed to have been first coined by the French, who called it *danse du ventre*, or "dance of the stomach." Then, in 1893, a dancer known as Little Egypt belly danced at the

Chicago World's Fair. The performance fascinated Americans. Hoping to capitalize on this newfound craze, Hollywood began making movies in which dancers wore elaborate Middle Eastern-inspired costumes. In this way, the popularity of belly dancing was born.

Belly dancing has two Arabic names. *Raqs sharqi* refers to the dance most familiar to Westerners, where a woman improvises a solo dance with relaxed, torso-driven movements. *Raqs baladi* is a more folkloric style of dance performed by both men and women at traditional celebrations such as wedding parties.

The most important body part in belly dancing is actually the hips. Hips can drop, twist, or lift. Other movements include slow and rhythmic figure eights involving the hips and belly, rolling the stomach like a wave from the ribs to the belly, or quickly shaking the hips or shoulders. Each of these movements is designed to accompany a specific beat, melody, or instrument in the music.

Egypt may be considered the home of belly dancing today, but Turkey, Cyprus, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Israel all have dancing traditions that involve using the hips and belly. Belly dancing has spread far and wide from the Middle East and is now a popular form of exercise, artistic expression, and meditative practice. There may be a belly dancing school in your neck of the woods, so stop by this May 11 for a lesson or a show.

From Folklore to Fridge

Why does placing a pillow on top of your fridge bring you good luck? While the answer to the question may be lost in time, many people still perform this ritual on May 29, Put a Pillow on Your Fridge Day.

Long ago, people put cloth in their larders, or cool pantries, for good luck and prosperity. With the advent of the refrigerator in 1927, this tradition evolved into putting a pillow on top of your fridge. Loosely speaking, one could put any type of cloth on top of the fridge: blankets, sheets, or towels. Perhaps you should try them all and see which cloth brings the most wealth and happiness. Just don't confuse this holiday with putting a pillow inside the fridge, which some people enjoy doing on very hot days so that they can sleep better at night.

Green Gold

A great use of your time on May 29 is to learn about the many benefits of composting. It is, after all, Learn About Composting Day.



One of the best ways to maintain a healthy garden is to feed it fresh compost. Most soils are sandy, rocky, or compacted—less than perfect in some way. Adding compost improves a soil's fertility, thanks to a dose of energy-giving nutrients and microorganisms. Plus, you can forego harsh and costly chemical fertilizers.

The trick to a healthy compost pile is a good carbon-to-nitrogen ratio. Different types of matter provide carbon (branches, dead leaves, peels, wood, straw) and nitrogen (food scraps, green grass clippings, green leaves, stems). Rainwater, worms, and other microorganisms in the ground do the rest. Simply turn the compost with a pitchfork once a week, and watch as the perfect soil additive develops before your eyes.

Mediterranean Magic



What is it about living in the Mediterranean that allows people to live longer? Is it the sunshine? The red wine? Science suggests that it's the Mediterranean diet. This simple diet isn't a fad; it just consists of foods typical of the Mediterranean region. And yes, the occasional glass of red wine is included! May is International Mediterranean Diet Month, so add a few of this region's foods to your shopping list.

All healthy diets require a variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, but what makes the Mediterranean diet special? Bread is a staple in many Mediterranean countries, but the grains typically are whole grains, containing no damaging trans fats. Moreover, these whole grain breads are eaten plain or simply dipped in olive oil, not spread with butter or margarine. Also, salt isn't the first choice when it comes to increasing flavor. Instead, cooks sprinkle on herbs and spices.

Nuts are another frequent addition to meals. Some people avoid nuts because they are high in fat, but nuts actually contain healthy fats. Mediterranean diets steer clear of honey-roasted or salted nuts.

Speaking of fat, olive oil is almost always the primary source of fat, used in lieu of vegetable or canola oil and butter. Olive oil helps reduce cholesterol and is full of beneficial antioxidants. Eating fish at least twice a week (and red meat only a few times a month) also increases the intake of omega-3 fatty acids, which help moderate blood pressure, improve the health of blood vessels, and decrease the likelihood of heart attacks.

What about red wine? Dark red wine is rich in antioxidants, but many doctors hesitate to recommend alcohol as part of a healthy diet. Whatever the secret of the Mediterranean diet, studies show that it staves off heart disease and cancer and can even reduce incidences of Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. Cheers to that!

Sound Choices

Hearing loss is the number one disability in the world, affecting 1.5 billion people, both young and old. Hearing decreases as we age, and more people living longer means more people experience hearing loss. However, the main culprit of hearing loss is too much noise. This May 31, Save Your Hearing Day, follow these tips to give your ears a rest.

In many cases, our ears' worst enemies are everyday appliances that make our lives easier: hair dryers, lawn mowers, and portable music players. Work-related noise is also a culprit. So how do we fight hearing loss? Search out peace and quiet for one. And don't be afraid to protect your ears with earplugs or other types of ear protection. Other methods to save hearing may surprise you. Some doctors stress a diet rich in nutrients that slow the aging process. Exercise is just as important. It stimulates circulation, which is greatly beneficial to a healthy auditory system. Now that's advice worth listening to!

Winds of Change



When you picture a windmill, you might imagine a quaint wooden structure overlooking a field of tulips or a peaceful farm scene. Windmills aren't just a nostalgic piece of the past, however. Although most no longer mill flour or help saw wood, today's sleek, powerful windmills and wind turbines harness wind power to create energy.

More and more, windmills towering over 200 feet tall, with blades longer than 100 feet, can be spotted on seashores and hilltops. These spinning giants provide an important source of clean energy in many countries worldwide. Embracing Windmill Day, May 11, honors the ingenuity of our ancestors and underscores the importance of renewable energy sources in our present and our future.