

Did you know . . .

National Almond Day

Friday, February 16 is National Almond Day.

Nearly every ancient civilization used almonds. By 4,000 B.C. people were cultivating almond trees, which blossomed well in the lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea.

Hebrew literature from 2,000 B.C. mentions almonds. Early references from Turkey, Romania and the Baltic peninsula also cite references to the nut. The Bible makes numerous references to almonds as an object of value and symbol of hope.

In Genesis 43:11, for example, a famine in Canaan prompts Jacob to ask his sons to go to Egypt to buy grain. He told them, "Take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry down to the man a present, a little balm and a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds."

"It's said Moses crafted pure gold lamps in the shape of almonds, Persian rug makers wove their image into rugs and Van Gogh devoted many paintings to their likeness. Since at least biblical times, it's believed the almond has been revered in art, music and literature as emblems of beauty, hope and rebirth.

The shape of the almond seed is prominent in religious art of the Renaissance and earlier. The distinctive oval of the kernel forms a halo around religious figures in paintings, stained glass windows, frescoes, friezes, and in many other art forms to signify spiritual energy or to serve as a protective shield. Widely used by Italian artists, the halo was referred to as a mandorla, the Italian word for almond.

Throughout history, almonds have maintained religious, ethnic and social significance. The Bible's Book of Numbers tells the story of Aaron's rod that blossomed and bore almonds, giving the almond the symbolism of divine approval.

The Romans showered newlyweds with almonds as a fertility charm. Today, North Americans give guests at weddings a bag of sugared almonds, representing children, happiness, romance, good health and fortune. In Sweden, cinnamon-flavored rice pudding with an almond hidden inside is a Christmas custom. Find it, and good fortune is yours for a year." (From "History of Almonds", *National Almond Day.com*)

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