

ST. PATRICK'S DAY FACTS

- Commemorates St. Patrick (AD 387-461) and the arrival of Christianity in Ireland:
 - ❖ He was born in Roman Britain to a wealthy Romano-British family
 - ❖ His father was supposed a Christian deacon, who took that role most likely for the tax incentives
 - ❖ At 16, kidnapped by Irish raiders and held for six years at an unknown location on the West Coast of Ireland
 - ❖ Told by God in a dream to flee his captors, head to the coast and board a ship to return to Britain
 - ❖ Joined the Catholic Church in Auxerre in Gaul and studied to be a priest in a course of study that lasted more than 15 years
 - ❖ In 432, God told him to return to Ireland; this time as a bishop to Christianise the Irish from their native polytheism
 - ❖ He was not the first to introduce Christianity to the Irish as many erroneously believe
 - ❖ He chose to include local traditional traditions into his lessons on Christianity
 - ❖ He superimposed a sun, a powerful Irish symbol, onto the Christian cross to create what is now called a Celtic cross, so that veneration of the symbol would seem more natural to the Irish
 - ❖ The original Irish culture centered around a rich tradition of oral legend and myth. Thus, it is no surprise that St. Patrick's life has become exaggerated over the centuries
 - ❖ Irish folklore tells that one of his teaching methods included using the shamrock to explain the Christian doctrine of the Trinity to the Irish people
 - ❖ Died on 17 March 461 and buried at Downpatrick
- The Irish began celebrating St. Patrick's Day by the Irish in Europe in the ninth and tenth centuries.
- He eventually became more widely known as the patron of Ireland
- Designated an official holy day of obligation by the Catholic Church in the early 17th century
- Gradually became a secular celebration of Irish culture
- In 1903, St. Patrick's Day became an official public holiday via an act of the United Kingdom Parliament



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- Later a law was passed that required pubs and bars to be closed on 17 March after drinking got out of hand; provision was repealed in the 1970s
- First St. Patrick's Day Parade in Ireland was held in the Irish Free State in Dublin in 1931
- Probably the most widely celebrated saints day in the world
- Wearing of green attire, especially shamrocks
- Catholic Church lifts Lenten restrictions on eating and drinking alcohol
- The original color associated with St. Patrick was blue. Over the years, the color green and its association with St. Patrick's Day grew
- Green ribbons and shamrocks were worn in celebration of St. Patrick's Day as early as the 17th century



➤ **The Shamrock:**

- ❖ Was called the "seamroy" by the Celts, which was a sacred plant in ancient Ireland because it symbolized the rebirth of spring
- ❖ By the 17th Century, the shamrock had become a symbol of emerging Irish nationalism
- ❖ As the English began to seize Irish land and make laws against the use of the Irish language and the practice of Catholicism, many Irish began to wear the shamrock as a symbol of their pride in their heritage and their displeasure with English rule

➤ **Snakes:**

- ❖ It has long been recounted that, during his mission in Ireland, St. Patrick once stood on a hilltop (which is now called Croagh Patrick), and with only a wooden staff by his side, banished all the snakes from Ireland
- ❖ In fact, the island nation was never home to any snakes
- ❖ The "banishing of snakes" was really a metaphor for the eradication of pagan ideology from Ireland and the triumph of Christianity. Within 200 years of St. Patrick's arrival, Ireland was completely Christianized



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➤ Irish Music:

- ❖ Often associated with St. Patrick's Day and culture in general.
- ❖ From the ancient days of the Celts, music has always been an important part of Irish life
- ❖ The Celts had an oral culture, where religion, legend and history were passed from one generation to the other by way of stories and songs
- ❖ After being conquered by the English, and forbidden to speak their own language, the Irish turned to music to help them to remember important events and hold onto their heritage and history
- ❖ As it often stirred emotion and helped galvanize people, music was outlawed by the English
- ❖ Queen Elizabeth I even decreed that all artists and pipers were to be arrested and hanged on the spot
- ❖ Instruments that have been used for centuries include:
 - Fiddle
 - Uilleann pipes (a sort of bagpipe)
 - Tin whistle (a sort of flute that is actually made of nickel-silver, brass or aluminum)
 - Boghran (an ancient type of framedrum that was traditionally used in warfare rather than music)

➤ Corned Beef & Cabbage

- ❖ Though cabbage has long been an Irish food, corned beef only began to be associated with St. Patrick's Day at the turn of the century
- ❖ Irish immigrants living on New York City's Lower East Side substituted corned beef for their traditional dish of Irish bacon to save money. They learned about the cheaper alternative from their Jewish neighbors



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➤ The Leprechaun

- ❖ Original Irish name for these figures of folklore is "lobaircin," meaning "small-bodied fellow"
- ❖ Belief in leprechauns probably stems from Celtic belief in fairies, tiny men and women who could use their magical powers to serve good or evil
- ❖ In Celtic folktales, leprechauns were cranky souls, responsible for mending the shoes of fairies
- ❖ Though only minor figures in Celtic folklore, leprechauns were known for their trickery, which they often used to protect their much-fabled treasure
- ❖ Leprechauns had nothing to do with St. Patrick or the celebration of St. Patrick's Day
- ❖ In 1959, Walt Disney released a film called "Darby O'Gill and the Little People," which introduced America to a very different sort of leprechaun than the cantankerous little man of Irish folklore
- ❖ This cheerful, friendly leprechaun is a purely American invention, but has quickly evolved into an easily recognizable symbol of both St. Patrick's Day and Ireland in general.

