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Everything You Should Know About the Longest Day of the Year

In 2022, the June solstice occurs on Tuesday, June 21, marking the astronomical first day of summer. The solstice is celebrated by many cultures around the world. Learn solstice facts, fun, and folklore!

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Is the Summer Solstice the First Day of Summer?

A: Yes and no... Technically, it depends on whether we're speaking about the meteorological or astronomical start of the season. Most meteorologists divide the year into four seasons based on the months and the temperature cycle, which allows them to compare and organize climate data more easily. In this system, summer begins on June 1 and ends on August 31. Therefore, the summer solstice is not considered to be the first day of summer, meteorologically speaking.

Astronomically, however, the first day of summer is said to be when the Sun reaches its highest point in the sky, which occurs on the summer solstice (June 20–22). Therefore, the summer solstice is considered to be the first day of summer, astronomically speaking.

As an almanac, which is defined as a “calendar of the heavens,” we prefer to follow the astronomical interpretation of the seasons and do consider the first day of summer to coincide with the summer solstice. That being said, you may choose to follow whichever system you like best!

There is also a common debate regarding how the exact timing of the solstice affects the first day of the season. For example, if the solstice occurs at 11:30 P.M. on a Saturday, should we consider that Saturday to be the first day of summer, or should we instead consider the following day (Sunday) to be the first day? it tends to differ by whichever source you follow.

Q: Is the Summer Solstice the Longest Day of the Year?

A: Yes! As spring ends and summer begins, the daily periods of sunlight lengthen to their longest on the solstice, then begin to shorten again.

On the solstice, the Sun is at its highest point in the sky and it takes longer for it to rise and to set. (Note: When the Sun appears highest in the sky near the summer solstice, the full Moon opposite the Sun generally appears lowest in the sky!)

On the [winter solstice](#), just the opposite occurs: The Sun is at its lowest in the sky. At this time, its rays hit part of Earth at an oblique angle, creating the feeble winter sunlight.

Use our handy [sunrise and sunset calculator](#) to figure out how many hours of sunlight you'll get in your location on the solstice!

Q: Why Doesn't the Summer Solstice Fall on the Same Date Each Year?

A: The summer solstice in the Northern Hemisphere ranges in date from June 20 to 22. This occurs in part because of the difference between the Gregorian calendar system, which normally has 365 days, and the tropical year (how long it takes Earth to orbit the Sun once), which has about 365.242199 days. To compensate for the missing fraction of days, the Gregorian calendar adds a leap day about every 4 years, which makes the date for summer jump backward. However, the date also changes because of other influences, such as the gravitational pull from the Moon and planets, as well as the slight wobble in Earth's rotation.

Q: Why isn't the Summer Solstice—the longest day of the year—also the hottest day of the year?

A: Earth's atmosphere, land, and oceans absorb part of the incoming energy from the Sun and store it, releasing it back as heat at various rates. Water is slower to heat (or cool) than air or land. At the summer solstice, the Northern Hemisphere receives the most energy (highest intensity) from the Sun due to the angle of sunlight and day length. However, the land and oceans are still relatively cool, due to spring's temperatures, so the maximum heating effect on air temperature is not felt just yet. Eventually, the land and, especially, oceans will release stored heat from the summer solstice back into the atmosphere. This usually results in the year's hottest temperatures appearing in late July, August, or later, depending on latitude and other factors. This effect is called seasonal temperature lag.

Q: What is Midsummer Day (June 24)?

A: Historically, this day marks the midpoint of the *growing season*, halfway between planting and harvest. It is traditionally known as one of four "quarter days" in some cultures. Folks celebrated by feasting, dancing, singing, and preparing for the hot summer days ahead. [Read more about the ancient Quarter Days!](#)

Solstice Fun Facts

The solstice does NOT bring the earliest sunrise

Although the day of the solstice has the most daylight hours of the year, the **earliest sunrises** of the year occur before the summer solstice. The exact timing will depend in part on your latitude: In the mid-latitudes of the Northern Hemisphere, it occurs about a week earlier than the June solstice.

The reason for the timing of sunrises is related to the inclination of the Earth's rotational axis and Earth's elliptical (rather than circular) orbit.

The **latest sunsets** of the year will occur several days after the solstice, again depending on latitude.

The Sun sets more slowly at the solstice

Did you know that the Sun actually sets more slowly around the time of a solstice, in that it takes longer to set below the horizon? This is related to the angle of the setting Sun. The farther the Sun sets from due west along the horizon, the shallower the angle of the setting Sun. (Conversely, it's faster at or near the equinoxes.) Bottom-line, enjoy those long romantic summertime sunsets at or near the solstice!

Summer Solstice Folklore

- *Deep snow in winter, tall grain in summer. –Estonian proverb*
- *When the summer birds take their flight, goes the summer with them.*
- *If it rains on Midsummer's Eve, the filbert crops will be spoiled. –Unknown*
- *One swallow never made a summer.*
- *Easterly winds from May 19 to the 21 indicate a dry summer.*
- *If there are many falling stars during a clear summer evening, expect thunder. If there are none, expect fine weather.*