

April Fools' Day

April Fools' Day – or 'All Fools' Day' falls annually on the 1st of April and is a time for playing practical jokes on others for fun.

When Did It Start?

No one really knows for sure when it began, but most think that it started in the late 1500s when the calendar we use today (The Gregorian calendar) was introduced. Some people didn't get the message and were still celebrating New Year on the 1st of April, which is when it used to be. Therefore, some people thought they were foolish.

There are also clues in a famous book called 'The Canterbury Tales' that it could have started in the late 1300s. Others think that it could go back even further as the ancient Romans held spring festivals called 'Hilaria' around that time too; full of merriment at the spring equinox.



Famous April Fools' Day Tricks

- In 1998, a burger company advertised new 'left-handed' burgers. Thousands of people visited the shops trying to buy them, some even wanted right-handed ones!
- In 1957, even the BBC got involved with a short, spoof documentary about spaghetti trees in Italy. Many people believed it and wanted to know how to grow them at home. The reply was: "Place a sprig of spaghetti in a tin of tomato sauce and hope for the best."

What Happens on April Fools' Day?

April Fools' Day is a fun time when harmless, but amusing tricks are played on others. Even the television and newspapers get involved so be careful what you read and hear on that day! In Scotland, the victim of a trick is called an 'April Gowk'. A Gowk is the name for a cuckoo, or foolish person in Scotland.

In France, the day is called 'Poisson d'Avril' (say: pwass-on dav-rill) meaning 'April Fish' because on this day people (usually children) stick paper fish to the backs of others (usually adults), so they can walk around looking silly without even knowing.

Watch the Time...

In many areas, if you try to play a trick after midday, then you become the fool. If you are fooled after noon, you can say:

"April Fools' has passed and gone, you are the fool and I am none."

Questions

1. What is an alternative name for 'April Fools' Day'?

2. What is the name of the calendar system we use in the UK?

3. Why were people celebrating New Year on the 1st April?

4. Name one other possible origin of April Fools' Day earlier than the 1500s?

5. What does the Scottish word 'Gowk' mean?

6. The author uses the phrase: "**sprig** of spaghetti"
Which word most closely matches the word **sprig**?

Tick **one**:

offshoot

bush

plant

flower

7. Who usually has fish stuck to their backs on April Fools' Day in France and who will have put them there?

8. Can you really buy left-handed burgers? Give a reason for your answer.

9. What might someone say to you if you tried to play a trick on them in the afternoon of the 1st of April?

10. Give two reasons why you think the BBC spoof documentary on spaghetti trees was such a successful prank?

Answers

1. What is an alternative name for 'April Fools' Day'?
An alternative name for April Fools' Day is 'All Fools' Day'.
2. What is the name of the calendar system we use in the UK?
The name of the calendar system we use in the UK is the Gregorian calendar.
3. Why were people celebrating New Year on the 1st April?
People were celebrating New Year on 1st April because before the calendar change, this is where New Year used to be.
4. Name one other possible origins of April Fools' Day are earlier than the 1500s?
One possible origin of April Fools' Day is:
(either from)
 - **the book 'The Canterbury Tales'**
 - **the Roman festivals of 'Hilaria'.**
5. What does the Scottish word 'Gowk' mean?
A 'Gowk' is a cuckoo or a foolish person.
6. The author uses the phrase: "sprig of spaghetti"
Which word most closely matches the word **sprig**?
 offshoot
7. Who usually has fish stuck to their backs on April Fools' Day in France and who will have put them there?
Adults will have fish stuck to their backs on April Fools' Day in France. They will have been stuck there by children.
8. Can you really buy left-handed burgers? Give a reason for your answer.
No, you cannot buy left-handed burgers because it is in the text as an April Fool prank and that means that it is a trick and therefore not real.
9. What might someone say to you if you tried to play a trick on them in the afternoon of the 1st of April?
In the afternoon on the 1st of April, if you play a trick on someone they might say, "April Fools' has passed and gone, you are the fool and I am none."

10. Give two reasons why you think the BBC spoof documentary on spaghetti trees was such a successful prank?

An open-ended question and a good opportunity to watch the video on the Internet and discuss why it was so successful.

Reasons can include:

- **Made by the trusted BBC**
- **People weren't as used to pranks at that time.**
- **Looked and sounded like a serious documentary**
- **Spaghetti was still quite new to people in the UK in the 1950s so people knew less about how it was made.**
- **Showed footage of people actually picking spaghetti and it hanging on trees.**
- **In the 1950s fewer people in the UK will have visited Italy.**