

Going Wild

The old nursery rhyme reminds us, “April showers bring May flowers.” What it doesn’t mention is that those flowers will bloom only if you plant them! Wildflowers delight our senses with their colorful blooms and delicate fragrances, but they also play valuable roles in nature. The first full week in May is Wildflower Week, a good reminder to plant wildflowers for all to enjoy.



The term *wildflower* is not scientific but refers to flowers that have evolved to thrive in their native habitats. They require less water and fertilizer than non-native species and are naturally resistant to local pests and diseases. Most importantly, wildflowers make critical contributions to their local ecosystems. They improve soil health, prevent erosion, and improve water quality. The flowers themselves also provide habitat to native insects and wildlife that act as pollinators. Pollinators facilitate the reproduction of 87.5% of the world’s flowering plants, including 35% of the crops that we eat. Non-native species, on the other hand, often disrupt communities of pollinators. Some non-native flower species even outcompete local wildflowers, decreasing their habitat and adversely affecting the insect and animal species that rely on native flowers for survival.

World Bee Day on May 20 honors one of the world’s most prolific pollinators. Birds, bats, butterflies, moths, flies, beetles, wasps, and rabbits all make vital contributions to an ecosystem as pollinators. But no animal on Earth is as vital a pollinator as the bee. A 2018 study on pollinating habits conducted by the Royal Society of London concluded that not only do honeybees do the most pollinating, but they are also the most effective and efficient pollinators. Since 2006, colony collapse disorder has decimated honeybee populations around the world. One of the best ways to support honeybees is to plant native wildflowers. These flowers reliably produce the nectar and pollen that honeybees depend on and support the honeybee colonies that we rely on to pollinate so many of our favorite crops.

May Birthdays

In astrology, those born May 1–20 are Bulls of Taurus. Like bulls in a pasture, Taureans enjoy relaxing in serene environments. They also work hard and expect a reward for their efforts. Those born from May 21–31 are Twins of Gemini. Perhaps because twins are born with a companion, Geminis love to communicate with others. They are flexible and clever extroverts who can make persuasive arguments.

- Dwayne Johnson (actor) – May 2, 1972
- Frankie Valli (singer) – May 3, 1934
- Audrey Hepburn (actress) – May 4, 1929
- Don Rickles (comedian) – May 8, 1926
- Stevie Wonder (musician) – May 13, 1950
- Janet Jackson (singer) – May 16, 1966
- Malcolm X (activist) – May 19, 1925
- Mr. T (actor) – May 21, 1952
- Bob Dylan (musician) – May 24, 1941
- Sally Ride (astronaut) – May 26, 1951
- Betty Shabazz (activist) – May 28, 1934
- Brooke Shields (model) – May 31, 1965

Celebrating May

Gardening for Wildlife Month

Personal History Month

Global Health and Fitness Month

World Laughter Day *May 1*

African World Heritage Day *May 5*

148th Kentucky Derby *May 7*

Mother’s Day (U.S.) *May 8*

World Belly Dance Day *May 14*

International Learn to Swim Day *May 21*

Buy a Musical Instrument Day *May 22*

Memorial Day (U.S.) *May 30*

Village Voice

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An Inventive Month

May is Inventors Month, a good time to consider where we would be without the ingenuity of inventors. Our everyday life is filled with innovative products. Thanks to internet connectivity, we can speak to smart assistants that both turn on our coffee makers and dial our loved ones for a video chat. In many ways, it seems as if the future is already here, but there are plenty more mindboggling innovations just over the horizon.

One of the hottest technological buzzwords of the moment is *metaverse*. What is the metaverse? It is an alternate online virtual world. Using elements of virtual reality and augmented reality, people will use digital avatars to “live” in an online environment where they can interact, communicate, work, and play. Imagine going on a virtual trip to a faraway country with some friends, or attending a virtual meeting in a digital boardroom with colleagues from all around the country. You can even visit digital clothing stores to buy expensive new clothes for your virtual self. These are just small examples of the burgeoning metaverse.

One arena of invention we often forget about is food. In a fast-growing world with limited food resources, finding new ways of feeding the population is necessary. It is becoming more common for food to be grown in a lab. Steaks have already been grown cell-by-cell. Scientists are also improving methods of replicating milk, ice cream, cheese, and eggs. With the dairy industry responsible for more carbon emissions than air travel and shipping combined, these innovations offer a green alternative.

Concrete is the second-most-consumed material on Earth after water. Scientists have invented a living concrete made of sand, gel, and bacteria. They envision an environmentally friendly concrete that can heal its own cracks, absorb dangerous toxins from the air, and glow on command. While your vision of the future might be filled with flying cars and vacations to outer space, a more accurate version might be one filled with lab-grown food, living buildings, and an expansive virtual world.

Lorraine Nixon 1st

Maxine Perry 1st

Carolyn Smith 5th

Juanita Poulson 7th

George Deal 13th

Larry Joiner 13th

Mollie Hope 15th

James Haarburger 22nd

Barbara Hogrefe 23rd

Frances Chawklett 24th

Helen Peoples 25th

Beulah Hardy 31st

Follow the Clues

It is no mystery why mystery novels consistently top bestseller lists and why the genre reliably rakes in hundreds of millions of dollars each year. Curiosity, after all, is one of the most powerful attributes of the human psyche. A good mystery grabs onto our curiosity and doesn't let it go until the wrongs have been righted. Lose yourself in a good mystery during the month of May, which is Mystery Month.



The wonderful thing about a mystery is that it can take place in any setting. Sherlock Holmes chases Moriarty through the streets of London during the Victorian Era. Nancy Drew embodies the Depression Era mindset that all able-bodied people, no matter the age or the gender, have a chance to pitch in and solve problems. There are plenty of science-fiction mysteries that take place in worlds both dominated by new technology or decimated by it. However, at the crux of every mystery are two reliable and familiar tropes: the detective and the mystery itself. In many ways, our love of mysteries stems from our familiarity with the genre. No matter the setting, the stakes are always the same—our protagonist must decode the puzzle before it's too late.

This doesn't mean that every sleuth is working from a place of altruism. In fact, some of the genre's most beloved detectives are seriously flawed, which makes them feel reassuringly human. Sherlock Holmes often lacks empathy and is addicted to opium. Bob Arctor of Phillip K. Dick's novel *A Scanner Darkly* suffers from such severe mental illness that he must both solve the mystery and figure out who he is. Even Agatha Christie's beloved Miss Marple is a nosy gossip despised by friends and neighbors.

Despite their character flaws, these detectives still seek justice and truth. This is what makes even a flawed detective so heroic. We accompany them on a journey from fear and criminality to justice and reassurance. That might be the thing humans desire most of all—the unambiguous reassurance that a wrong has been righted.

Princess Power

International Tiara Day falls on May 24, the same day as Queen Victoria's birthday. How many parents have watched their young kids don a frilly pink ballgown and tiara and play princess? Some might blame the corrupting influence of Disney. Others, though, consider the tiara a potent symbol of feminine power and majesty. Some experts argue that so-called "princess play" offers children a window into feminine power. After all, princesses are born to rule.

Ironically, the word *tiara* was first used by the Greeks to describe the high headdresses worn by ancient Persian kings, not queens. It wasn't until the late 18th century that tiaras, as worn by female royals, surged in popularity. Unlike a crown, which is circular, a tiara is only semi-circular, designed to cover half the head. That does not mean it is half as valuable. The Greville Emerald Kokoshnik tiara, valued at \$18 million, was made by French jeweler Boucheron in 1919 for Dame Margaret Greville, who bequeathed it to Queen Elizabeth in 1942.

Animal Attraction



The first week of May is Pet Week, a week for humans to shower their animal companions with love and attention. Such a celebration of the human-animal bond might sound strange to those who do not have or want a pet, but some scientists argue that keeping a pet is an intrinsic part of human nature. Plenty of headlines tout the health benefits of pet ownership, but scientists suggest that our real attraction to animals might be a deep genetic predisposition for social grooming. Social grooming, the physical combing of hair, was one of the first and most powerful forms of social bonding. Petting animals stimulates the release of powerful "love hormones" such as oxytocin. In fact, studies show that some animal lovers possess a genetic variation that produces more oxytocin, making them even more likely to feel bonded to others, including pets.

Meditate on This

Take a deep breath and relax. May is Meditation Month. Meditation might have gone mainstream thanks to popular practices like yoga and tai chi, but meditation is a practice that dates back many millennia.

While some archaeologists date meditation back to 5000 BC, and some anthropologists speculate that even our Neanderthal ancestors might have meditated, the earliest written records referencing meditation date to around 1500 BC in India. The Hindu tradition of Vedantism included the practice of *Dyana*, a pursuit of enlightenment that emphasized "the training of the mind." The word *meditation* comes from the Latin *meditatum*, meaning "to ponder." The notion that meditation is closely linked to the mind has persisted across various cultures for thousands of years.



Specifically, meditation is a technique used to calm and clear the mind. The Buddha, although he did not invent meditation, used it as a means to achieve enlightenment. Lao Tzu, the Chinese sage and author of the *Tao Te Ching*, wrote, "Be still. Stillness reveals the secrets of eternity." Meditation has long served as a valuable tool during humanity's relentless search for the meaning of life.

Today, modern science shows us that meditation benefits the body just as much as it benefits the mind. In 1967, Dr. Herbert Benson of Harvard's Medical School found that people who meditated used 17% less oxygen, lowered their heart rates, and increased brain waves that aided sleep. He called these effects "the relaxation response." Studies now confirm that meditation reduces anxiety, promotes emotional health, enhances self-awareness, improves sleep, controls pain, and can even make you more kind. Meditation isn't a miracle or magic. All it takes is deliberate practice. Dr. Benson might have put it best when he said, "All I've done is put a biological explanation on techniques that people have been utilizing for thousands of years."

Motherhood: Priceless



How will you show Mom that you care on this Mother's Day, May 8? In its early days, Mother's Day was celebrated by attending church and sending mom a handwritten letter. Today, Mother's Day is a \$28 billion industry. As well it should be! After all, if we were to pay Mom for the various tasks she performs, that salary would be over \$116,000 a year. The least we can do is shower her with gifts! Mothers aren't the only ones who look forward to the holiday. It is the busiest day of the year for restaurants, with 80 million people dining out. Jewelry stores make out big, too. Shoppers spend \$5 billion on new bling for Mom. When Mother's Day began in 1914, the floral industry declared that carnations were the best way to honor mothers: red carnations for moms still living, and white for those who had passed. Today, the tradition of gifting flowers lives on. Mother's Day is the number one day for floral sales, which total \$2.66 billion.

The Sky Is Falling!



In May of 2009, NASA identified an asteroid known as JF1. Much has been made of JF1, especially the news that it will hit Earth on May 6. Some people are claiming that the asteroid is the size of an Egyptian pyramid, and, on impact, it will destroy mankind. Luckily, these are crazy exaggerations. NASA's Center for Near-Earth Object Studies is tasked with monitoring any cosmic debris that could impact Earth. It estimates that JF1 has a 1-in-3,984 chance of hitting the planet (or a 99.974% chance it will miss). Moreover, the size of JF1 is just 13 to 20 meters in diameter, hardly a threat to human civilization. It could, however, burn up in the atmosphere and explode in a massive ball of fire, releasing the equivalent of 400 kilotons of TNT, a blast large enough for people on Earth to notice.