



Spring and Nowruz: Celebrating the Persian New Year

The Iranian calendar is one of the oldest and most accurate calendars in the world. “Nowruz” (meaning “New Day”) is the name of the Iranian New Year, and is one of the most important and most colorful Persian national festivals. It has been celebrated for over 3000 years in Iran (Persia), and was gradually extended to Central Asia, the Caucasus, Western Asia, the Black Sea Basin, and the Balkans. It symbolizes the continuity of ancient Persian culture, which has survived so many adversities and vicissitudes. It was proclaimed as an official UN observance because it promotes peace and solidarity.

Nowruz is the day of the “vernal equinox” in March, and marks the first day of the first month in the Iranian calendar. Over centuries, the exact time of the equinox has been modified several times by Iranian astronomers. The last modification was made around 900 years ago by an Iranian astronomer, Omar Khayam (also a poet and mathematician). Amazingly, he calculated the year to be 365.24219858156 days long, which is accurate to the 6th decimal place!

“Haft Seen” is a traditional custom followed during Nowruz. A table is set with seven different items, each one beginning with the Persian letter “S”. Each of these represents life: rebirth, health, happiness, prosperity, joy, patience, and beauty. “Sabzeh” (grass), usually a cereal grain or lentil, is one of these items, representing greenery, nature, and rebirth.

This year, for the first time, Nowruz was celebrated at the Ottawa Research and Development Centre of AAFC, and bouquets of oats featured prominently on the table!

-Mehri Hadi Nezhad, March 2017



Mehri Hadi Nezhad and Shea Miller, with pots of oats representing “Sabzeh”.