

Happy Thanksgiving from the CNC News family!

To my family, friends, and everyone who supports CNC News, thank you. Every time you watch a report, share a story, or call to tell me what you think, it reminds me why this work matters. I'm especially grateful to my family and friends for cheering me on, and to the CNC News team for the care you put into every story.

From my family to yours, I wish you good health, time around the table with the people you love, and a very happy Thanksgiving.

With gratitude,
Varinder Singh
Bureau Chief, Washington, D.C.
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Why Americans Celebrate Thanksgiving in November and Canadians Give Thanks in October

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Americans are gathering around dinner tables this Thursday to give thanks for the people who helped them through the year. Across the Canadian border, families marked Thanksgiving more than six weeks ago, on October 12. In Britain and parts of continental Europe, the closest tradition is an autumn harvest festival, sometimes marked by bringing food to church for a neighbor who needs it. And from Japan to Punjab, people have their own days of thanks, many far older than the American holiday.

How Thanksgiving became an American holiday

The best-known story associated with American Thanksgiving dates to 1621, when Wampanoag people and English colonists at Plymouth, in present-day Massachusetts, shared a three-day harvest gathering. Indigenous peoples had held ceremonies of thanks long before the colonists arrived. The November holiday on today’s calendar took shape more than two centuries later.

In 1863, with the United States divided by the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln called for a national day of thanksgiving. Writer and editor Sarah Josepha Hale had spent years urging the country to observe the holiday together. In 1941, Congress fixed the date Americans still use today, the fourth Thursday in November.

Today, a turkey dinner, a parade or a football game are familiar parts of the American holiday. Food drives and volunteer shifts are traditions, too. In Plymouth, the day also carries a different meaning. Since 1970, United American Indians of New England has organized a National Day of Mourning, where Indigenous people and their allies remember their ancestors and the losses their communities suffered through colonization.

Canada sets its own Thanksgiving table

Canada celebrates Thanksgiving on the second Monday in October, which fell on October 12 in 2026. The Canadian holiday has its own harvest traditions, with families gathering to share a meal and give thanks for the past year. For families with relatives on both sides of the border, the two calendars offer a chance to wish one another a happy Thanksgiving twice.

How Britain and Europe give thanks for the harvest

In the United Kingdom, November 26 is an ordinary working Thursday. A related British tradition is Harvest Festival, observed by churches and schools in autumn. In some English parishes, fruit, flowers and sheaves of wheat decorate the church while families bring tins and packets for local food banks. At a Church of England school in Rothwell, near Leeds, pupils have collected food at their harvest service for people in their own community.

Across continental Europe, customs vary. In Germany, many churches celebrate Erntedankfest, a harvest thanksgiving festival, on the first Sunday in October. Produce displayed at the altar calls attention to the work and growing season behind an everyday meal. It is a theme that would be familiar at many American tables this Thursday, even if the date and the dishes are different.

Thanksgiving around the world

The American holiday has travelled, and many other countries have their own days of gratitude with roots of their own.

The Netherlands: where the Pilgrims lived first

Before the Mayflower sailed, many of the Pilgrims lived and worked in Leiden, in the Netherlands, from 1609 to 1620, after leaving England to escape religious persecution. Leiden still remembers them on American Thanksgiving with a non-denominational service at the Pieterskerk, the Gothic church where Pilgrim leader John Robinson is buried.

Liberia: a holiday carried across the Atlantic

Liberia, the West African nation founded in the 19th century by freed slaves from the United States, kept many American customs. In the early 1880s, its government declared the first Thursday of November as National Thanksgiving Day, celebrated with church services, concerts and dancing.

Norfolk Island: thanks in the South Pacific

On Norfolk Island, an Australian territory in the Pacific, an American trader named Isaac Robinson introduced Thanksgiving in the 1890s, hoping to draw visiting American whalers to a church service. Islanders still decorate All Saints Church with fruit, vegetables and cornstalks and sing American hymns on the last Wednesday of November.

Grenada: a newer tradition

Grenada observes its own Thanksgiving Day every October 25, marking the anniversary of the 1983 U.S. and Caribbean military intervention that followed a coup on the island. Residents who hosted the troops that autumn invited them to dine, even serving turkey and cranberry, and the day of thanks became a national holiday.

Japan: from rice harvest to Labor Thanksgiving Day

Japan’s Kinro Kansha no Hi, or Labor Thanksgiving Day, falls on November 23. It grew out of Niiname-sai, an ancient imperial rite of thanks for the rice harvest, and became a national holiday in 1948 honoring work and workers. Schoolchildren often make thank-you cards for police officers, firefighters and other public workers, and the Emperor still performs the harvest ritual privately.

Korea: Chuseok and the harvest moon

In Korea, Chuseok, often called Korean Thanksgiving, is a three-day harvest festival held on the 15th day of the eighth lunar month, around the autumn equinox. Millions travel to their hometowns to honor their ancestors and share crescent-shaped rice cakes called songpyeon.

Punjab: Vaisakhi, the spring harvest

For Punjabi readers, the closest parallel comes in spring. Vaisakhi, celebrated on April 13 or 14, marks the ripening of the rabi wheat harvest and began as a harvest festival long before it gained its deepest meaning for Sikhs. On Vaisakhi in 1699, Guru Gobind Singh founded the Khalsa at Anandpur Sahib, which is why the day is also observed as Khalsa Sajna Diwas. Today it is celebrated in gurdwaras and fields from Punjab to the United States, Canada and Britain.

One idea, many calendars

Whether it falls in April or November, around a turkey, a bowl of rice or a plate of songpyeon, the idea is shared: pausing to give thanks for the harvest, for work, and for the people who make the year possible.