



JAPAN INFORMATION
AND CULTURE CENTER
在米国日本大使館広報文化センター

TEACHING TUESDAY

SETSUBUN

Setsubun (節分) was a term that used to be used to mark the change one season to the next, but now only one day officially holds the title of setsubun: the day before the beginning of spring. Typically, setsubun falls on either February 3rd or 4th, and is seen as sort of a new start to the New Year. Historically, this day marked a time when the spirit world was unusually close with the physical world, so many traditions and ceremonies were performed and are still celebrated today.

The most famous of these is mame-maki, the bean-throwing recipe. Families will gather and fill a masu (a wooden measuring cup) with roasted soybeans and throw the beans all about the room, shouting “Oni wa soto! Fuku wa uchi!” meaning “Out with the oni (goblin) and in with fortune!” Often, one person will dress themselves as an oni and run around the room while the others throw beans at them. Afterwards, everyone eats the same number of beans as their age. This ritual began as a ceremony to drive out evil and pray for good fortune and good health.

Shrines and temples around the country also hold large celebrations for setsubun. Priests and invited guests will throw beans (some wrapped in gold or silver foil), small envelopes with money, sweets, candies and other prizes. Some events involving celebrities or sumo wrestlers will even be nationally televised. Another traditional, originally started in Osaka, is to eat an uncut sushi roll called an ehō-maki while facing a certain direction. People also set out small decorations of sardine heads and holly leaves and drink ginger sake to ward off bad spirits.