

### April poem

There's rain that's rain  
And rain that's sleet  
And rain that turns to snow  
There's April showers  
Just in time  
To make the flowers grow.

-- Jean Roberts

**International Guitar Month** -- The guitar is descended from the Roman cithara, which the Romans introduced to Hispania around 40 AD; it was further influenced by the four-string oud, brought by the Moors after their conquest of Iberia in the 8th century. Guitars these days are grouped into two general categories, acoustic and electric, and they create a wide variety of music. Guitar stores celebrate International Guitar Week with lessons, re-stringing clinics, and special sales.

**Easter, April 4** -- Easter, the Christian celebration of the resurrection of Christ, has roots in an ancient tradition. "Eastra" was the ancient Saxons' pagan goddess of spring. Her name was adapted by early missionaries, as were many pagan customs, into the Christian holiday. But the precise timing of Easter was not set until A.D. 325, when Emperor Constantine decreed it be celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox. Thus, its date may fall in a 35-day range from March 22 to April 25.

**World Parkinson's Disease Day, April 11** -- The birthday of Dr. James Parkinson (1755-1824), who first described the disease in his paper, "An Essay on the Shaking Palsy." Parkinson's Disease is a disabling neurological disorder that can dramatically affect a patient's ability to walk, talk, write, and swallow. Approximately 6.3 million people have Parkinson's Disease worldwide.

**Astronomy Week, April 19-25** -- A grass-roots movement conceived to "Bring Astronomy to the People." Astronomy clubs, science museums, observatories, universities, planetariums, laboratories, libraries, and nature centres host special events and activities to acquaint their neighbours with local astronomical resources and facilities.

*"The first of April is the day we remember  
what we are the other 364 days of the year."*

- Mark Twain

### Happy April Fools' Day!

The April Fools' Day tradition has been around since at least the 15th century (with a possible reference to it appearing in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*), and the question of how it began has been asked almost as long: A letter to the British magazine *Apollo* in 1807 wondered, "Whence proceeds the custom of making April Fools?"

The usual explanation involves the calendar. The Julian calendar began the New Year on March 25, and festivals celebrating it were typically held on April 1. When the world began changing over to the Gregorian calendar, which places New Year's Day on January 1, pranksters sometimes tried to fool their friends and neighbours into thinking that April 1 was still the first day of the year.

In the 18th century, some believed that April Fools' Day dated back to the days of Noah and the flood. A newspaper article published in 1789 suggested that Noah sent the first birds off to look for land too soon, and that he launched them on the first day of the Hebrew month corresponding with April.

Coincidentally, in 1933 a newspaper in Cologne ran a story about the discovery of Noah's Ark by an expedition sponsored by the "Royal Yalevard University" in Massachusetts, led by "Professor Mud" and Professor Stoneass." The story appeared on April 1; on April 8, the paper admitted the joke, but other publications printed the story as if it was genuine.

### From hare to eternity: origins of the Easter Bunny

Next to Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny is probably the most beloved bringer of gifts to small children. This famous symbol of spring was originally associated with Eostre, a German goddess of fertility who was often depicted with a rabbit companion.

Both rabbits and eggs, not surprisingly, are considered symbolic of fertility.

The bunny as a symbol of Easter was first mentioned in German writings during the 16th century, and edible bunnies made of pastry and sugar were made in Germany during the 19th century. The Easter Bunny was introduced to American children by German settlers in the Pennsylvania Dutch region in the 1700s.

Children were encouraged to build colorful nests and hide them in their homes. If the children had been good, the Osterhase would leave brightly coloured eggs in the nests.

## When did people first ‘think outside the box’?

“Think outside the box” has become a cliché. People have used the term to describe creative, innovative thinking, and its value is clear: Sometimes we have to throw away all our preconceptions and look for new approaches instead of repeating the same old strategies.

But where did the phrase come from? Although its origin is uncertain, it seems to spring from a simple puzzle popularized by management consultants in the late 1960s. In the puzzle, nine dots are arranged in three rows of three. The challenge is to connect all the dots with four lines while not lifting one’s pen or pencil off the paper.

The problem seems insoluble at first glance, because most people instinctively stay within the confines of the “box” – the square created by the nine dots. Only by drawing a line beyond the area of the square can one solve the puzzle. You have to go outside the box.

## April showers bring these words of wisdom . . . from Noah!

- Don’t miss the boat. For safety’s sake, travel in pairs.
- Speed isn’t always an advantage. The snails were on board with the cheetahs.
- Build on the high ground.
- Remember that the ark was built by amateurs; the Titanic by professionals.
- Plan ahead. It was not raining when Noah built the boat.

## Interesting ways to say familiar things

Writers are told to avoid clichés like the plague if they want to hit one out of the park, but that doesn’t mean you should throw the baby out with the bath water. We all rely on figures of speech, in any language. Consider some of these common expressions from different cultures, as collected in the book *I’m Not Hanging Noodles From Your Ears (and Other Intriguing Idioms From Around the World)*, by Jag Bhalla (National Geographic):

- “Seize the moon by the teeth” (France): to attempt something impossible;
- Reheat cabbage” (Italy): rekindle an old romance
- “When the crayfish sings in the mountain” (Russia): Never
- “Stand like a watered poodle” (Germany): to be crestfallen
- “Dry firewood meeting a flame” (China): love at first sight
- “Gnaw your own navel” (Japan): sulk
- “Wiggle your bucket” (Mexico): dance
- “One hand can’t hold two watermelons” (Iran): do one thing at a time
- “Stop climbing on my head” (Arabic): Stop bothering me
- “Like a quick match” (Puerto Rico); a short-tempered person

“It is only the farmer who faithfully plants seeds in the Spring, who reaps a harvest in the Autumn.”

- B. C. Forbes

## They’re not real doctors, but they play them on TV

Many of us trust media portrayals of doctors more than our actual physicians. We certainly see them more often, and we don’t spend hours in their waiting rooms waiting for attention.

Try matching this list of famous TV doctors with quotations from their shows:

1. Perry Cox, *Scrubs*
2. Cliff Huxtable, *The Cosby Show*
3. Doug Ross, *ER*
4. Leonard McCoy, *Star Trek*
5. Douglas Howser, *Doogie Howser, M.D.*
6. Gregory House, *House, M.D.*
7. Benjamin Franklin Pierce (Hawkeye), *M\*A\*S\*H*

- a. “What would you prefer -- a doctor who holds your hand while you die or one who ignores you while you get better?”
- b. “I’m a doctor, not a bricklayer.”
- c. “I became a doctor for the same for reasons that everybody does -- chicks, money, power, and chicks.”
- d. “I’m a doctor and nothing gets in the way of that. Nothing.”
- e. “You’re afraid to try, because you’re afraid your brain is going to explode and it’s going to ooze out of your ears.”
- f. If we don’t go crazy once in a while, we’ll all go crazy.”
- g. “They say beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Maybe if we all spent a little less time beholding -- we’d all be a lot happier.”

Answers: 1. c; 2. e; 3. d; 4. b; 5. g; 6. a; 7. f