

5. National Peanut Month

March is National Peanut Month. This tradition had its beginning as National Peanut Week in 1941. In 1974 it was expanded to a month-long observance. March is also National Nutrition Month and a great time to highlight the nutritional value of peanuts. Each serving provides a good source of protein, vitamin E, niacin, folate, phosphorus, and magnesium. People are sometimes surprised to learn that peanuts are actually not nuts at all. They belong to the legume family, like beans, peas, and lentils. Dr. George Washington Carver researched and developed more than 300 uses for peanuts in the early 1900s and is considered "The Father of the Peanut Industry" because of his extensive research and promotion of peanut production. Two peanut farmers have been elected President of the United States: Thomas Jefferson and Jimmy Carter.

6. Eli Whitney and the Cotton Gin

Eli Whitney was born on December 8, 1765, in Westboro, Massachusetts. He was a gifted engineer, inventor, manufacturer, and businessman. On March 14, 1794, Whitney was granted a U.S. patent for his cotton gin. The cotton gin was a machine designed to remove the seeds from the cotton bole. Prior to that, seeds had to be hand-picked, which was a tedious and time-consuming process. Whitney's invention greatly sped up and increased the production of cotton grown in much of the South. This made the region prosperous. After the cotton gin, Whitney went into the firearms business, using his mechanical skills to design a system for manufacturing identical and interchangeable parts for rifles. He operated a successful firearms factory near New Haven, Connecticut until he retired around 1820.

7. St. Patrick's Day

St. Patrick was a Christian missionary born in the 5th century and is credited with bringing Christianity to Ireland. He is known as the Patron Saint of Ireland. St. Patrick's Day, celebrated on March 17th each year, commemorates the anniversary of his death. This religious holiday has been observed by the Irish for over a thousand years. It is marked by special church services, parades, festivals, and the like. The shamrock was chosen as Ireland's national emblem, and Ireland is called the "Emerald Isle" because its plentiful rain and mist create magnificent green landscapes year-round. For this reason, displaying shamrocks and wearing green have become popular St. Patrick's Day traditions, as well.

8. Swallows Return to Capistrano

Each year on March 19th, large numbers of cliff swallows (species: *Petrochelidon Pyrrhonota*) return to the San Juan Capistrano Mission in California. They stay until it is time to migrate back to their winter haven in Argentina on October 23rd. Scouts arrive a few days before the rest of the flock, but the majority of the small, energetic birds usually reach their destination on the 19th. They quickly begin rebuilding their mud nests, which cling under the eaves and on the ruins of the old stone church and other buildings throughout the Capistrano Valley. The padres at the mission first noticed the birds' migration pattern centuries ago. The mission has remained an ideal summer home for the swallows because the area offers a great abundance of insects for them to eat. Today, the village of San Juan Capistrano throws a fiesta to celebrate the annual event. Visitors come from all over the world to watch the return of the swallows.