

Why do we leave milk & cookies for Santa



Leaving cookies and milk out for Santa Claus—and perhaps a few carrots for his reindeer—on Christmas Eve is a popular practice among American children. But how did the tradition begin?

There isn't a definitive event to trace this tradition back to. It could be due to Saint Nicholas, who is said to have dressed in red robes and ride his horse on December 6th to distribute candy to good children and coal to bad ones. Sound familiar? Children have left out overnight food for the saint in exchange for gifts for centuries, but when European immigrants moved to the American colonies, Saint Nicholas was slowly replaced with Santa Claus in American culture. But this isn't the only origin story for milk and cookies.

The basis of the food for gifts tradition and even Santa Claus may go back to Norse mythology. The god Odin was thought to ride his eight-legged horse, Sleipnir, with his ravens Huginn and Muninn in midwinter to deliver gifts to humans. To entice Odin to stop at their homes and leave gifts, children supposedly left hay for Sleipnir. However, people may be confusing children's part in Odin's journey with that of St. Nicholas's ride above, as the two were eventually combined in Christmas folklore. Regardless, the custom has evolved over the centuries for Dutch children. Instead of leaving treats for Odin's eight-legged horse, they now set out carrots for Father Christmas' normally legged horse in return for gifts, much like the American version.

Why Do Children Leave Cookies and Milk for Santa?

But leaving cookies and milk for the jolly old elf didn't become a widespread American Christmas tradition until the Great Depression. With millions facing sudden hardships, parents wanted their children to learn the importance of giving to others. To do this, families began leaving snacks for a weary Santa Claus and his 8 reindeer. Focusing on the act of giving at

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Christmas, it also taught young children to be thankful for the gifts they received that year. Decades later, children still set out cookies and milk for Santa, though perhaps today it's more of a bribe to receive more gifts!

And many other countries have their own special treats to leave for Santa and whatever animal pulls his sleigh. Children in the United Kingdom leave the holiday-favorite mince pie, Swedish kids leave a special Christmas-time rice porridge, and in Germany, the gift is instead a letter to Santa. One thing remains consistent, though. Around the world, children know to be kind to Santa during his yearly journey around the world.

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