

January 22, 2010

KUNG HEI FAT CHOY

(HAPPINESS AND PROSPERITY IN THE NEW YEAR)

The lunar calendar is represented by 12 animals. Each year is named after one animal. The 12 animals are: Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Rooster, Dog and Pig. A complete cycle takes 60 years when each of the animal signs is paired with the five main elements: Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal and Water. The year 2009 is the Year of Ox.

Chinese New Year - otherwise known as Lunar New Year or Spring Festival – is the most important festival in the Chinese calendar. Celebrations begin on New Year's Eve, which is on February 13, 2010 and last for 15 days. However, preparations for the Festival usually begin a month ahead of time.

It is a time of renewal, sweeping out the old and bringing in the new. Houses are thoroughly cleaned and decorated with fruit-bearing kumquat trees and flowering peach branches. New clothes are bought. Everyone gets a haircut. Outstanding debts are settled. Families visit temples to pay respect to their ancestors.

Traditionally, families dine together on Lunar New Year's eve. Each dish in this evening's sumptuous banquet symbolizes wishes for the New Year. Chinese dumplings and eggs imply wealth, since they have the shape of ancient Chinese gold or silver ingots. Abalone represents abundance, oysters are good for business, mushrooms mean growing opportunity, chicken is the phoenix, fish means surplus and pork signals prosperity.

(Source: Hong Kong Tourism Board)

Chinese New Year Traditional Food

Symbolic Food and Recipes to Celebrate Chinese New Year

Given the importance of food in Chinese culture, it is not surprising that food plays a major role in Chinese New Year celebrations. "Lucky" foods are served through the two week Chinese New Year celebration, also called the Spring festival.

What gives a certain food symbolic significance? Sometimes it is based on appearance. For example, serving a whole chicken during the Chinese New Year season symbolizes family togetherness. Noodles represent a long life; an old superstition says that it's bad luck to cut them. Both clams and Spring Rolls

symbolize wealth; clams because of their resemblance to bouillon, and Spring Rolls because their shape is similar to gold bars.

On the other hand, a food may have special significance during Chinese New Year because of the way the Chinese word for it sounds.

For example, the Cantonese word for lettuce sounds like rising fortune, so it is very common to serve a lettuce wrap filled with other lucky food. Tangerines and oranges are passed out freely during Chinese New Year as the words for tangerine and orange sound like luck and wealth, respectively. And let's not forget pomeloes. This large ancestor of the grapefruit signifies abundance, as the Chinese word for pomelo sounds like the word for "to have."

Fish also play a large role in festive celebrations. The word for fish, "Yu," sounds like the words both for wish and abundance. As a result, on New Year's Eve it is customary to serve a fish at the end of the evening meal, symbolizing a wish for abundance in the coming year. For added symbolism, the fish is served whole, with head and tail attached, symbolizing a good beginning and ending for the coming year.

And what about the sweet, steamed cakes that are so popular during the Chinese New Year season? Cakes such as Sticky Rice Cake have symbolic significance on many levels. Their sweetness symbolizes a rich, sweet life, while the layers symbolize rising abundance for the coming year. Finally, the round shape signifies family reunion.

Other Examples

- Bamboo shoots - wealth
- Black moss seaweed - wealth
- Dried Bean Curd - happiness
- Chicken - happiness and marriage & family reunion (if served whole)
- Eggs - fertility
- Egg Rolls - wealth
- Fish served whole - prosperity
- Chinese garlic chives - everlasting, a long life
- Lychee nuts - close family ties
- Noodles - A long life
- Peanuts - a long life
- Seeds - lotus seeds, watermelon seeds, etc. - having a large number of children
- Tangerines - luck

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- 30 -

Regards,

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