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Thanksgiving Traditions

By Judi Moreo

Celebrated on the last Thursday in November, our national holiday stems from the feast held in the autumn of 1621 by the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag Indians to celebrate the colony's first successful harvest. English colonists celebrated days of thanksgiving as a normal part of their religion. During medieval times, the tradition of thanking God for the year's harvest at autumn was a well developed practice in Europe. In some countries a part of this practice included lighting up bonfires, dancing and eating to prepare for the winter to come. The first thanksgiving was actually three days of feasting and giving thanks for the harvest.

In the United States, the Cornucopia has become a traditional symbol of Thanksgiving. Cornucopia is a Latin term derived from "cornu," meaning horn and "copia," meaning plenty. Also known as the Horn of Plenty or Harvest Cone, the cornucopia is a symbol of food and plenty dating back to the 5th century BC.

In Greek mythology, Amalthea raised Zeus on the milk of a goat. In return Zeus gave Amalthea the goat's horn. It was said to have the power to give the person possessing it whatever he or she wished for, thus giving rise to the legend of the cornucopia. Original depictions were of the goat's horn filled with fruits and flowers. Deities, especially Fortuna, were often depicted with the horn of plenty.

The Cornucopia has become an everlasting symbol of abundance. Usually a hollow, horn-shaped wicker basket it is typically filled with various kinds of colorful dried whole fruits, vegetables, nuts and flowers and can be found gracing many Thanksgiving tables.

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Judi Moreo - Winning Solutions judi@choicesonlinemedia.com
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