

FESTIVAL INFO

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SETSUBUN

Setsubun (節分) is the day before the beginning of [spring](#) in the [old calendar](#) in [Japan](#).^{[1][2]} The name literally means 'seasonal division', referring to the day just before the first day of spring in the traditional calendar, known as *Setsubun*; though previously referring to a wider range of possible dates, *Setsubun* is now typically held on February 3 (in 2021 it was on 2nd February),^[3] with the day after – the first day of spring in the old calendar – known as [Risshun](#) (立春).

HISTORY

The new year was felt to be a time when the spirit world became close to the physical world, thus the need to perform *mamemaki* to drive away any wandering spirits that might happen too close to one's home. Other customs during this time included [religious dances](#), [festivals](#), and bringing tools inside the house that might normally be left outside, to

Both *Setsubun* and *Risshun* are celebrated yearly as part of the Spring Festival (*Haru matsuri* (春祭)) in Japan.^[4] In its association with the [Lunar New Year](#), *Setsubun*, though not the official New Year, was thought of as similar in its ritual and cultural associations of 'cleansing' the previous year as the beginning of the new season of spring. *Setsubun* was accompanied by a number of [rituals](#) and traditions held at various levels to drive away the previous year's bad fortunes and [evil spirits](#) for the year to come.

prevent the spirits from harming them. Rice cakes were also balanced on lintels and windowsills, and tools normally left outside were brought indoors for safekeeping.^[3]

Because *Setsubun* was considered to be a day set apart from the rest of the year, a tradition of role reversal in appearance and dress was also practiced; such customs included girls wearing the [hairstyles](#) of older women and vice versa,

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wearing disguises, and [cross-dressing](#). This custom is still practiced among [geisha](#) and their clients when entertaining on *Setsubun*.^[3]

Traveling entertainers (旅芸人, *tabi geinin*), who were normally shunned during the year because they were considered [vagrants](#), were welcomed on *Setsubun* to perform [morality](#) plays. Their

vagrancy worked to their advantage in these cases, as they were considered to take evil spirits with them.