

## April Fool's Day

Today is April Fool's Day, and you'd better be alert to shenanigans from your friends(?) and co-workers. The custom of playing practical jokes on acquaintances was part of the celebrations in ancient Rome on March 25 and in India on March 31. The timing seems related to the vernal equinox and the coming of spring -- a time when nature fools us with sudden changes between showers and sunshine.

April Fool's Day is thought to have originated in France. Before the use of the Gregorian calendar, New Year's celebrations ended on April 1. When New Year's Day was changed to January 1, the people who still celebrated it on April 1 were called April Fools.

In France, the victim of a joke is called an "April Fish" (poisson d'avril). In England, tricks can be played only in the morning. If a trick is played on you, you are a "noodle." In Scotland, you are called an "April gowk," which is another name for a cuckoo bird. In Portugal, April Fool's Day is celebrated on the Sunday and Monday before Lent. The traditional trick there is to throw flour at your friends. Humor and practical jokes are universal.

Across the years, I have witnessed some rather mean-spirited demonstrations of April 1 tomfoolery. Instead of tricks, the day could be made special, indeed, by performing acts of kindness. Some of these might include visiting residents in a nursing center, calling a friend to tell that person how much he or she means to you, sending a note or greeting card to a person who is ill or shut-in at home, or offering to make a trip to the store for a widow or an elderly neighbor.

Such practices would make the day much more honorable and beneficial.

--Beecher Hunter