



## Happy Chinese New Year

*Make it a year filled with food, tradition and good fortune!*

By Jeff Tsao  
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The Chinese New Year, one of the most popular Asian holidays celebrated around the world, begins this month on January 26 and takes us through two fabulous weeks, filled with not only rich heritage, family and celebration but, perhaps more importantly, food – not surprising, given the importance food plays overall in Chinese communities.

"Lucky" foods are served through the two-week Chinese New Year celebration. What gives a certain food symbolic significance is sometimes based on appearance. For example, serving a whole chicken symbolizes family togetherness. Noodles represent a long life. Both clams and spring rolls symbolize wealth.

On the other hand, a food may have special significance because of the way it sounds in Chinese. For example, lettuce sounds like rising fortune. Tangerines and oranges are passed out freely as the words for these fruits sound like luck and wealth. And, let's not forget the pomelo – this large ancestor of the grapefruit signifies abundance and sounds like the word for "to have."

*Chi fan le mei you*, or, "Have you eaten yet?" is a common greeting to guests as they enter a home to celebrate the Chinese New Year. And, more food is consumed during the New Year celebrations than any other time of the year. Vast amounts of traditional dishes are prepared for family and friends, as well as for family members and distant relatives who have passed. On New Year's Day, a typical Chinese family will eat a vegetarian dish called jai, which consists mainly of roots or fibrous vegetables. Other foods include a whole fish, to represent togetherness and abundance, and a chicken for prosperity. The chicken must be presented with a head, tail and feet to symbolize completeness.

Dinners tend to be very elaborate, involving tables laden with traditional and seasonal foods. Almost every dish has a symbolic meaning or name that sounds like Chinese characters for fortune, happiness, longevity and prosperity. Otherwise known as hoe see fat choy, hair seaweed (fat choy) with dried oysters (ho see) sounds like "wealth and good business," lotus roots (lin ngau) mean abundance year after year, while lettuce translates into "growing wealth" and pig's tongue forecasts "profit."

When Cantonese families visit each other to exchange New Year greetings it is customary to take gifts such as tangerines and oranges, as their Chinese names sound like "gold" and "wealth." In some homes, a platter with either five meat or five vegetable dishes might be served. Whether meat or vegetable dishes are included, this dish is called "the five blessings of the New Year," referring to longevity, riches, peace, wisdom and virtue.

Nian gao, a sticky rice pudding, holds a particular significance as it purports to make people advance toward higher positions and prosperity step by step. Another typical main course that is most likely served is carp, a typical main course, because it symbolizes a profitable year ahead. However, the fish is never totally eaten, as it is believed to ensure the family will have an excess of good fortune through the year. Fish balls (yu-wan) and meatballs (jou-wan) are symbolic of reunion, as the round shape of the meat and fish balls portrays togetherness. Great care is taken to serve an even number of dishes to bestow "double happiness" on the family.

To ensure completeness and to avoid misfortune, most New Year dishes are prepared with uncut or whole ingredients. In fact, using knives, cleavers or sharp objects during the holiday season is considered unlucky as this could sever the entire family's good fortunes.

The last day of the New Year celebrations marks China's own Valentine's Day, which is also known as the Lantern Festival. Decorative lanterns are hung both indoors and outdoors and lantern parties become the major attraction for everyone to enjoy. "Yuan Siu," is a typical Lantern Festival treat that contains glutinous rice balls stuffed with sweet fillings and it is eaten to symbolize togetherness and completeness.

And, if 2008 didn't end with a bang, you can seek solace in the 14 days of celebration and revelry that takes place during the Chinese New Year. You can wish, plan and set goals while immersing yourself in tasty, Asian fare, surrounded by family and friends.

Regardless of whether you are a superstitious person or not, following these traditions for the Chinese New Year may change your luck. On the 26<sup>th</sup>, take a chance and try to incorporate traditions or dishes or aspect of the Chinese New Year into your life – you never know what this year, the Year of the Ox, may bring. For more information on Chinese New Year, Chinese food, culture and more, visit [KahikiFoods.com](http://KahikiFoods.com)

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### **About Kahiki**

Kahiki Foods is committed to delivering fun, innovative, restaurant quality Asian frozen foods to customers. Kahiki Foods produces restaurant quality products that can be found in retail grocery stores, membership warehouse clubs and foodservice operations. Kahiki serves only great tasting foods made from the freshest ingredients.

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