



## What is the Qing Ming Festival?

By ROOTS

Qingming Festival is a traditional Chinese festival, an important solar term and an official Chinese holiday and a significant celebration for the Chinese people as well<sup>1</sup> ([Click here](#) to find out more about the significance of the Qingming Festival to the Chinese people).

When it comes to the timing of the Qingming Festival, it is celebrated around the 5th of April in the Gregorian calendar. As this is the third month in the Chinese lunar calendar, Qingming Festival was also known as the March Festival in ancient times. The origin of the word "Qingming" can be found in an ancient book called "The Hundred Questions of the Year", written during the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912), which states that "Everything grows at this time, and is clean and clear."<sup>2</sup> We can appreciate the beautiful cultural flavour of Qingming in these words.

The most wonderful views of the year are at Qingming. For people who are living in the city, Qingming is the most refreshing time and the most

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the significance of the Qingming Festival to the Chinese people, watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=amJeM8omS4>

<sup>2</sup> "When everything grows at this time, it is clean and clear, so it is called Qingming". The phrase is from "The Hundred Questions of the Year" as quoted in "The Records of the Year of Yanjing", which was written during the Guangxu period.

appropriate time for excursions, trekking and tomb-sweeping. In addition, there is also a customary saying in the city that goes: "The best time to plant trees is during the Qingming Festival". The twenty-four solar terms have a significant impact on peasants, as they reflect the changes in temperature, climate, weather conditions, rainfall and drought levels throughout the year in an objective manner. This is why peasants, or especially those who worked in agriculture in the past, relied strongly on the solar terms to organise their agricultural production activities. Many of the ancestors left behind agricultural proverbs that well reflect the close connection between Qingming and agricultural production.

It can be said that Qingming is the beginning of the planting season and a time for peasants to sow their hopes. During the Qingming season, in many parts of the country the temperature rises -often above 12°C- and rainfall increases, making it a good time for spring ploughing. Hence, there are popular agricultural proverbs that go "Around Qingming, plant beans and melons" and "When the Qingming Festival and the rainy season are connected, please don't delay in planting your fields".

There is also an atmosphere of busy work and joy everywhere. For instance, "at the time of Qingming, wheat grows three sections long", with winter wheat in most areas already on the verge of gestation and those growing in the northeast and northwest about ready for being harvested. In addition, wastewater management and pest control during this period is crucial to the overall wheat harvest. The northern dry crop areas as well as the grown rice fields in the south of the Yangtze River also enter the suitable sowing period. Cotton, maize and higher crops are at the right time for planting as well.

Although the customs of the Qingming Festival vary across the country, the basic themes of Qingming are centred around tomb sweeping, ancestral worship, tributes to martyrs and excursions. Historical changes have also led to the integration of a variety of traditional festivals and the extension and transmission of their unique cultural practices. Thus, in addition to the basic celebratory themes mentioned earlier, people also add to the fun of the festival by planting trees, flying kites, attending cock fights, willow inserting and participating in silkworm flower shows, as well as playing games like tug-of-war or cuju. It is with the incorporation of these traditional customs that the Qingming Festival continues to enrich its cultural connotations.



Paying homage to martyrs



Adding soil to graves

As the Qingming Festival has a tradition of not eating hot food, people prepare plenty of pastries in advance to be consumed for the occasion. *Leng bobo* (cold pastries) and *qingtuan* (green rice balls) are the classic Qingming festival food. *Bobo* -pastries or chunks of food made from mixed grain flours- and *leng bobo* are the most common food at Qingming in Shandong. *Qingtuan* -green rice balls- is a seasonal snack in the region south of the Yangtze River, and the custom of eating *qingtuan* dates back more than 2000 years. *Qingtuan* is usually filled with bean paste and pounded with a combination of green

mugwort and glutinous rice flour, which allows them to keep well for 3-5 days to meet the demand for cold food during the Qingming period when people visit graves and pay respects to their ancestors and deceased relatives during the Qingming period. It is green, glutinous, soft, not too sweet and not too greasy, with a light but long-lasting aroma of grass and a smooth and sticky taste in the mouth.



Cold pancakes



Qingtuan

## References:

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