

The 24 Solar Terms

More than 2,000 years ago, ancient Chinese people created an overall framework to mark the annual passage of time based on observations of the sun's motion, called "The 24 Solar Terms." In the international meteorological, the 24 Solar Terms are hailed as "the fifth great invention of China." In 2016, the 24 Solar Terms were included in the UNESCO's Representatives list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The 24 Solar Terms are: Start of Spring, Rain water, Insects Awaken, Spring Equinox, Clear and Bright, Grain Rain, Start of Summer, Grain Buds, Grain in Ear, Summer Solstice, Minor Heat, Major Heat, Start of Autumn, End of Heat, White Dew, Autumn Equinox, Cold Dew, Frost's Descent, Start of Winter, Minor Snow, Major Snow, Winter Solstice, Minor Cold and Major Cold. Summer Solstice and Winter Solstice are the two days of the year, with the longest and shortest amount



of daylight respectively, while Spring Equinox and Autumn Equinox are days with the most balanced amount of daytime and nighttime. Through these four points, a year is divided to four parts: Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter.

In ancient times, this system not only guided agricultural production, instructing farmers to expect the changes in temperature, but also directed Chinese folk customs. Nowadays, the 24 Solar Terms could not only be applied to farming but also guided Chinese in everyday life. They remind people to adapt to the changes in the seasons through suitable foods and cultural rituals. Seasonal customs are still the rage, such as eating spring pancakes at Start Spring, sweeping ancestors' tombs at Clear and Bright, gaining weight to keep warm at Start of autumn and eating nutritional food to store energy at Start of Winter. They have actually become indispensable rituals in Chinese life.

