

# The Traditions That Make Us Different, Yet Also the Same

We just finished celebrating Thanksgiving with turkey, sweet potato casserole, green beans, stuffing and more. We watched too much football and took naps in the middle of the day. Not bad for one Thursday!

Now we move on to December, which includes several holidays and special events. Originally the tenth month on the Roman calendar, it became the twelfth month after January and February were added.

December is Learn a Foreign Language Month. I didn't realize that it could be accomplished in 31 days! Still worth a try. It is Universal Human Rights Month, Spiritual Literacy Month and National Tie Month.

We also have several holidays such as Christmas, Kwanzaa and Hanukkah. Each of these includes special celebrations, shopping and gifting, unique meal planning and, in some cases, lots of baking!

In my November article, I mentioned that my family merged both Cuban and American holiday menus at Thanksgiving. That continued into December as we celebrated Noche Buena, or good night, on December 24th. A traditional Cuban Christmas Eve dinner included lechon asado (roast pork), congri (black beans and rice), yuca con mojo (yuca with garlic sauce) and caramel flan. As we got older and added more American dishes, my mother included stuffing and sweet potatoes (one of her favorites) to the menu along with pumpkin pie and brownies.

My mother also made Crema de Vie, which is Cuban eggnog. Included here is a recipe courtesy of [www.mybigfatcubanfamily.com](http://www.mybigfatcubanfamily.com).

As children, we were given a small taste of this eggnog at meals and family get togethers. I can tell you that it is quite delicious and I still make it.

Also, in December we celebrate Kwanzaa and Hanukkah, which each bring their own respective traditions. Celebrated every year from December 26 through January 1, Kwanzaa is a week of festivities honoring African American culture and heritage. Educator and activist Maulana Karenga created Kwanzaa in 1966 to empower African Americans to rediscover and honor their African roots. Kwanzaa means "first fruits" in Swahili, a language spoken in Africa, and refers to the joy and unity many Africans have when celebrating the harvest season. Celebrants enjoy special foods all throughout Kwanzaa. Families use recipes that have been passed down over many, many years; often those foods have roots in African culture. Meals might include dishes like peanut soup or shrimp gumbo, topped off with tasty desserts like fried bananas, sweet potato pie and coconut sweets. A Karamu Ya Imani (Feast of Faith) is a feast typically held on

December 31, the sixth day of the Kwanzaa period. (Information about Kwanzaa was obtained from the National Geographic website.)

Hanukkah is a Jewish festival commemorating the recovery of Jerusalem and subsequent rededication of the Second Temple at the beginning of the Maccabean Revolt against the Seleucid Empire in the 2nd century BCE.

Hanukkah is observed for eight nights and days, which may occur at any time from November 28 to December 27. The festival is observed by lighting the candles of a candelabrum with nine branches, commonly called a menorah or hanukkah. Traditional foods include potato pancakes, known as latkes in Yiddish, jam-filled doughnuts and fritters. (Information obtained from Wikipedia.)

Recipe

CRÈMA DE VIE (CUBAN EGGNOG)

Makes about 5 cups

Ingredients

Instruction

- 1 can sweetened condensed milk
- 1 can evaporated milk
- 6 egg yolks
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 cup water
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 1/2 cup white rum

1. Mix sugar and water together over very low heat, stirring constantly until the sugar dissolves – about 3 min. Keep temp low enough so the sugar doesn't caramelize but makes a thick sugary water.
2. Put egg yolks in a blender and mix with condensed milk.
3. Slowly add evaporated milk and mix completely.
4. Flavor with vanilla.
5. Pour mixture into the sugar-water and mix together.
6. Finally stir in rum (as a preservative).



Photo: Anna Shepilova, Shutterstock

This list is not inclusive of all faiths or traditions, but is intended to emphasize our differences and commonalities. We all celebrate something; we should share and celebrate with each other.

Our final holiday of the year is New Year's Eve, December 31st, when Cubans eat 12 grapes at midnight and throw water out the front and back doors. The grapes represent the 12 months of the year. The water is to wash away the

bad and bring in the new and good. We also dance as much as possible!

With all this celebrating to do, please don't forget to participate in the LBA's December events:

- Santa's Court Toy Drive is underway and ending soon! The LBA partners with the Salvation Army Angel Tree to make sure that as many children as possible experience a great holiday (see page 13).
- Nominations are open for the 2025 Justice William E. McAnulty Jr. Trailblazer Award. The award celebrates leaders who drive legal and social progress and is named for the first African American to serve on the Kentucky Supreme Court (see page 17).

I want to thank the LBA Executive Committee, the Board and the staff for all of their efforts and support during 2025. It has been my pleasure and privileged to serve as President this year.

  
Maria A. Fernandez  
LBA President



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*As we close another successful year here at the LBA, I would like to extend my personal gratitude to our outgoing LBA President Maria Fernandez. Maria is a tireless supporter of the LBA and a true friend to and advocate for our legal community. Since I've known her, she's had this year circled on her calendar – and while it may have gone differently than she originally envisioned, it has still been a rousing success. We are all so grateful for her resilience and leadership throughout this past year. If you see her, please give her a well-deserved thanks for her steadfast year of service to the LBA!*  
– Kristen Miller, LBA Executive Director