Over the years, we've become so used to the names of the months on our calendar. But do you have any idea where these names come from? In this article, we're going to explore how each month, from January to December, was given its designation.

We all know that the year starts with January and ends with December (and includes 10 other months in between). What many of us don’t know, however, is how these months got their names. Whether it’s been on your mind, or if you haven’t given it a second thought, by the end of this article, you will have the answer. We promise, it’ll be fun.

JANUARY

January is the month when people most often reflect upon their lives, write resolutions, and start having a lot of hopes and expectations for the year ahead. With that in mind, it seems logical that January is named after the Roman god Janus.

In Roman mythology, Janus has two heads that look in the opposite direction. One head looks to the past, observing the year that has departed, while the other looks into the future, hoping for the best in the upcoming year.

Janus is the god of bridges, doors, gates, and other things that represent beginnings, ends, and transitions.

FEBRUARY

February is the shortest month of the year. However, to people living in cold, snowy climates, it often feels like the longest.

One of the most interesting things about January and February is that these two months didn’t exist at first. The original Roman calendar had only 10 months until 713 BCE when Numa Pompilius decided to add two more to the calendar. He wanted to conform to how long it takes for the Earth to go around the Sun.

February was named after Februa, the Roman festival of purification, during which people were ritually washed. However, in England, it wasn’t called that for a long time. Old English had two names for this month: Solmonath (“mud month”), which was most common, and Kale-monath (“cabbage month”), which was used less.

MARCH

March is the third month of the year nowadays, but it wasn’t always like that. Its name is derived from the Latin word Martius (named after Mars, who was the god of war in Roman mythology). This association is likely due to the Romans using this month to start preparations for the upcoming summer “[campaigning season](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Campaign_history_of_the_Roman_military%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)”.

In the Roman calendar, Martius was the first month of the year. Furthermore, it still is in some cultures and religions of the modern world.

APRIL

The word “April” has been around since before 700 BCE, just like the names of many other months. However, in this case, we cannot state its origin for sure, though there are a few common theories.

According to one of them, the word “April” comes from the Latin “Aprilis”, which itself derives from another Latin word—”aperire”, which means “to open”. In the Northern Hemisphere, April is the month when trees and flowers start to blossom, which could explain the name.

According to another theory, April is one of the many months of the Gregorian calendar named after gods and goddesses. In this case, April or Aphrilis could derive from Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love (called Venus in Roman mythology).

MAY

May could be named after the goddess Maia. However, it’s unknown which Maia exactly, as there are two.

The Greek goddess Maia was the mother of Hermes, who later became the messenger of all Greek gods. She was one of the Pleiades, who were considered the companions of Artemis.

The Romans, however, had a goddess named Maia as well. Her name comes from the Latin word “maius” meaning “large”. She was the goddess commonly associated with spring and growth.

JUNE

June comes from Iūnius, which means “sacred to Juno”. Juno is the name of another Roman goddess, whose role in the Roman pantheon was similar to the Greek goddess Hera.

Juno was the patron goddess of Rome. In some sources (like Aeneid written by Virgil) she is portrayed as cruel. In others, however, she is described as the goddess of childbirth and marriage. In fact, many people used to wed in June because they believed they’d get Juno’s blessing—and the tradition continues to this day.

JULY

July was called Quintus (“fifth month” in Latin) at first. However, it was later renamed to honour Roman politician, military general, and historian [Julius Caesar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julius_Caesar%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank).

In fact, it was Caesar who changed the calendar system and invented the one we still have. It was him who introduced a year that consists of 365 days, with leap years that happen every four years and consist of 366 days.

AUGUST

Just like July, August had a different name at first. It was called Sextilus (“sixth month” in Latin). It wasn’t until 8 BCE when the month was renamed to honour [Augustus Octavian Caesar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustus%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), who was the first Roman Emperor.

Augustus was the grandnephew of Julius Caesar. His birth name was Gaius Octavius, but he later changed it after Caesar’s assassination. In 44 BCE, he took on the name Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus, though he’s often referred to as Octavian in many texts.

In 27 BCE, he became an emperor and was given the honorary title Augustus.

SEPTEMBER

In the original Roman calendar, September was the seventh month of the year, hence its name.

The word comes from the Latin root “septem” meaning “seven”. Initially, the previous six months of the ten-month Roman calendar were assigned names according to their numbers. While July and August were renamed later, September and the months following still remain named after numbers.

OCTOBER

October comes from the Latin root “octo” meaning “eight”, as you’ve probably already guessed. That name entered Old English via Old French, and with time replaced the old name for the month, Winterfylleð (“winter month”).

NOVEMBER

Just like its two predecessors, this month is also named after a Latin root. In this case, it’s “novem”, which means “nine”.

In Old English, this month was called Blōtmōnað (“blood month”). This morbid name was chosen because November was the time for the early Saxons to stock up on food for the winter. A lot of animal sacrifices were made and a lot of animal blood spilt in the process.

DECEMBER

December is formed from another Latin root as well: “decem” meaning “ten”. In Old English, the month was called Ǣrra Gēola or Gēolmōnað (“yule month”).

The early Saxons called December and January “yuletide”—a period during which the mid-winter season was celebrated. That’s why the name Gēolmōnað was chosen.