

The History of Father's Day

Father's Day may not be as big a holiday as Mother's Day in the U.S., but close to 95 million cards were given to dads last year, making it a close runner up. But while Mother's Day was established back in 1914, the national observation of Father's Day is a much newer holiday, with its own unique history and traditions.



The woman given credit for creating Father's Day was Sonora Smart Dodd, who grew up in Spokane, Washington. She was one of six children raised single-handedly by her widowed, Civil War veteran father on a farm. While listening to a Mother's Day sermon at her church in 1909, Dodd was inspired to create a special day to honor her father as well as others. She held the first Father's Day celebration on June 19, 1910, her father's birthday. The idea caught on, and in 1924, President Calvin Coolidge supported a petition Dodd sent to him about a national Father's Day. A National Father's Day Committee was formed in New York City in 1926.

In 1966, President Lyndon Johnson designated the third Sunday in June as Father's Day. Yet it wasn't until 1972, after Mother's Day had been in full swing for more than 50 years, that President Richard Nixon established Father's Day as a national holiday to be observed on the third Sunday in June in honor of all good fathers.

Half of the cards sent on Father's Day are from sons and daughters, and wives purchase 20 percent of Father's Day cards for their husbands. The remaining 30 percent of Father's Day cards go to grandfathers, sons, brothers, uncles, and other special men. While ties are still the most familiar and commonplace Father's Day gift, dads might also appreciate a new shirt, sweater, or tools and a toolbox. Fishing rods and golf clubs also make popular Father's Day gifts, and ones that can be shared on family outings. Dad might also like that best-selling novel, biography, or book about his favorite sport or hobby.

How do most dads celebrate Father's Day? Well, they don't get breakfast in bed as often as mom does; more than 68 million Americans held barbecues on Father's Day last year.

Facts About Fathers

- Historians agree that a tradition to celebrate and honor fathers began thousands of years ago. A study shows that 4,000 years ago in Babylon, a son carved a special message to his father on a card made of clay. He wished his dad a long and healthy life. It is believed that several countries adopted this custom of celebrating Father's Day.
- Carnations are known as the traditional flower of Mother's Day, but the rose is the official flower of Father's Day. Sonora Smart Dodd selected the rose for this special holiday, and in many countries people wear roses on Father's Day, red if dad is alive and white if he is deceased.
- It's estimated by the U.S. Census that in 2006 there were close to 150,000 stay-at-home dads; married fathers with children younger than 15 who have been out of the workforce for more than one year. These "Mr. Moms" cared for approximately 283,000 kids.
- Many dads who have full-time jobs work evening or night shifts and take care of their preschool-age kids during the day while mom goes to work.
- Nearly half of children living with both parents eat dinner with their fathers every day; even kids living with unmarried fathers share dinner with dad.
- Dads are known for their kind words: more than half of all dads praise their children three or more times a day.