



The Month of October

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Have you ever wondered about the origin of certain words? This weekend I was thinking about the word "October" and decided to look it up.

The Roman calendar only had ten months as January and February were not included at that time. Winter had cycles that were divided into eight-day weeks but not into months until later.

At that time, the last four months of the year all ended in "ember" which doesn't seem to have a significant meaning.

The prefix for the last four months of September, October, November and December, however, were derived from the Old French words representing the numbers seven, eight, nine and ten. Old French was converted to Old English and that was why the spelling slightly changed. Because the original Roman calendar only had eight months, October was the eighth month of the year. The "Oct" prefix represented the number eight (like octopus).

Then, in 46 BC Julius Caesar decided to change everything. With the assistance of Greek mathematicians and astronomers he introduced a new calendar beginning on January 1, 45 BC. It had 365 days for three years followed by 366 days in the fourth or "leap year". He added January and February which meant that October became the tenth rather than the eighth month of the year but left the name the same.

Change came again with Pope Gregory XIII who, in 1582, altered the calendar because of equinoxes and the lunar cycles that were being used by the church. October 4 of that year became October 15 to make up for the "drift" that had been occurring. The year was now recognized as 0.0075 shorter than it had been in the past. Interesting!

This whole story recognizes the fact that things change over time and likely will continue to change.

Now let's think about what October means at a personal level:

1. Transition - Nature turns green to bright orange and yellow before leaves drop and trees are bare. This symbolizes the move from summer to winter and reminds us to think differently about our behaviours as we approach winter and temperatures drop.
2. Preparation - We put the garden hoses away and bring out the snow shovels. Thoughts go to canning and freezing the produce from the garden that will be enjoyed in the winter months. Flip flops are replaced with warm boots and gloves become part of daily wearing apparel.
3. Surprises - October always offers random challenges. One day might offer good weather and fresh air while the following day may cover us in snow with freezing temperatures only to be followed by nice weather again!

4. Traditions - October also brings thoughts of Thanksgiving Day, Hallowe'en and gift buying for Christmas.

No matter where you live in the world, October brings special meaning for people.

What does this month mean for you? How will you make it a lovely time for you and those around you this year?