

MARTISOR

Martisor is a traditional Romanian celebration of the coming of spring. It is celebrated on the March 1st every year. The day's name is the diminutive of March (in Romanian *Martie*), and thus means something like "little" or "dear March". Its origins are old and mention of this exists in the Roman celebrations of Mars, the god of fertility and vegetation or in his Thracian equivalent- the god Marsyas Silen who had the same attributes.

Even if its beginnings are still a mystery, it is usually said that it originated in Ancient Rome, because New Year's Eve was celebrated on the 1st of March (*Martius*), the month of the war god Mars. He had a double role: both protector of agriculture and of war, so the celebration signified the rebirth of nature.



Martisor is also the name of a talisman object consisting of a small decoration or jewel tied to a white and red string, symbolizing the coming of spring. The small decoration can be something like a flower, an animal or a heart and it is offered to women by men on this day. However, giving a little nickel tied to a red and white string is an old custom and was originally designated for both men and women. It was believed that the one who wears the red and white string would be powerful and healthy for the year to come. The decoration is a symbol of the coming spring like the holiday itself. A woman wears it pinned to her blouse on this day and up to two weeks after. In some parts of the country, women also give such gifts to men. A duality of symbols is kept in the colours of the Mărțișor: white- the colour of winter and red-the colour of spring . It might also symbolize peace and war, or love and purity/divinity.

Martisor is a custom which can be found in all areas where Romanians live and the holiday signifies nature coming back to life again or a fresh new start of life.



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