

Learning about culture "The background of heritage of Father John"

Essential Foods for Tet holidays

Vietnamese people have a very good habit of saving, which are reflected by the regular meals – rice with a main dishes (meat or fish/shrimp), a vegetable food and a bowl of soup. Vietnam food is thus often jokingly labelled "food for peasants". However, this statement no longer holds water during [Tet holiday](#), when Vietnamese let themselves taste more protein-rich and sophisticatedly made dishes. Following are the most typical food found in Vietnamese' Tet holiday:

BANH CHUNG/ BANH TET - SQUARE CAKE:



[Banh Chung](#) (steamed square cake) and its Southern variety called Banh Tet - is unique to Vietnam's Tet holiday, though many other countries (China, Japan, Korean, Singapore, Taiwan) celebrate this holiday as well. Banh Chung is a food made from glutinous rice, mung bean and pork, added with many other ingredients. Banh Chung is covered by green leaves (usually banana leaves) and symbolizes the Earth, invented by the prince Lang Lieu from Hung King dynasty. Besides traditional reason, Banh Chung is chosen as the main food for Tet holiday because of it can last long for days in the severe [weather of Vietnam](#) (Banh Chung can survive at room temperature for nearly 1 month).

[Banh Chung Village - Photos](#)

VIETNAMESE SAUSAGE:



[Gio Cha](#) (Vietnamese ham/sausage) is another traditional food in Tet holiday, and usually served with Xoi (sticky rice) and Banh Chung. Gio is different from Cha since Gio is boiled and Cha is deep-fried. Vietnamese people make Gio from lean meat, added fish sauce and covered by leaves then boiled for hours. Cha is also made of lean pork and ingredients, but Cha is not wrapped by leaves and boiled but deep-fried in oil. Cha just survive for some days when Gio can last for month due to its covers. There are many kind of Gio, categorized by its origins: Gio Lua (made

from pork), Gio Ga (made from chicken), Gio Bo (made from beef). All these types are used not only in Tet holidays but also over the year.

STICKY RICE - XOI:



Xoi (Sticky rice) is also a very important part of Tet holiday in Vietnam, since the meals to worship the ancestors can not miss this dish. Moreover, along with Banh Chung, xoi is the main staple foods for Tet holiday. Xoi in Tet holidays can be seen in many forms: Xoi Lac (sticky rice with peanuts), Xoi Do Xanh (sticky rice with mung bean), [Xoi Gac](#) (sticky rice with special “gac” fruit). Among these types, xoi gac is favorite the most by people because of its special red color – symbolizes the luck and new achievement for the New Year. Xoi is usually served with Gio Cha or boiled chicken in Tet meals. Sometimes it can be served with Che (sweet soup) like a dessert.

Learn more about [Sticky Rice in varieties of Vietnam](#)

BOILED CHICKEN - THIT GA:



Thit ga (boiled or steamed chicken) plays an important role in Tet holiday cuisine because all the tribute meals to the ancestors must contain a boiled chicken, whole or chopped. Chicken meat in Tet meals are various in forms: usually chicken are boiled and sliced, but sometimes people can place the whole chicken in a plate, or nowadays some families use roasted or fired chicken to replace the original boiled ones. Chicken meat is served with Xoi (sticky rice) and Banh Chung, and become one of the most popular main dishes in Tet holidays. Boiled chicken are always go with sliced lemon leaves and salt-and-pepper sauce, as a tradition. Chicken (especially bones, legs and heads) can be used to prepare the broths for other soups.

Learn more about [Boiled Chicken Dish](#)

MUT - CANDIED FRUITS



Mut Tet (Tet jam) is not a food to serve in a meal during Tet holiday, but more like a snack to welcome guests in this special period. Mut is always kept in beautiful boxes and placed at the table in the living room, and it is the main food for the owners and guests to taste when they're talking, enjoyed over a cup of tea. Unlike Western jam, which is usually in liquid form and served with bread, "Vietnamese jam" is mainly in dry form, usually dried fruits and some kind of seeds (pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, watermelon seeds). This once-in-year mix of snack is very large in variety, with so many tastes: ginger, carrot, coconut, pineapple, pumpkin, lotus seed, star fruit, sweet potato. Nowadays, cake and sweet are slowly replacing jam in Tet period, but many people still love the taste this unique food – an angle of [Vietnamese culture](#).

NEW YEAR WISHES

Tet holidays are the moments of happiness and family enjoy, therefore Vietnamese often dedicate the most beautiful words to their family and friends on this occasion. Here is the list of the most common ones:

- 1 - **Năm mới dồi dào sức khỏe:** I wish you a healthy new year
 - 2 - **Năm mới tấn tài tấn lộc:** I wish you a wealthy new year
 - 3 - **Năm mới thăng quan tiến chức:** I wish that you will get promoted in the new year
 - 4 - **Năm mới toàn gia bình an:** I wish that the new year will bring health to all your family
 - 5 - **Năm mới thắng lợi mới:** New year, new triumphs (often heard in political speech)
 - 6 - **Vạn sự như ý:** All wishes come true
 - 7 - **Chúc hay ăn chóng lớn:** Eat more, grow rapidly (for children)
 - 8 - **Chúc mau chóng tìm được người yêu:** New lover will come in the new year (for single people)
 - 9 - **Tiền vào như nước sông Đà, tiền ra nhỏ giọt như cà phê phin:** Money influx is as strong as Da's river; expenditure is as little as dripping coffee
- Still there are plenty of wishes that people send to each other in [Tet holiday](#), this list is simply an overview. Use them and impress your friends this coming Tet!

NEW YEAR'S FLOWERS

Tet holidays are the days of relaxation, happiness and joy. And similar to pine tree for Christmas holiday in the West, Vietnamese also use many kinds of flowers and plants to decorate their house in this special period. Some names can be listed out: Chrysanthus, marigold, Mao Ga flower, paperwhite flower, lavender, to name a few. Some people nowadays even use orchid and rose, although this is not yet popular. And above all, there are 3 kinds of plants that can not be missing in Tet holidays: peach flower, *ochna integerrima* and marumi kumquat.



The busy scene of flower market near Tet days can bring on both excitement and nostalgia

Peach flower and **marumi kumquat** are familiar in the North while South people prefer ***ochna integerrima*** for [Tet holidays](#). Another reason is the characteristics of the plants. While marumi kumquat and peach trees grow well in cold weather, *ochna integerrima* just can survive in tropical lands with lots of sunshine.

Watch our video: **Tet's colours brighten up Northern Highland**

People in 2 different parts of Vietnam have various explanations for this tradition. Northern people say that peach flowers blossom in spring – during Tet holidays while most other flowers still stay silent, symbolizing the strong vitality and a brave heart. Moreover, the pink colour of peach flowers shows the love and joy spread among people in this unique time of the year. Peach flower has 2 kinds: light peach with light pink colour and Nhat Tan – Ha Noi's specialty peach with dark pink colour (nearly red).



Peach flower - peaceful and elegant

Marumi kumquat bears different story. A tree with all 5 characteristics: full of fruits, flowers, leaves, branches and roots is a symbol for wealth and happiness for the new year. The tips for choosing a good plant are generated accordingly: the tree must have both ripe and green fruits, mature leaves and new bud - which represents wealth and luck brought to the [family](#) in the new year.



Kumquat - lucky and fruitful

The **ochna integerrima** in the South has another meaning. The golden yellow of the flower means the noble roots of Vietnamese (folktales said that the ancestors of Vietnamese is a couple of dragon and fairy). In addition, the high rate of blossom of the flower in Tet holidays also symbolizes the wealth and passionate love among people.



Hoa mai (ochna integerrima) - bright and shining

Vietnamese usually buy those special plants from lunar mid-December from the flower market (some even try to have peach flower branches/trees from the mountains because of its impressive vitality) and keep them until lunar mid-January of the New Year. Some families keep the branches to the end of the lunar January.

THE MEANING OF 'MAI LAN CUC TRUC' IN TERMS OF CHARACTER

The four chosen flowering plants of the new year:

Hoa Mai ~ cherry or apricot blossom, representing 'Spring';

Hoa Lan ~ orchid, representing 'Summer';

Hoa Cuc ~ chrysanthemum, representing 'Autumn';

Hoa Truc - bamboo, representing 'Winter';

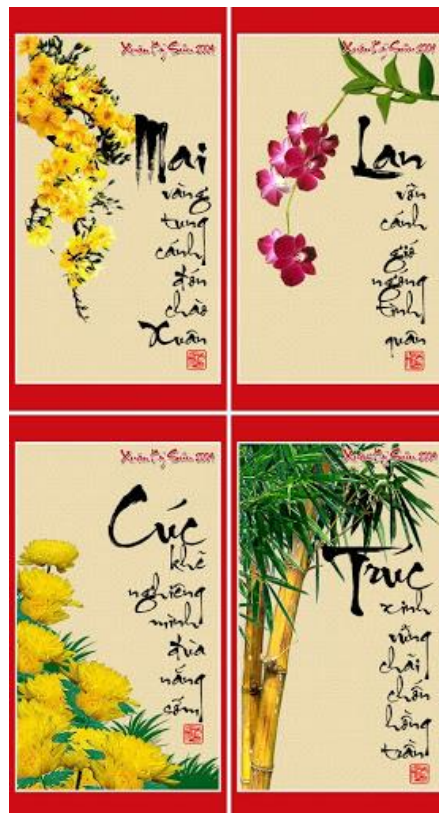
Explanation of each characters

Hoa Mai comes, or more precisely, blooms, only during the annual **Tet** celebration. So, it must mean "*self-renewal*" or even "*celebrative spirit*".

Hoa Lan, by its inherent nature, means "*elegance*" or even "*finesse*", or maybe "*adroit and artful self management*".

Hoa Cuc, which has the same colour as the sun, and which is often used by folks in votive offerings because the petals don't easily drop off, probably means "*zestful energy*" or even "*spiritual solidarity*", in the light of **Vietnam** being a communist state.

Hoa Truc, by its inherent nature, means "*tenacity and resilience*".



SOUTH VIETNAMESE FLAG

