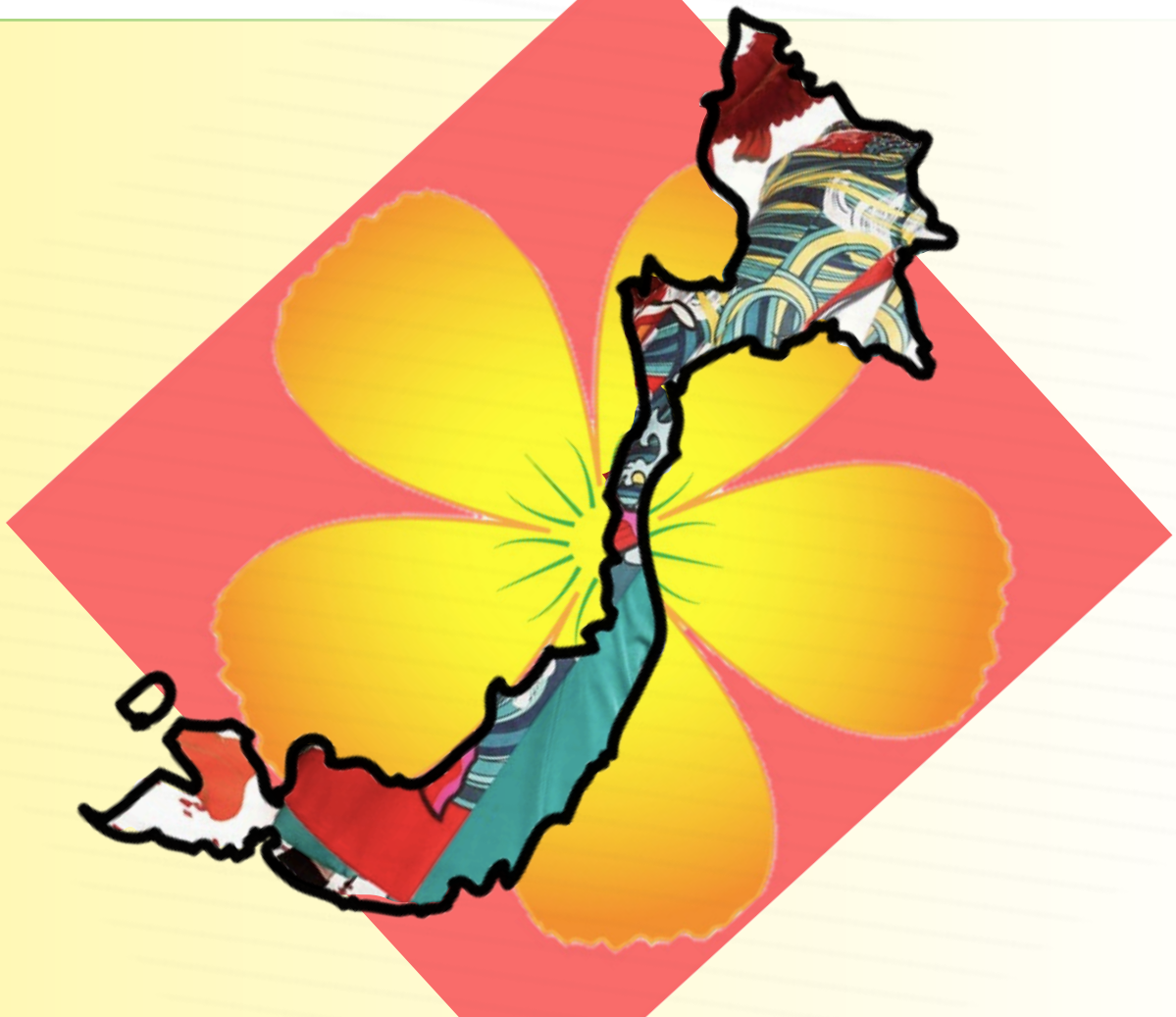




# Vietnamese New Year

"Chuc Mung Nam Moi!"



Did you know: Vietnamese New Year is celebrated by 50+ ethnic groups throughout Vietnam and the world!



Thanh and Kiet's children celebrate Tet in traditional Vietnamese outfits (áo dài). Photo courtesy of Thanh Ton.

## Meet Thanh

Learn about Tết, or Vietnamese New Year's celebrations, through the experiences of Thanh Ton and her family. Thanh is a Vietnamese American who was born in Saigon and raised in San Francisco. Now, Thanh lives in Seattle with her husband, Kiet Ly, and their three children, Xuan, Minh, and Dat. Thanh and Kiet remember celebrating traditions preserved by their own parents who immigrated to the U.S. in 1975.

### NEW YEAR'S TRADITIONS

Thanh associates the New Year with the smell of incense from offerings to family ancestors and to the Kitchen God, a legendary figure who watches over the kitchen and family. Her husband remembers midnight mass at the Catholic Church and the Hoa Mai (a small flowering tree native to Vietnam, believed to bring happiness, luck, and prosperity), which his father would coax into blooming early, just in time for Tết.

Although their memories differ because of their religious backgrounds, Thanh and Kiet both recollect the excitement of Tết - preparing special foods, cleaning the house, and getting new clothes. Thanh recalls, "Everyone is happy, because it's like re-starting the year. At midnight, we give New Years wishes to family. When I was at school in Connecticut, I would stay up until 3 a.m. just to call my parents in San Francisco and wish them a happy New Year."

Thanh and Kiet also remember many visitors coming to their homes. Kiet explains, "The first guest after the New Year is important because he/she sets the tone for the next year. So my parents always wanted someone who was honorable and happy." Visitors would be served tea and mứt (special sweetened dried fruits). Children would wish their elders happiness and good health, and in return, they would receive advice and encouragement along with a li-xi ("lee-see"), a red envelope with money inside.

### BEING UNIQUELY AMERICAN

Traditionally in Vietnam, Tết lasted 14 days and was a country-wide celebration. Kiet explains how families here may observe Tết on the weekend immediately following New Year's Day. "Communities with large Vietnamese populations often hold community events such as the Tết Festival at the Seattle Center so the community can get together and feel the essence of Tết," he says.

At home, Thanh and Kiet confess that their celebration is not as elaborate as that of their parents. But Tết is still a big deal, and Thanh expresses the desire to pass on some ceremonial aspects to their children. "We tell them not to sweep the good luck out of the house, teach them how to offer good wishes to their elders, tell them to be happy, and give them li-xi. I light incense with my kids as part of my Buddhist background ... so they would have the same memories that I have."

# The Story of Chưng Bính Truyện

Have you ever wondered why you eat certain foods for certain holidays? Often, folktales or myths, stories passed down from generation to generation, will explain many of the food-based traditions for different holidays. Tết is no different, with stories such as Chưng Bính Truyện to explain why dishes like bánh chưng and bánh giầy are so popular to eat during Tết.

The story of Chưng Bính Truyện begins with the sixth Hung King. Throughout his life, he fathered many sons - 20 in total. As he prepared for the next generation of rulers, the King wanted to know which of his sons should be his heir as king. To do so, the king designed a competition in which each prince had to present what they believed would be the most sincere and delicious food offering for the ancestral altar during the celebration of Tết.

All of the princes were quick to go out in search of rare and luxurious dishes from all across the forests and the sea to bring back to their father, except for one: Lang Liêu. He was the 18th prince, but was also the poorest of all the sons. As a result, he did not have the time or ability to travel to such far off places in search of food for the competition.

Lang Liêu knew that he would have to be contented with every day ingredients such as pork and rice, but he still did not know exactly what he should make. That was until a deity approached him in his dreams and gave him an idea: use sticky rice, pork, and mung beans to create two cakes, one that is square (bánh chưng) and one that is round (bánh giầy). The square cake is to represent the earth, while the round cake is to represent heaven. The deity also told him to wrap the cakes in banana leaves to represent a mother's protections.

Although Lang Liêu was still worried that this dish was not enough to win the competition, the deity calmed him by adding that no matter what fancy dishes the others may bring, nothing can compare to rice, which may be simple, but can feed, sustain, and nurture so much life. In the end, the deity was right, and Lang Liêu won the competition, earning his spot as the next king, and creating a dish that would become a common part of Tết celebrations.

## Vocabulary

- **Tết** - The Vietnamese celebration for New Year's. Although it originated in Vietnam, many Vietnamese American families continue to celebrate it in the US with a mixture of traditional and updated celebratory activities.
- **Bánh Chưng** - A sticky rice cake often eaten as part of New Year's celebrations
- **Gourd** - A vegetable similar to squash or pumpkins that used to be dried and turned into water bottles. Today, most Vietnamese American's recognize it as one of the six sides of the dice in the Squash-Crab-Shrimp-Fish game.
- **Folktale** - A story passed down from generation to generation, often through oral storytelling
- **Deity** - A God or powerful figure within a spiritual belief system

# Taste the New Year: Bánh Chưng

Now that you know the story behind bánh chưng, learn how to make these delicious sticky rice cakes!

## Ingredients:

5 1/2 Cups - Sticky Rice (soaked in water for 4 hours)

1 1/2 Cups - Mung Beans (Soaked in water for 4 hours)

1 lb - Pork belly (cubed)

3 Shallots

2 tbs - Fish Sauce

Salt

Pepper

Vegetable Oil



## Directions:

1. Marinate the pork belly over night using 3 tbs salt, 3 tbs pepper, fish sauce, and shallots.
2. In a large pot, bring mung beans and just enough water to cover them to a boil over medium high heat. Once boiling, bring to a simmer for 20-30 minutes, until the beans are soft enough to mash into a paste.
3. Mash the mung beans into a paste and season to taste with salt, pepper, and 1 tbs of vegetable oil.
4. Using saran wrap, take a cup of the mung bean paste, place a few pieces of pork in the center and wrap into a square shape.
5. Take two banana leaves partially overlapping with the light side facing down and place a cup of rice in the center. Place square of mung bean paste in the center, and cover with another cup of rice
6. Fold the banana leaves to cover the rice and mung beans and wrap tightly.
7. Wrap in another layer of banana leaves, this time with the dark side facing out and tie tightly. It is very important to wrap it twice so that no water can get into the cakes while you are boiling them.
8. Repeat steps 4-7 with remaining ingredients.
9. Bring a large pot of water to a boil and place the cakes in the water. Use a heavy object to ensure that they remain submerged while being boiled. Leave the cakes boiling for 6-8 hours, until the packages feel plump and rice is fully congealed. Add water as necessary to keep the cakes submerged.

# Let's Watch: Bánh Chưng folding



Want to use the recipe provided in the packet, but still curious how to properly fold and tie the sticky rice cakes? [Watch this video to learn how Vietnamese and Vietnamese American families quickly shape, wrap, and tie enough cakes for the entire family to enjoy!](#)

# Let's Play: Gourd-Crab-Shrimp-Fish

Start the new year by playing **Bầu cua cá cộp**, which translates to gourd-crab-shrimp fish. Instead of dots on the dice, there is a image of a crab, a tiger, a fish, a shrimp and a dried gourd that is used as a traditional drinking vessel. The images on the dice each have their own spot on the game board.

Usually a betting game, we've changed around the rules to be a fun game to play with friends and family. Print out the dice and game board, and find out who is going to have the luckiest year to come!



# Let's Make: A Paper Lotus



Start the New Year by making a paper lotus filled with wishes and goals for the coming year. The lotus is seen as a symbol for the future in Vietnam.

Along with your friends, family, or classmates, follow along with the instructions to create a beautiful paper flower that will hold the wishes of you and your community within it.

## Gourd-Crab-Shrimp-Fish Bầu cua cá cộp

Cut out the dice along the outside lines, making sure to include the tabs. Fold along the lines and put a bit of glue on the tabs. Fold dice into a cube shape and secure the shape by gluing tabs to the back of the die faces. Make 3 die in total.

You can play with pennies, beans or any other game pieces, just make sure you have equal amounts for each player and some extras. Each round, take turns placing your game pieces on the image you think will be called. Roll the dice and call out what you see. For each piece on the image that matches the dice, it is multiplied by the amount of dice showing the image. If your image on the board was called by each of the three dice, you'd multiply your pieces on that space by three. Set the amount of rounds before you play and see who gets the most pieces by the end of the game.

