

Hop Into



The Year of the Rabbit

by Marcia Amidon Lusted

**I**f someone asks you what your astrological sign is, you may say Sagittarius (if you were born in September) or Taurus (if you were born in May), or another one of the 12 familiar signs of the Western zodiac. But if you are Chinese, your answer would be completely different. In Chinese astrology, the 12 zodiac animals are called *shēngxiào*, which means “animal sign.” These animals, in their order of appearance, are the Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and Pig. Each animal sign reoccurs every 12 years. The year you were born matches one of these animals. It might also tell you something about your personality. So, if you were born in 2011, you were born in the Year of the Rabbit. And 2023 is also the Year of the Rabbit.

But why would a year be named after a rabbit? Rabbits usually aren't seen as very powerful animals. But in Chinese culture, the rabbit is known as the luckiest of all the zodiac animals. It is a symbol of elegance, beauty, and mercy. Rabbits are also seen as being very intelligent. If you are born in the Year of the Rabbit, then according to the Chinese zodiac you are calm and peaceful, and you don't like to fight. You are artistic and smart, but don't like to be criticized. You also don't like change.

The animals in Chinese astrology are about more than just personality traits. They are also

symbols of a deep connection with ancient Chinese culture, mythology, and heritage. And other cultures around the world have their own connections to the rabbit. Unlike many other symbols, though, almost every culture thinks of rabbits as symbolizing luck, prosperity, abundance, and fertility. Most cultures see rabbits as symbols of springtime, renewal, and cleverness.

Think of some of the things we do that relate to rabbits. Have you ever woken up on the first day of a new month and said, “rabbit, rabbit” before speaking to anyone? Saying it is supposed



Rabbits are known for producing lots of offspring, so they are often associated with fertility and abundance.



Shrines throughout Japan honor rabbits.

# CHINESE ZODIAC »



According to Chinese legend, 12 animals gathered on a riverbank to race to the Jade Emperor at his Heavenly Palace. A pig, a dog, a rooster, a monkey, a goat, a horse, a snake, a dragon, a rabbit, a tiger, an ox, and a rat all wanted to be first. The powerful ox, confident in his strength, plunged into the water and began to swim across. The others followed, except for the rat. He had already climbed up on the ox's back for a free ride. As soon as the ox arrived at the opposite bank, the rat leapt off and scampered to the emperor—first in line. The ox was second, followed by the other animals one by one, with the slow pig last. But where was cat? He had missed the race entirely. He was still napping by the warm stove because the rat had forgotten to wake him as promised. Or had he? And that's why the cat and rat are enemies and why the cat is not one of the animals of the Chinese zodiac.

to bring you good luck for 30 days. No one is sure where the superstition came from, but it was first mentioned in a British magazine in 1909. President Teddy Roosevelt used to say it every single month.

Have you ever seen anyone carrying a rabbit's foot keychain? They are believed to be lucky charms that bring good fortune to those who had them. Ancient Celtic tribes believed that rabbits were very powerful and capable of shapeshifting. And because rabbits spent so much time underground, they could communicate with gods and spirits, carrying messages back and



Some people carry a rabbit's foot keychain in hopes that it will bring good luck.

A rabbit's afoot.



This ancient Aztec monument features a rabbit.



forth between the living and the dead. All of this made them lucky, and the rabbit's foot was the luckiest part of the animal. Fortunately, today most rabbit's foot keychains are artificial and don't come from real rabbits.

Not every culture associates rabbits with good luck, however. Native American tribes consider rabbits to be tricksters. This trickster rabbit was called Jistu. It was sly, smart, and deceitful. In children's stories, a rabbit trickster is also funny, careless, and has a big ego. African folklore also had a trickster rabbit, whose stories were brought to America by enslaved peoples. Author Joel Chandler Harris recreated these stories with a popular character named Br'er (or Brother) Rabbit, who seemed small and weak, but was

always able to overcome larger, stronger animals that weren't as smart as he was.

The Aztec culture, however, didn't view rabbits as tricksters or symbols of luck. Rabbits were associated with an alcoholic drink called *pulque*, which was made from the fermented sap of the agave plant. They were linked to drunkenness and festivity.

There are also different beliefs about white, black, and brown rabbits. A white rabbit represents love, inner strength, and sensitivity, as well as new opportunities and good fortune on the way. Dreaming about a white rabbit might mean that your life is about to change. A dream about a black rabbit, however,



**Some cultures have beliefs surrounding the color of a rabbit. A white rabbit symbolizes love, inner strength, and good fortune. A black rabbit is associated with stress, fear, and feelings of helplessness.**

might mean stress, fear, and feeling helpless. A brown rabbit is associated with abundance, but also with being vulnerable. But if you dream about a brown rabbit, it means that you are fortunate and that you shouldn't take things too seriously.

But whatever symbolism or beliefs there might be about rabbits, there are more than three million pet rabbits in the United States alone. Wild rabbits can also be a familiar sight on lawns, in fields, or in the woods. For the most part, rabbits mean good luck, so don't forget to say, "rabbit, rabbit" at the beginning of the next new month. It could mean 30 days of good luck!