



Enjoy  
the longest  
night

**WINTER SOLSTICE | DECEMBER 21**



# All About the Winter Solstice

Winter Solstice is also known as midwinter, it's an astronomical phenomenon marking the day with the shortest period of daylight and the longest night of the year. It occurs when one of the Earth's poles has its maximum tilt away from the Sun. It happens twice yearly, once in each hemisphere.

## HISTORY OF WINTER SOLSTICE

- ❄ Ancient Egyptians, Celts, and other groups celebrated the winter solstice and many different traditions.
- ❄ The winter solstice occurs on December 21st of each year.
- ❄ Historically, periods throughout the year marked timings for things like crop cultivation, animal mating cycles, and migration.
- ❄ Since starvation was common during the first few months of winter, the solstice became crucial.
- ❄ People needed to harvest and stock up on food in order to survive the 'famine months', as they were called, which referred to the months between January and April in the northern hemisphere, and July to October in the southern hemisphere.
- ❄ Many cattle and other farm animals were slaughtered before this time so they wouldn't need to be fed and maintained during the winter, and so that people could rely on a stockpile of fresh meat to sustain them.
- ❄ Wine and beer were fermented and ready for drinking by this time to last groups until the spring.
- ❄ At sunrise on the winter solstice, the sun can be seen directly between the main stones at Stonehenge in England.
- ❄ The winter solstice is the day of the year with the shortest period of daylight and is also the longest night of the year.
- ❄ Astronomically, it occurs when one of the Earth's poles is tilted at its maximum tilt away from the sun, happening twice a year, once in each hemisphere.
- ❄ Many people associate the winter solstice with the first day of winter, and the beginning of the Christmas season.
- ❄ The sun is at its lowest height in the sky on the winter solstice.

# How Other Cultures Observe the Winter Solstice



## IRAN

In Iranian culture, the festival of Yalda, which means birth, is celebrated on the solstice. Considered the longest night of the year, Yalda eve is the night when ancient Iranians celebrated the birth of Mithra, the goddess of light. During the solstice, the longest and darkest night of the year, family and friends get together to eat, drink, and recite poetry until the early hours of the morning:

Foods typically eaten during Yalda include fruit and nuts, especially watermelon and pomegranates, as the color red symbolizes the colors of the coming dawn and the 'glow of life'.

## NORTHERN EUROPE

The Yule, or Yuletide, is a festival that is observed by various Northern European groups and Neopagans in Nordic countries and around the world.

In more recent times, Yule is celebrated with gatherings that often involve a meal and gift-giving.

Yule logs are burned.

Buche de Noel - a French Christmas cake made from a thin layer of spongecake that is rolled up and frosted so as to resemble a decorative Yule log are eaten.



## EAST ASIA

In East Asia, the winter solstice is celebrated as one of the 24 Solar Terms (referred to as 'Dong Zhi' in Chinese). It is one of the most important Chinese and East Asian festivals celebrated by the Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, and Vietnamese, and celebrates the seasons turning point toward the warmer, lighter days of spring. It's a time during the depths of winter to enjoy a hearty, fortifying family meal that raises hopes for spring's arrival.

Tang Yuan, a soup consisting of ginger and glutinous rice dumplings is eaten.





# Facts About the Winter Solstice

- ❁ The word 'solstice' comes from the two Latin words 'sol', meaning 'sun', and 'sistere' meaning 'to stand still'.
- ❁ The winter solstice can be a beautiful reminder that we are all a part of something larger and that life is always changing and renewing.
- ❁ Sharing food is of particular importance to the many groups who celebrate the solstice, as it is a symbol of faith in the return of the sun and the harvest in the coming year.
- ❁ In ancient cultures, the celebration of the winter solstice took place over several days, not just one.
- ❁ The Ancient Roman 'Saturnalia festival' sometimes went on for a week.
- ❁ Many who celebrate the winter solstice take part in evening rituals that include meditating, lighting candles, singing, and sharing food with loved ones and friends. Some also choose to burn a log as a Yule log to start next year's fire (metaphorically).
- ❁ Some people choose to make donations of food, clothing, or money on the winter solstice, as well as small gestures of kindness, like setting up bird feeders or cleaning out resting places for animals.
- ❁ Direct observation of the solstice isn't really possible, as the sun moves too slowly to be tracked by the naked eye.

# Solstice Acrostic

Can you think of a word or phrase for each letter in the word "Solstice"?

Example: S is for the Shortest day of the year with the least amount of sun!

S \_\_\_\_\_

O \_\_\_\_\_

L \_\_\_\_\_

S \_\_\_\_\_

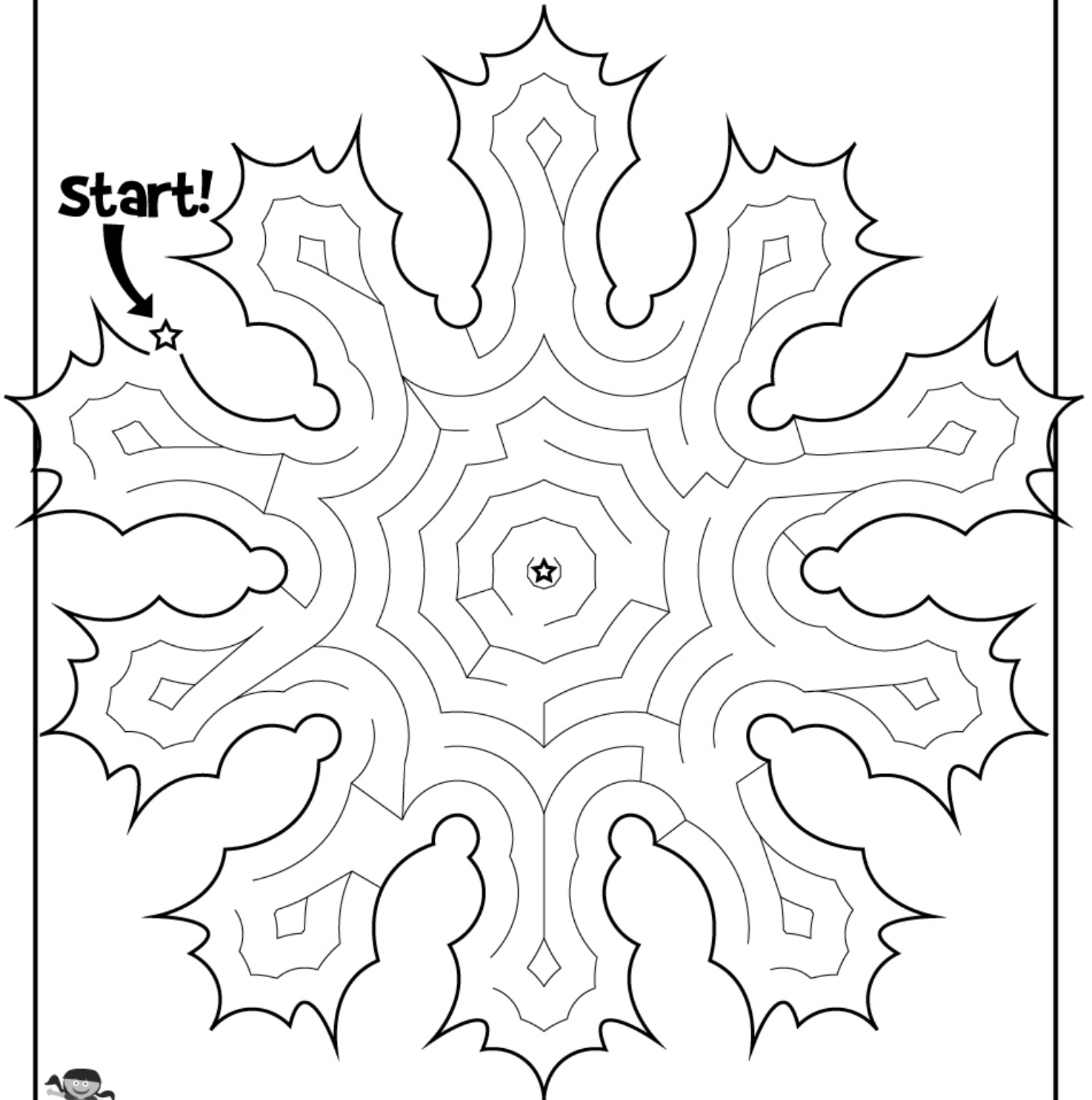
T \_\_\_\_\_

I \_\_\_\_\_

C \_\_\_\_\_

E \_\_\_\_\_

# Snowflake Maze!



# Winter Word Search

Q L O N G E S T N I G H T G  
O Y T R Q P E I Y X W S X U  
W A G X E S T L U C I A O O  
R L U V Q J E T Z J N T B Q  
E D O N G Z H I U L T U D I  
I A Z R D S U N Y P E R I U  
E Y U L E L O G I N R N E Q  
R H E M I S P H E R E A X R  
Z N I N S G G G L L N L Q N  
S B O L E T I I S D H I A W  
I Y S H O R T E S T D A Y A  
B N Q R T P L H L L Z X B N  
Y D N L L N R X R L G N G S  
L D S E A V L U H I I L H T

**DONG ZHI**  
**HEMISPHERE**  
**LONGEST NIGHT**  
**SATURNALIA**  
**SHORTEST DAY**  
**ST. LUCIA**

**SUN**  
**TILTING**  
**WINTER**  
**YALDA**  
**YULE LOG**  
**YUZU**

# Puzzle Solutions

