

The Year of the Dog

December 29, 2017



On Feb. 16, 2018, the Chinese calendar will celebrate the incoming of Year 4715, the year of the Yellow Mountain Dog.

But Russians are getting a jump on it.

For decades Russians have rolled Christmas and New Year's into one joyous, festive, family holiday on the night of Dec. 31, complete with decorations, family traditions, gift-giving, favorite movies, and ritual foods. Most aspects of the bash don't change from year to year. In fact, that's the point: the pleasure of taking out tree ornaments from childhood, eating Mom's best salad "Olivier" and watching "The Irony of Fate" with the whole family.

But in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when horoscopes, Tarot cards, astrology, and psychic readings flooded the country along with more traditional religious practices, for some reason many Russians grabbed onto the Chinese new year rituals and made them their own. So now, they've added a new layer to their cultural and family traditions. Newspapers, magazines and sites are full of advice on how to see in this new year so as to propitiate the Chinese animal god and bring good fortune in the coming year.

2018 will be the year of the Dog, who is either yellow or brown, depending on the land

he comes from — and, one suspects, the translation from the Chinese. This dog is male, and he is of the Earth — specifically from the mountains, symbolized by two peaks, side by side. He is a pack animal, loyal and loving, who occasionally likes to run off on his own.

After 2017, the Year of the Red Fire Rooster, characterized by whims, eccentricities, and a fight for pecking order — anyone come to mind? — the Year of the Yellow/Brown Male Mountain Dog has the potential to be filled with more dialog, solidarity and cooperation.

There is, however, the alpha male thing, which could lead to dogfights, and the pack thing, which could lead to small, tightly-knit social groups squaring off against one another.

But, if the world avoids the bad alpha-male-pack behavior, it might be a year of new philosophies of brotherhood, large-scale industrial projects that are good for the environment, and policies of empathy and social justice.

It all depends on you. You have to keep that Male Mountain Dog happy on New Year's Eve.

Where and How to Celebrate

The Male Mountain Dog is a pack animal, so you need to see in the new year in a pack: in a big family group, with your friends and neighbors, at a party, in parks, or at street festivals. If you celebrate at home, keep it lively. Dogs like to play, so make sure there are games, dancing, running around, and general merriment. Lifting fork to mouth and pressing buttons on the remote are insufficient activity.

But since dogs — especially male dogs, and most especially male mountain dogs — like to roam, be sure to break away from your pack for a half hour or so. Go outside and walk around, breath in some fresh air — or air filled with cordite from the local fireworks display.

What to Wear

Both men and women should dress in mountain dog colors: yellow, ochre, brown, orange, and gold. But women can also wear a little black dress because: little black dress. And if men need to dress more formally, they might consider velvet, presumably in honor of mountain dog's velvety ears.

Do not, under any circumstances, wear animal print dresses, shirts or pants. Zebra and giraffe prints are out, and don't even think of wearing a leopard print.

How to Decorate

The Male Mountain Dog is a simple creature, not fond of extravagant decorations in his dog burrow. He prefers something refined and tasteful — a nicely decorated tree, a few garlands, and some fairy lights. Be sure the color highlights are yellow, orange and gold. He may not like to eat citrus fruit, but he apparently appreciates a well-decorated table with tangerine accents.

One source suggests making a table arrangement out of bones to make the dog god happy. Good luck explaining that to your Russian Granny.

To keep the Male Mountain Dog god happy, it's important to take down and put away all images of felines. If you have a live feline, lock him in the closet until the night is over.

What to Eat

Like almost all dogs, and certainly like all mountain dogs, the yellow-brown Male Mountain Dog will eat anything and everything. He doesn't know when to stop, so have lots of food on the table. And make sure there is more meat than vegetables. If you are a vegetarian or have vegetarian friends coming over, make a dish with soy meat. Really.

Don'ts

In addition to all the year-specific dos and don'ts, Russians have a huge list of superstitions on how to see in the new year. The main principle is: How you welcome in the new year is how you live it. Here are the main prohibitions:

Don't have empty pockets, or it will be a year of want.

Don't just celebrate with ladies, or there won't be any men in your life.

Don't serve crayfish, crab, lobster, or any fowl — the sea creatures move backwards and chickens and other birds scratch the earth backwards. That will keep you in the past and unable to move forward.

New Year's Eve Don'ts

Don't lend or borrow money.

Don't break any plates; if you do, carefully gather up all the pieces and bury together far away from your house.

Don't quarrel or fight.

Don't take out the garbage after 6 p.m.

Don't think of anything bad.

Don't recall the deceased; let them rest. If you do remember them, don't think or say anything bad about them.

Don't clean, but don't see in the new year in squalor. Do all your cleaning before the 31st.

Don't see in the new year alone.

Got it? Have a wonderful, safe, fun New Year's celebration. And keep the dog happy.

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