



# Where the Wonders of Learning Never Cease® WONDEROPOLIS®

Wonder of the Day #168

## What Is the Vernal Equinox?

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SCIENCE – Earth and Space

### Have You Ever Wondered...

- What is the vernal equinox?
- Is the vernal equinox on the same day in the northern and southern hemispheres?
- Can you really balance an egg on end during the vernal equinox?

As Earth revolves around the Sun, there are two moments each year when the Sun is exactly above the equator. These moments – called equinoxes – occur around March 20 or 21 and September 22 or 23. Equinox literally means “equal night,” since the length of day and night is nearly equal in all parts of the world during the equinoxes.

The March equinox marks when the Northern Hemisphere starts to tilt toward the sun, which means longer, sunnier days. In the Northern Hemisphere, the March equinox is called the vernal equinox, because it signals the beginning of spring (vernal means fresh or new like the spring). The September equinox is called the autumnal equinox, because it marks the first day of fall (autumn).

When the Northern Hemisphere starts to tilt toward the sun in spring, the Southern Hemisphere starts to tilt away from the sun, signaling the start of fall. Thus, in the Southern Hemisphere, the March equinox is called the autumnal equinox, and the September equinox is called the vernal equinox.

People have celebrated the vernal equinox for centuries. For ancient cultures, the vernal equinox signaled that their food supplies would soon return. Early Egyptians even built the Great Sphinx so that it points directly toward the rising Sun on the day of the vernal equinox. In Christianity, the vernal equinox is significant, because Easter always falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox.

If you keep your eyes and ears open around the time of the vernal equinox, you're likely to hear or see people talking about a magical phenomenon that only occurs on that day. According to legend, the special astronomical properties of the vernal equinox make it possible to balance eggs on end.

So is there any truth to this popular legend? Nope! It's actually possible to balance eggs on end on any day of the year. It just takes a lot of patience and determination. There's nothing magical about the vernal equinox that makes it any easier to balance an egg on end.

You might be wondering how such an interesting and widespread legend got started. No one knows for sure, but some believe the Chinese may have started the practice of balancing eggs on end during the vernal equinox. Given that day and night are balanced at the time of the vernal equinox, it's possible that the Chinese chose a balanced egg as a symbolic representation of this astronomical phenomenon.

## Wonder Words (15)

**SPRING, BALANCE, EQUAL, TILT, EQUATOR, ASTRONOMICAL, PATIENCE, DETERMINATION, WIDESPREAD, SYMBOLIC, REPRESENTATION, PHENOMENON, VERNAL, EQUINOX, AUTUMNAL**

## Wonder What's Next?

Roses are red, violets are blue, grass is... find out tomorrow in Wonderopolis!

## Try It Out

Spring forward to find a few friends you can always fall back on! Ask them to help you explore one or more of the following fun activities:

- If you're more fascinated by the thought of balancing eggs on end, give it a try. Make sure you get your parents' permission before giving egg-balancing a whirl on your kitchen counters. It's not as easy as it looks. Take it slow and you'll do fine! How many eggs can you balance? If you're feeling eggs-tra inspired, try one of these egg-ceptional craft ideas:
- Up for a challenge? Let's say you just hit the lottery. You have a gazillion dollars in your bank account and you can do what you want, when you want, where you want. You want to never see Old Man Winter again. You don't mind spring and you love summer. Your goal is to always be living, visiting or staying in a place where it's spring or summer. Find a map of the world and plot out the

places you'd go and when you'd go there, keeping in mind the dates of the equinoxes and what seasons these dates signal in different hemispheres. Have fun dreaming of the never-ending summer!

Does it feel like spring in your part of the world right now? Even if Old Man Winter is still hanging around, you can still get excited about the warmer weather to come with these crafts inspired by spring flowers:

Tissue Paper Flowers (<http://kidsparties.about.com/od/diyideas/ig/Tissue-Paper-Flowers/>)

Flower Cards (<http://kidsparties.about.com/od/diyideas/qt/DIYFlowerCards.htm>)

<http://wonderopolis.org/wonder/What-Is-the-Vernal-Equinox>

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