Spring

1. 立春 Beginning of Spring (February. 3, 4 or 5)

The Beginning of Spring is also the beginning of the annual cycle of the 24 solar terms. Daylight hours start to become longer. People start to prepare for farming activities and make wishes for a bountiful year by eating spring pancakes and spring rolls with assorted vegetables.

2. 雨水 Rain Water (February. 18, 19 or 20)

As the Rain Water arrives, temperatures begin to rise, rainfall becomes more frequent, and the soil gets ready for planting.

3. 惊蛰 Awakening of Insects (March 5, 6, or 7)

Awakening of Insects is the time when spring thunder wakes up the insects hibernating in the soil, and farmers start to sow wheat. The weather is relatively dry in northern China, and people eat pears to keep hydrated.

4. 春分 Spring Equinox (March 20, 21 or 22)

Spring Equinox marks the midpoint of the spring season when the day and night are approximately equal in length and wheat grows more quickly.

5. 清明 Pure Brightness (April 4, 5 or 6)

At Pure Brightness, the day is clear and bright and the weather becomes noticeably warmer. The season marks a traditional Chinese festival called 清明节, or Tomb Sweeping Day, when people pay respect to ancestors by visiting their graves, cleaning their tombstones, and making offerings of food and other items.

6. 谷雨 Grain Rain (April 19, 20 or 21)

Grain Rain has been selected as the Chinese Language Day at the United Nations to pay tribute to 仓颉 (Cang Jie) who invented the Chinese characters. The legend goes that the Emperor of Heaven rewarded Cang Jie's work by opening the granary of the Heavenly Palace, creating a "rain of grain", which saved the whole population that was suffering from a famine; from that time forward, people referred to the day as "Grain Rain" in honour of Cang Jie. In the context of weather-oriented farming, Grain Rain is often alternatively interpreted as "rain for the growth of grain" since it is a time when crops benefit from sufficient rainfall.

Summer

7. 立夏 Beginning of Summer (May 5, 6 or 7)

Beginning of Summer is the turning point between spring and summer, when the plants sown in Spring have grown upright.

8. 小满 Grain Buds (May 20, 21 or 22)

At Grain Buds, the seeds of summer crops are starting to become full but not yet ripe. The increased rainfall fills rivers, making this a perfect time for enjoying fresh fish.

9. 芒种 Grain in Ear (June 5, 6 or 7)

Grain in Ear marks the time when summer crops like wheat are ready to harvest and autumn crops like rice are supposed to be sown. It is the busiest time of the year. The character 芒, which refers to crops such as wheat and barley, is pronounced the same as 忙, which means busy.

10. 夏至 Summer Solstice (June 21 or 22)

Summer Solstice marks the longest day and shortest night of the year in the Northern Hemisphere. On this day, people eat noodles made from the newly harvested wheat.

11. 小暑 Minor Heat (July 6, 7 or 8)

At Minor Heat, the weather becomes noticeably hotter. All the crops have entered the stage of vigorous growth and farmers need to strengthen their field management.

12. 大暑 Major Heat (July 22, 23 or 24)

Major Heat sees the hottest time of the year when crops grow at the fastest rate. It is also a time to be mindful of the heat and to take steps to protect one's health by staying cool.

Autumn

13. 立秋 Beginning of Autumn (August 7, 8 or 9)

Beginning of Autumn marks the transition from summer to autumn. The weather begins to cool down, although it can still be quite hot, as described in the word 秋老虎, which is literally translated as “Autumn Tiger” but means “after heat”.

14. 处暑 End of Heat (August 22, 23 or 24)

End of Heat brings the end of the summer heat and the temperature starts to cool down for autumn. The character 处 in ancient Chinese means “stop”. People eat duck meat, which is believed to be mild and to alleviate the heat accumulated in the body.

15. 白露 White Dew (September 7, 8 or 9)

White Dew marks the true arrival of autumn. As the weather turns cool, moisture in the air turns into dew on grass and trees during the night.

16. 秋分 Autumn Equinox (September 22, 23 or 24)

Autumn Equinox marks the midpoint of autumn, when the day and the night are of equal length. This is the time for farmers to sow winter wheat and winter rice.

17. 寒露 Cold Dew (October 8 or 9)

Cold Dew marks the transition from cool to cold, when dew is colder than white dew. People switch from lighter summer clothing to warmer autumn attire for protection against the drop in temperature.

18. 霜降 Frost's Descent (October 23 or 24)

Frost's Descent means the start of the frost. One traditional custom during Frost's Descent is to eat persimmon, which helps strengthen the body for the colder weather.

Winter

19. 立冬 Beginning of Winter (November 7 or 8)

At and around Beginning of Winter, all the autumn crops should be dried and stored up in storehouses.

20. 小雪 Minor Snow (November 22 or 23)

Minor Snow is the time when the weather becomes even colder and the first snowfalls begin in northern China. Customs in this period include pickling salted vegetables.

21. 大雪 Major Snow (December 6, 7 or 8)

Major Snow is more likely to see significant snowfall and temperature drop. It is also a time to make preserved meat and fish.

22. 冬至 Winter Solstice (December 21, 22 or 23)

Winter Solstice marks the shortest day and longest night of the year. On this day, families gather to eat dumplings (饺子) in the north or glutinous rice balls (汤圆) in the south. Both dumplings and rice balls are cooked in hot soup to help people keep warm against the cold weather.

23. 小寒 Lesser Cold (January 5, 6 or 7)

Lesser Cold marks the beginning of the coldest days of the year. With less work in the fields, people start preparing for the Spring Festival (the Lunar New Year).

24. 大寒 Greater Cold (January 20 or 21)

Greater Cold, the last of the 24 terms, marks the coldest time of the year. It is the slack season for farming, and the festive atmosphere grows stronger when people get ready to celebrate the Spring Festival.

《初春小雨》，韩愈（唐朝, 768–824 A.D.）

天街小雨润如酥，草色遥看近却无。
最是一年春好处，绝胜烟柳满皇都。

Light Rain in Early Spring

by Han Yu (Tang Dynasty, 768–824)

The royal streets are moistened by a creamlike rain;

Green grass can be perceived afar but not nearby.

It’s the best time of year, late spring tries in vain;

With its capital veiled in willows to outvie.

Translation by Dr. Xu Yuanchong (许渊冲，1921–2021)

《春夜喜雨》

杜甫(唐朝, 712–770)

好雨知时节，当春乃发生。
随风潜入夜，润物细无声。
野径云俱黑，江船火独明。
晓看红湿处，花重锦官城。

Happy Rain on a Spring Night

by Du Fu (Tang Dynasty, 712–770 A.D.)

Good rain knows its time right;

It will fall when comes spring.

With wind it steals in night;

Mute, it moistens each thing.

O’er wild lanes dark cloud spreads;

In boat a lantern looms.

Dawn sees saturated reds;

The town’s heavy with blooms.

Translation by Dr. Xu Yuanchong (许渊冲，1921–2021)

《春晓》

孟浩然 (唐朝，689–740 A.D.)

春眠不觉晓，处处闻啼鸟。
夜来风雨声，花落知多少。

A Spring Morning

by Meng Haoran (Tang Dynasty, 689–740 A.D.)

This morn of spring in bed I’m lying,

Not woke up till I hear birds crying.

After one night of wind and showers,

How many are the fallen flowers!

Translation by Dr. Xu Yuanchong (许渊冲，1921–2021)

如梦令

李清照 （宋朝，1084–1155 A.D.）

昨夜雨疏风骤，

浓睡不消残酒。

试问卷帘人，却道海棠依旧。

知否，知否？

应是绿肥红瘦。

Tune："Like a Dream"

By Li Qingzhao (Song Dynasty, 1084 –1155 A.D.)

Last night the wind blew hard and rain was fine;
Sound sleep did not dispel the aftertaste of wine.
I ask the maid rolling up the screen.
"The same crab-apple tree", she says, "is seen".
"But don't you know,
O don't you know
The red should languish and the green must grow?"

Translation by Dr. Xu Yuanchong (许渊冲，1921–2021)

《相思》 王维(唐代，692–761 A.D.)

红豆生南国，

春来发几枝。

愿君多采撷，

此物最相思。

Love Seeds

By Wang Wei(Tang Dynasty, 692–761 A.D.)

Red berries grow in southern land,

In spring they overload the trees.

Gather them till your hands are full:

They revive fond memories.

Translation by Dr. Xu Yuanchong (许渊冲，1921–2021)

《春词》 刘禹锡 (唐代，772–842 A.D.)

新妆宜面下朱楼，

深锁春光一院愁。

行到中庭数花朵，

蜻蜓飞上玉搔头。

A Song of Spring

By Liu Yuxi (Tang Dynasty, 772–842 A.D.)

She comes downstairs in a new dress, becoming to her face,

When locked up, even spring looks sad in this lonely place.

She counts up flowers in mid-court while passing by,

On her lovely hairpin alights a dragonfly.

Translation by Dr. Xu Yuanchong (许渊冲，1921–2021)

《静夜思》李白 (唐代，701–762 A.D.)

床前明月光，疑是地上霜。

举头望明月，低头思故乡。

A Tranquil Night

By Li Bai (Tang Dynasty, 701–762 A.D.)

Abed, I see a silver light,

I wonder if it's frost aground.

Looking up, I find the moon bright;

Bowing, in homesickness I'm drowned.

Translation by Dr. Xu Yuanchong (许渊冲，1921–2021)

春望

杜甫(唐朝，712-770 A.D.)

国破山河在，城春草木深。
感时花溅泪，恨别鸟惊心。
烽火连三月，家书抵万金。
白头搔更短，浑欲不胜簪。

Spring View
By Du Fu (Tang Dynasty, 712-770 A.D.)

On war-torn land streams flow and mountains stand;
In vernal town grass and weeds are overgrown.
Grieved over the years, flowers make us shed tears;
Hating to part, hearing birds breaks our heat.
The beacon fire has gone higher and higher;
Words from household are worth their weight in gold.
I cannot bear to scratch my grizzling hair;
It grows too thin to hold a light hairpin.

Translation by Dr. Xu Yuanchong (许渊冲，1921–2021)