

The Bandera PROPHEET

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Understanding Leap Year is a bit of a leap

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Happy Leap Day.

Just about every four years, the shortest month of the calendar is extended by one day. Those who are mathematically inclined could offer an intensely specific explanation why an extra 24 hours is necessary to maintain order. In laymen's terms, Leap Year is a kind of self-correction, because nothing is perfect, not even keeping time.

It all began somewhere around 45 or 46 BCE, when Julius Caesar wanted the calendar to be based on the position of the sun and corresponding seasons. The dilemma was that the Earth's orbit is not exactly 365 days per year. It's 365.25-ish days. So, ever so clever Caesar decreed an extra day would be added every four years to compensate for the overage.

When in Rome.

But there was still a problem. The actual solar year is 365.242 days, according to experts more expert than most. The Julian calendar was too long, so over time, important dates didn't align and the equinoxes and solstices were out of sync. Called a seasonal drift, imagine Earth screeching around the cosmos corner because it was running a little late for Easter.

Several centuries later, Pope Gregory XIII, in the late 1500s, took matters into his own hands and created his own calendar, which is still in use today. Instead of adding an extra day every four years, the arithmetical formula was tweaked to add an extra day *about* every four years.

In a nutshell, years that are divisible by four are considered Leap Years, except for years divisible by 100, unless they are divisible by 400.

Easy enough.

Not really.

But, there's no need to break out the calculator just yet. To keep it simple, the next regularly scheduled Leap Year that won't be a Leap Year is 2100 - so, not a today problem.

A few fun facts about Leap Year include:

~ People born on Leap Day are called Leapers or Leaplings.

~ A Feb. 29 birthday is usually celebrated March 1.

~ Anthony, Texas is considered the Leap Year Capital of the World.

Every Leap Year, the largest and longest two-day birthday party is held to celebrate Leap Day babies.

~ American Barman Harry Craddock, inventor of the White Lady and popularizer of the Dry Martini, created the Leap Day Cocktail at London's Savoy Hotel American Bar in 1928.

To have a taste, pour 2 ounces gin, 1/2 ounce Grand Marnier, 1/2 ounce Italian vermouth, and a dash of fresh lemon juice in a cocktail shaker with ice and shake well for 10 seconds. Strain and serve.

For a twist, try the Leap Year Cocktail: 1 ounce gin, 1/2 ounce vermouth and 1/2 ounce cognac, with a scoop of orange and lemon sherbet.

Whether a Leapling or not, a little indulgence once every four-ish years seems reasonable - as long as its divisible by 400.