

New Year's Resolutions

JANUARY

- GOAL
- PLAN
- ACTION

New Year's Day 1

8

7

4

1

3

1

2

3

Try Something New This Year

New Year's resolutions often come with an unspoken expectation: improvement. Get better, faster, stronger, more disciplined.

But what if one of the most valuable things you could do this year is try something you might not be good at on purpose?

Leaning into beginner status can shift the focus from achievement to curiosity, opening the door to a different kind of growth.

RELEASING THE NEED TO EXCEL

For many adults, the hesitation to try something new isn't lack of interest; it's fear of being bad at it. Years of experience in careers and daily life can make starting from scratch feel uncomfortable.

But being a beginner comes with its own advantages. It invites experimentation, play and a willingness to make mistakes without high stakes. Instead of measuring success by performance, the emphasis shifts to participation.

That change in perspective can be freeing. Without the pressure to excel, people are often more open to learning and more likely to stick with something long enough to enjoy it.

BENEFITS TO TRYING

Experts list other reasons to



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try something you might be bad at:

- Actively failing in small, low-stakes ways helps you desensitize to fear. The action contributes to retraining your nervous system to realize that failure isn't dangerous.

- Intentionally making mistakes can help you overcome social anxiety by proving that most people don't notice or care. It can help break the habit of perfectionism and embrace the concept that sometimes done is better than perfect.

- Being bad at something is the first step toward being good

at it. It's a crucial step in skill mastery. Singing poorly or writing terrible drafts provides the raw material needed to improve through repetition.

- Embracing the joy of the mess changes one's mindset. Instead of having a scoreboard mentality, you can simply enjoy activities like painting or dancing because they make you feel alive, not because you are trying to achieve a standard.

CURIOSITY OVER OUTCOMES

Approaching a new activity with curiosity rather than expectation can transform the

experience. Trying a dance class, learning a language, picking up a musical instrument or attempting a new craft becomes less about mastering a skill and more about discovering what it feels like to engage with it.

This mindset also builds resilience. When mistakes are expected, they lose their power to discourage. Progress becomes less about hitting milestones and more about staying engaged. Over time, that curiosity can lead to unexpected benefits, new interests, new connections or simply a renewed sense of creativity.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF RESOLUTION

Choosing to try something you might be bad at reframes the idea of a New Year's resolution. Instead of setting a goal with a clear endpoint, it becomes an invitation: Explore, experiment and see what happens.

As the year begins, consider giving yourself permission to be a beginner. Not to achieve, but to experience. Growth doesn't always come from doing what you're good at. Sometimes, it starts with the willingness to try something new and to be imperfect along the way.

Redefining Resolutions

For many people, New Year's resolutions arrive with a familiar script: Set ambitious goals, start strong and hope motivation lasts.

But around the world, traditions tied to renewal tell a different story, one rooted less in quick fixes and more in reflection, repair and meaningful fresh starts.

Looking beyond Jan. 1 can offer a gentler, more sustainable way to think about change.

A SEASON FOR REFLECTION

In the Jewish tradition of Rosh Hashanah, the new year begins not with a to-do list, but with introspection. The holiday marks the start of a period focused on examining one's actions, making amends and seeking reconciliation. The emphasis is not perfection, but awareness, taking stock of where you've been and where you hope to go.

Similarly, Nowruz, celebrated at the spring equinox, centers on renewal in both the physical and emotional sense. Families clean their homes, gather around symbolic tables and welcome the new year with a sense of balance and possibility. The message is clear: change begins with clearing space, literally and figuratively.

These traditions suggest that before setting goals, it may be



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more helpful to pause and reflect.

FRESH STARTS, MANY TIMES A YEAR

The Lunar New Year, observed across many Asian cultures, offers another perspective. Rather than a single moment of reinvention, it creates a rhythm of renewal that returns each year with intention and community.

Preparations often include cleaning, settling debts and let-

ting go of lingering burdens. The celebration itself emphasizes family, hope and good fortune, reminding participants that a fresh start is not just about individual willpower, but shared experience.

Taken together, these traditions challenge the idea that change must begin — and succeed — on a single day.

A DIFFERENT WAY TO RESOLVE

What if resolutions were less

about rigid goals and more about ongoing practices?

Instead of focusing only on outcomes — lose weight, save money, exercise more — global traditions point toward process: Reflect regularly, repair relationships, create space for growth and revisit intentions throughout the year.

That approach can be especially helpful for those who find traditional resolutions discouraging. Missed a goal in February? These traditions

would suggest you haven't failed; you've simply reached another moment to begin again.

In that sense, the calendar becomes less of a deadline and more of a series of invitations.

This year, consider borrowing from these global practices. Start with reflection. Make room for what matters. And remember that renewal is not confined to a single date, it's something you can return to, again and again.

Become a Better Neighbor

When people think about New Year's resolutions, they often focus inward — health goals, productivity, personal growth.

But meaningful changes can happen just beyond the front door. Becoming a better neighbor doesn't require a major commitment. Often, it starts with small, consistent acts that build connection over time.

THE POWER OF MICRO-CONNECTIONS

In an era when many people feel increasingly disconnected, even brief interactions can make a difference. A wave across the driveway. A quick conversation while walking the dog. Remembering someone's name.

These micro-connections may seem minor, but they help create a sense of familiarity and trust. Over time, they turn a collection of houses into a community.

For those setting intentions in the new year, focusing on these small moments can be more sustainable than sweeping resolutions. Instead of trying to transform relationships overnight, the goal becomes simply showing up, again and again.

SIMPLE WAYS TO START

Building stronger neighborhood ties doesn't have to be



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complicated. It can begin with approachable, everyday actions:

- Introduce yourself to someone new. Check in on a neighbor during extreme weather. Offer to pick up groceries for someone who might need help. Share extra produce from a garden or baked goods from the kitchen.

- Even being more present — spending time outside, attending a local event or supporting nearby businesses — can create opportunities for connection.

These gestures don't need to be frequent or elaborate to

matter. Consistency is what builds familiarity.

ACTIONS MATTER

Even introverts can be good neighbors as not all neighborly acts involve social contact.

Respect matters when living near others. Be considerate of noise. Keep the outside volume low and avoid loud activities (including blowing leaves or mowing the lawn) late at night or early in the morning. Bring pets inside to avoid noise complaints.

Keep your property looking pleasant. Maintain a neat garden. Pick up trash and ensure

that trash cans and recycling bins are handled correctly.

If you have shared spaces, respect parking rules. Don't block drives or park in reserved spots. Keep walkways and shared areas clean. If you live in cold climates, shovel your sidewalks as soon as possible. If you have a snow blower? Consider clearing your neighbor's sidewalk or driveway for them.

A SHARED INVESTMENT

Stronger neighborhoods benefit everyone. They can increase feelings of safety, reduce isolation and create in-

formal networks of support when challenges arise.

They create space for celebration: Block parties, shared traditions or simply the comfort of knowing who lives nearby.

As a New Year's resolution, becoming a better neighbor offers a different kind of goal. It's not about achieving a measurable outcome, but about cultivating a habit of attention and care.

This year, consider starting small. A greeting. A conversation. A moment of connection.

Over time, those moments add up, quietly strengthening the place you call home.

Cook Across Cultures

Trying a new recipe can do more than shake up a weekly menu. It can open a window into another culture, its history, traditions and everyday rhythms.

Expand your palate by committing to trying a different cuisine at least once a month.

Be among the growing number of home cooks who turning to international dishes not just for flavor, but for connection.

MORE THAN A MEAL

Every cuisine carries a story. Ingredients reflect geography and climate. Cooking methods reveal generations of adaptation and creativity. Even the way food is shared — family-style, street food, celebratory feasts — offers insight into cultural values.

Exploring these traditions at home can deepen appreciation in ways that go beyond dining out. Preparing a dish from another part of the world invites a closer look at how and why it's made. Doing so can challenge assumptions. A familiar ingredient used in a new way, or an unfamiliar spice that becomes a staple, can shift how people think about food altogether.

STARTING SMALL, LEARNING MORE

Cooking across cultures doesn't require elaborate tech-



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niques or hard-to-find ingredients. Begin with a single dish, trying a new spice blend, learning a traditional preparation method or recreating a meal enjoyed while traveling.

Many cooks find it helpful to start with cuisines they already enjoy. From there, they can explore regional variations or expand into neighboring traditions. Cookbooks, online tutorials and local markets can all serve as entry points.

Equally important is approaching new cuisines with respect and curiosity. Learning

about the origins of a dish, its cultural significance and the people who make it helps move the experience beyond imitation to appreciation.

COOKING RESOLUTIONS

There are many ways to incorporate cultural cooking into your New Year's resolutions. Consider the following:

- Embrace cultural luck: Cook dishes associated with prosperity: lentils in Italy (for coin-like wealth), pork in Germany, or black-eyed peas and greens in the American South.

- Cook globally, eat locally: Focus on sourcing ingredients for global dishes from local producers to support sustainability.

- Master specific culinary traditions: Dedicate time to mastering dishes like Greek vasilopita cake, French celebratory food (oysters/foie gras), or Cuban pork dishes.

- Learn preservation techniques: Kick off the year by fermenting cabbage or pickling food, a skill celebrated in many cultures around the New Year.

- Reduce meat intake: Adopt "Meat-free Mondays" by explor-

ing vegetarian versions of international dishes to encourage healthier, more creative cooking.

- Try regional challenges: Commit to a deeper dive by exploring a specific regional cuisine, such as choosing one new Italian ingredient to explore each month.

- Try fusion cooking: Experiment with blending cultural techniques and flavors, such as creating kimchi and sweet corn sushi or desserts inspired by different international traditions.

Track Joy Instead of Tasks

For many people, the start of a new year brings a familiar ritual: writing lists of goals, tasks and resolutions.

These lists can be helpful, but they often focus on what needs to be done rather than what brings energy and meaning.

An alternative approach is gaining attention: creating a joy list.

According to Psychology Today, 92% of Americans fail to achieve their New Year's resolutions.

Instead of tracking obligations, a joy list centers on the moments, activities and experiences that leave you feeling energized, content or connected. It is often defined as a curated list of activities, experiences or habits that bring happiness, curiosity or pleasure. The items on the list are motivated by pleasure, curiosity and self-care.

PAYING ATTENTION TO WHAT LIFTS YOU

A joy list doesn't require big plans or major life changes. It begins with noticing.

That might mean jotting down small moments throughout the week — a walk in the neighborhood, a conversation with a friend, time spent reading, cooking a favorite meal or listening to music. Over time, patterns begin to emerge.



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What consistently lifts your mood? What leaves you feeling more like yourself?

This kind of awareness can be especially useful in a culture that often prioritizes productivity over well-being. By shifting focus, a joy list helps rebalance attention toward what sustains you.

FROM OBLIGATION TO INTENTION

Traditional to-do lists are built around completion. A joy list, by contrast, is about intention.

It can serve as a guide when

planning time, helping to ensure that days and weeks include at least a few moments that feel restorative. It can also be a resource during stressful periods — a reminder of what has helped in the past.

Importantly, a joy list is not another task to complete. There's no quota, no deadline and no expectation to turn every moment into something meaningful. Even a short list can be enough.

How are resolutions and joy lists different? Resolutions have a mindset of obligation, "I should ...". Joy lists focus on in-

itation, "I want to ...". The goal of resolutions are perfection and an outcome while joy lists focus on enrichment and fulfillment. Joy lists are more flexible and have lower pressure. The success metric is different. Resolutions tend to be binary. You succeeded or you didn't. Joy lists focus on "Did I enjoy this?"

A RESOLUTION THAT GIVES BACK

Incorporating a joy list into the new year reframes the idea of resolution. Instead of adding more to accomplish, it creates

space to notice and return to what already brings fulfillment.

That shift can have practical benefits. Activities that generate joy often support mental and physical well-being, strengthen relationships and improve resilience during challenging times.

As the year begins, consider setting aside space, not just for what needs to be done, but for what brings you back to yourself.

In the end, a joy list isn't about doing more. It's about remembering what matters, and making room for it.

Rethink Resolutions by Letting Go

New Year's resolutions tend to focus on what to add: New habits, new goals, new expectations. But there's another, often overlooked path to change, deciding what to release.

Letting go can be just as powerful as taking on something new. In some cases, it's the necessary first step.

RELEASING WHAT NO LONGER FITS

Over time, routines and commitments can outlive their usefulness. A schedule that once felt productive may now feel overwhelming. A goal that once inspired growth may now feel like pressure.

Researcher Dr. Anne Holding found people experience an "action crisis" when a goal seems impossible or no longer interesting. In 2021, her research found that holding onto unfulfilling goals out of obligation or guilt often leads to depression, stress and a decrease in overall well-being.

Taking stock at the start of the year offers an opportunity to ask a simple but important question: Does this still serve me?

The answer might point to habits that drain energy, ex-



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pectations that no longer align with current priorities or commitments that crowd out what matters most. Letting go of even one of these can create space for something more meaningful.

PRACTICAL WAYS TO SET "LETTING GO" GOALS

Vanessa LoBue said in Psychology Today that she has taken to creating a not-to-do list.

"Instead of spending a little bit of time on everything, I

want to spend more time on the things that are actually meaningful to me, and less time on the things that aren't," she wrote.

Identify obligations or tasks that are no longer fulfilling to

reduce burnout. Tiny Buddha recommends writing out each goal you've ever had, imagining what it would be like to live without those goals, and then come to peace with it and let it go.

Focus on the journey and shift focus from the end result to the experience of personal growth. Practice self-compassion. Allow yourself grace when goals aren't met, rather than giving in to disappointment.

Use daily reminders or affirmations to release, such as "I choose to let go of this, to make space for ...". Tiny Buddha recommends doing this at the beginning of each day. Make it part of your morning routine to ask yourself not how much you accomplished the previous day, but how fulfilling the day was. Commit to being grateful for the good things that happened the day before.

SMALL RELEASES, BIG IMPACT

Letting go doesn't have to mean dramatic change. It can start small.

That might look like stepping back from an obligation that no longer feels meaningful, limiting time spent on draining activities or setting boundaries around work and personal time. It could mean releasing the expectation to do everything perfectly, or to meet goals on an inflexible timeline.

As the year begins, consider pairing your goals with a question of release. What can you set down in order to move forward?

Choose a Word of the Year

For many people, New Year's resolutions come with pressure — set a goal, stick to it and measure success or failure by how long it lasts.

An alternative approach, however, is gaining traction: choosing a single word to guide the year ahead.

Rather than focusing on a specific outcome, a “word of the year” offers a theme, something to return to, reflect on and interpret over time.

A GENTLER APPROACH TO CHANGE

The idea is simple. At the start of the year, you select a word that resonates: Balance, courage, focus, rest. Instead of tracking progress through checklists, the word becomes a touchstone for decision-making and perspective.

Rev. Kristin Stroble has written about a similar practice known as star words, in which participants receive a single word printed on a star on Epiphany and reflect on its meaning throughout the year.

“I’m not one for New Year’s resolutions because — let’s be honest — they always seem to fail,” Stroble wrote in the *Presbyterian Outlook*. “Instead, these star words have become my practice for the New Year. Instead of making a resolution that I’ll feel guilty about a week later, I take a star word



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as a gift and keep my eyes open. ... They’ve been challenging, life-giving and transformative.”

While rooted in a faith tradition, the concept translates easily into everyday life.

ROOM FOR INTERPRETATION

Unlike traditional resolutions, a word of the year is intentionally flexible. It doesn’t demand immediate change or perfection. Instead, it invites attention.

A word such as connection might prompt someone to reach out more often to

friends and family. Health could mean physical activity for one person and prioritizing rest for another. The meaning can shift as circumstances change, making the practice adaptable rather than rigid.

This flexibility can make it easier to sustain. There’s no moment of failure; only opportunities to return to the word and reconsider what it might mean.

CHOOSING A WORD

While star words are drawn randomly, many people choose their words with in-

attention. Author and artist Morgan Harper Nichols shares a list of ideas every year. She recommends that if someone is struggling to pick a few words, write them in a journal and then let them sit for a few hours or a few days. When you come back, notice which one stands out the most and sparks your curiosity.

Others encourage picking a word that feels inspiring rather than burdensome.

Apartment Therapy recommended searching through a thesaurus or brainstorming a list of words before choosing

one that resonates. It also suggests choosing something that aligns with your goals and intentions, not the one you feel like you should do.

Once you’ve chosen a word, write it down and put it somewhere you will see it. Some ideas include writing it on a sticky note and putting it on a mirror. Getting jewelry made with the word or setting it as a screensaver on your phone or laptop.

As the new year begins, a single word may be enough. Not as a rule to follow, but as a companion for the months ahead.