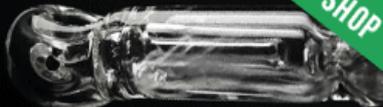




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For many cannabis enthusiasts, April 20th, or 4/20, is a special time of the year to celebrate the cannabis plant, fight for a change in drug policy, hit up a [canna-themed concert or event](#), or simply kick back and relax with friends. For those who are new to cannabis and unaccustomed with this unofficial holiday, however, you're likely curious about the significance of 420. Where does it come from? What does it mean? Why do we celebrate? *How* do we celebrate?



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Plan the Best 4/20 Ever This Year with Leafly's Events Calendar



You may have heard the term used in many different ways, but whether it connotes a time of day, a day of the year, or an entire lifestyle for you, 420 is what binds the cannabis community together. Though it originally spread as an internal cuckoo clock for a single group of smokers, the term now refers to the ongoing fight for nationwide legalization and the spread of accessible information within both the medical and recreational communities. If you're passing the pipe or rallying for your freedom, "420" is all you've got to say to let people know that you know what's up. In the name of honoring the past and celebrating the present, here's a crash course in all things 420 – the myths, the legacy, and the glorious revelry.

Where Did "420" Come From?



The origin story of 420 has been obscured by various rumors. Some say that it comes from the number of chemical compounds in cannabis; others suggest that it matches up with a mythical 4:20 p.m. tea time in Holland; still others have stated that it coincides with [Bob Marley's birthdate](#), or the death dates of Kurt Cobain, Janis Joplin, or Jimi Hendrix. It has also been explained as a police code for cannabis use. All of these are fictitious.

The truth is that 420 originated in the fall of 1971 at San Rafael High School, 30 minutes north of San Francisco. A group of students nicknamed "the Waldos" (so-called for their wall-centric hangout spot outside of the school) caught wind that a U.S. Coast Guardsman stationed at the nearby Point Reyes Lighthouse had abandoned a cannabis patch somewhere in the forest on the Point Reyes Peninsula after becoming nervous that it could be found by his commanding officer, jeopardizing his career. Not wanting the cannabis to go to waste, Newman drew a map for his brother-in-law Bill McNulty, who passed it along to his friends, the Waldos.



All five Waldos were athletes, so they planned to meet at their school's Louis Pasteur statue after their team practices were over, at – you guessed it – 4:20 p.m. They would then smoke copiously before venturing into the forest armed with the treasure map, searching for the lost grow.

The search continued for weeks. Every day they planned to meet, the Waldos would remind each other in the hallways between classes: "4:20 Louie," a phrase that was eventually shortened to "4:20." Lamentably, the grow was never found. However, the Waldos continued to use their new code phrase to signal that it was time to smoke, and eventually to refer to anything cannabis-related.



"The Waldos" in 2015

This all came around the time that The Grateful Dead relocated from San Francisco to San Rafael. One Waldo's older brother, who managed two Grateful Dead sidebands, was close friends and smoking buddies with bassist Phil Lesh, giving the Waldos access to Grateful Dead shows, rehearsals and parties. One of the Waldos, "Waldo Dave" Reddix, even tagged along with the Dead as a roadie during a summer tour.

From here, the phrase spread through the Grateful Dead community and across the nation. *High Times* caught wind of the phrase and began using it liberally in the early '90s. Over the years, it has established itself as an irrefutable cultural phenomenon, working its way into everything from social media handles to tattoos. And even in 2016, the legend continues to evolve; in February, the Waldos tracked down Gary Newman, the Coast Guardsman whose cannabis patch catalyzed 420, and explained how he had played a role in cannabis history.



The Grateful Dead in 1970

The Waldos keep their old batik 420 flag and memorabilia locked away in a bank vault in San Francisco. While all five lead successful professional lives, they still keep in touch with each other, and continue to document their story at 420waldos.com. They are proud of their contribution to the cannabis community, and pleased that 4/20 is celebrated annually by so many around the world. "[The best part is] that on 4/20 people peacefully take a stand against the drug war and discuss tactics for abolishing prohibition," says "Waldo Steve" Capper on behalf of all of the Waldos, "[and] that people celebrate the consumption of cannabis and spend time with friends being happy."

How and Where is 4/20 Celebrated?



In the decades since its inception, 420 has been widely embraced as a de facto holiday for those who partake of the plant. You can attend a legalization rally, hit up a [local or regional event](#), check out a canna-themed concert, take a trip with your friends, or simply enjoy a [Netflix marathon](#) with your [favorite cannabis strain](#) in the privacy and comfort of your own home. No matter where you are, there's almost certainly something 420-inspired going on: check out the [Leafly Events Calendar](#) to find out what's up in your area.

If you join in the party (and you certainly should), make sure that you do so responsibly. Regardless of cannabis legality in your location, public consumption can still lead to a fine, so be smart about how you celebrate. Moderation is key – whether you're smoking, [vaping](#), [dabbing](#), or savoring [edibles](#), you don't need to impress anyone by blazing through enough to take down George Clinton and his entire Parliament-Funkadelic. Remember to hydrate throughout the day. [Chew on some black peppercorns](#) if you overdo it. And never, ever drive under the influence of cannabis.



Quiz: How Much Cannabis Do You Consume in a Year?

4/20 almost certainly represents cannabis consumption's yearly high point, but have you ever wondered how much you consume over the course of a full year? [Take this fun and easy quiz](#) to figure it out!



How Does a Bong Work? A Guide to the Water Pipe

Image Sources: [Sara Dilley](#), [Gabrielle Lurie](#) via [SF Evergreen](#), and [Wikimedia Commons](#)

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Jasmine Chase · Toronto, Ontario

Dont forget the amazing annocement in canada that marijuana will be legalized by 2017 !! epic history that Our Prime Minister Justin Treaudeau announced on all days 4/20 (he is a big supporter of legalization and promised that he would in his election campaign)
"In Canada, we will apply these principles with regards to marijuana. To that end, we will be introducing legislation in the spring of 2017 that ensures that we keep marijuana out of the hands of children and profits out of the hands of criminals." - Health minister Jane Philpott (ironic last name) lol

<http://www.vancitybuzz.com/.../canada-marijuana.../>

Like · Reply · Apr 22, 2016 10:32pm



Zimmy Z Zimmerman · Kent State University

This story is BS.. the big Street clock at Haight-Ashbury was stuck on the time 4:20 all during the summer of love.. so every day at that time the hippies would get high to celebrate the fact that the clock was right

Like · Reply · 1 · Apr 19, 2016 10:11pm



Jill Springer Forrest · Owner at Self-Employed

You're wrong, they are right. I've known the story of the High School kids since the early 70's. Please cite your version, if true, I'll gladly eat my preroll!

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Zimmy Z Zimmerman · Kent State University

Jill Springer Forrest those high school goons nothing to do with it

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Mzz Jennifer Steel

HAPPY 420! #CatchTheFuzz

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Happy 420 loves "Nanapuff"

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