420, n.

Pronunciation: Brit. /fɔːˈtwɛnti/, U.S. /fɔ(ə)rˈtwɛn(t)i/  


Etymology: < four adj. + twenty adj., apparently coined as a code word by high school students in San Rafael, California in 1971, with reference to 4:20 p.m., the time at which they repeatedly met to try to locate an unattended plot of cannabis plants. There is no evidence to support the explanation offered in quot. 1991.  

N. Amer. slang.  

Used to refer to marijuana, or to the action of smoking marijuana. Frequently attrib.  

Often used with reference to the time 4:20 or the date April 20th (abbreviated 4/20 in the United States), considered as occasions for smoking or celebrating the smoking of marijuana.  

1974 Red & White (San Rafael High School, Marin County, Calif.) 7 June 3/2 If you had the opportunity to say anything in front of the graduating class, what would you say... 4-20.  

1975 D. Reddix Let. 23 Sept. in 420waldos.com (O.E.D. Archive 2016) P.S. a little 420 enclosed for your weekend.  

1991 High Times May 20/1 [Quoting flyer distributed at Grateful Dead concert, Dec. 1990.] Four-twenty...started as the police code for Marijuana Smoking in Progress. After local heads heard of the police call, they started using the expression ‘420’ when referring to the herb... People began getting stoned at 4:20 am and/or pm... Now, there’s something even more grand than getting baked at 4:20. We’re talking about the day of celebration, the real time to get high, the grand master of all holidays: 4/20, or April 20th.  

1998 Spin May 50/4 One story that’s sure to make the rounds at this month’s 420 festivals in San Francisco and College Park, Maryland, features the patron saint of the kind bud, Jerry Garcia.  

2005 Skiing Mar. 43 [He is] an Alta local, ski industry insider, and marijuana enthusiast. No, ‘enthusiast’ is not potent enough: Roy Dee’s a damn 4:20 aficionado.  

2006 N.Y. Times (National ed.) 7 May xi 2/3 A number of Craigslist users...say that they are ‘420 friendly’.  

2016 Vancouver Sun (Nexis) 19 May 5 A review of the 420 marijuana protest event last month showed it cost the city $148,000.