

The only comprehensive guide to south Indian festivals

Here is the wisdom of your aunts and grandmothers, never before collected in one place—and within easy reach. Beautifully designed, with over 1000 vibrant color photographs, and imbued with a warm, personal tone, *Follow the Hindu Moon* is a must-buy for every household— particularly those of expat south Indians—and a tribute to the family who worships together.

- Over 1000 colour photographs, beautifully designed, and presented in a stylish slipcase - here is the ideal gift for weddings and other festivals
- All relevant shlokams and sankalpas included
- Detailed walkthroughs of every festival with regional variations
- Instructions on religious etiquette
- Stories, mythologies and rationales behind each event
- Recipes for all major festival foods
- How to make kolams and festoons
- Pooja options—both quick and elaborate



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Hindu tradition has created a whole
year of festivals, vibrant,
colourful, and joyous.
To remember them all, you must

Follow the Hindu Moon

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Pongal quick view

Special purchases and requirements	Seasonal fresh vegetables in many varieties. Varieties of beans and peas from the vine, red and white pumpkin, yellow mochakottai (almost like black-eyed beans), sweet potato, yam, taro, and green bananas are all important vegetables Freshly harvested rice and lentils A metal plate to view the sun Sugarcane saplings Banana leaves and plants New brass or clay pot (known as vengalapanaï) Root ginger and turmeric on a stem with leaves (atleast two pairs if possible. One pair for the kolam and one pair for the neivedya) New clothes Usually whatever people use in the house on this day is new Pongal Seeru: gifts for the married daughter; A starter package for the newly married daughter: A ponga paanai, new pot Rice, lentils and jaggery (for her to cook) Ginger and turmeric roots Betel leaves, nuts, and fruits Flowers and kunkuma Any other additional gift		
Preferred fruits	All varieties of seasonal vegetables and fruits, especially sugarcane, bananas and coconuts, betel leaves and betel nuts		
Preferred flowers and leaves	All acceptable flowers or fragrant leaves Avoid bilva for the Surya pooja		
Special prayers	Surya pooja is performed outside the house with neivedya exactly when the sun enters Capricorn. Prayers: the <i>Aaditya Hridayam</i> , Surya Ashtotaram		
Neivedya	Essentials for the pooja: A salver with betel leaves, betel nuts, yellow bananas and an unbroken coconut Maha neivedya Payasam is optional, but is commonly made		

Walkthrough

Observance: auspicious ‘vishesham’ things to do

1. Clean an outer courtyard or balcony where the rays of the morning sun fall. A traditional mud courtyard is usually swept and the dust is settled with a film of thinned cow-dung that dries and hardens like an antibacterial pack.
2. Decorate the entryway to the house with mango-leaf festoons, flowers and kolams.
3. Have an oil bath. Women and men with long hair should dry their hair and knot the end.
4. Prop banana saplings near the main doorway or the pooja doorway.
5. Wear your new clothes, and wear auspicious accessories.

The pongal surya kolam and ratha kolam

Draw the surya and chandra ezhai wet kolam: a large image of the sun god with effulgent rays depicted as a resplendent face. Make a similar moon. The ‘face’ should look east (the nose should be on the east-west axis with the eyes to the west and mouth to the east. (See Book 2, Festoons and decorations: ‘Festival specific kolams’ p. 271).

Many families draw a chariot symbolic of Surya’s chariot within which they draw this Surya and Chandran. This ther or chariot kolam is a stylised rendition of the temple chariot with only one wheel shown. When drawing this kolam, the ther’s tip, the flag top, should be on the eastern side. The ‘ther kolam’ is drawn on any courtyard or other area where sunlight falls.

Some people draw Sarathy, Surya’s charioteer, and seven horses led by seven reins (or seven pairs).

Some families draw a wet kolam sum to the north of the ther kolam and a crescent moon out of kunkuma paste next to it.

The ropes pulling the chariot should be kept apart until the day after Pongal. In the villages, these kolams were usually on the street and on the morning after Pongal, in a display of collective harmony, families join these ropes from house to house.

Different families have different versions and the level of embellishment depends on the artistic skill of the person making the kolam. Often Sarathy, the charioteer, is depicted as Arunan, without legs. This has its origins in the story of two of Daksha’s daughters Kadru and Vinita. After the childless women were granted a special boon, Kadru laid a hundred eggs and her hundred children were born early, as snakes. Vinita gave birth to only two eggs but, despite her patience, they did not hatch. Unable to bear the suspense and her sister’s goading, Vinita cracked one of the shells, and a baby, incompletely formed and without legs, was born. This was Arunan, the charioteer of Surya. From the other egg emerged Garuda. This story attempts to explain the natural enmity between Garuda, the bird, and snakes as predator and prey.

Some people draw pulli or dot kolams of varying sizes and complexity.

Additions to the basic kolam include artistic renditions of sugarcane, the boiling pongal pot, and and other designs symbolic of the harvest depending on the creative interests of the person creating the kolam. For patterns, see Book 2, ‘Festoons and kolams’ (p. 271).

Decorating the kolam

- Decorate the kolam, placing dhruva grass (single blade grass) on the moon and the flower of the white pumpkin on the image of the sun. The white pumpkin’s flower, large and resplendent, is an apt representation of the sun.
- Prop three sugarcanes near the kolam of the sun or tie them in a tripod over the kolam. If only bits are available, place them on either side of the sun. Place at least one pair of the fresh ginger saplings with the ginger root and tender turmeric saplings along with their roots on the kolam. If this is not available, place regular ginger and turmeric root if you wish.
- Neatly arrange the fresh harvest or garden produce—often including sugarcane, pumpkins, valli yam and other vegetables—on the kolam. Also arrange fruits like coconuts and bananas, to make a beautiful and ceremonial spread.

The practice of placing a ball of dung in the centre of the kolam to prop up a pumpkin flower, ends with the last day or Margazhi on Bhogi.

A traditional Pongal pooja with its tripod of sugercanes and a beautiful spread of fruit and vegetables.



