

## **Rumbustious Ruling Romans Family Fun Activity: How to celebrate Saturnalia**

You don't need to be ancient or Roman to have some winter family fun like the Romans did!

Saturnalia was the ancient Roman winter celebration held in honour of the god Saturn. Many of today's Christmas traditions come from this celebration. Originally Saturnalia was held on December 17th but was later expanded from the 17th through to December 23rd. It was a time to stop all things 'serious', let go, and have fun. Unfortunately, Emperor Augustus (27BC – AD14) shortened the week to a three-day holiday because it was getting a bit too rowdy, rumbustious, and chaotic! The merry making of ancient Roman culture included exchanging gifts, feasting, party games and even decorating a tree.

It would have been very busy in the commanding officer's house at this time. Aurelia, the wife of the commanding officer at Arbeia Roman Fort wants to help you and your family create an authentic Saturnalia experience. Follow her easy steps to festive fun and see if you can spot any traditions in Saturnalia that are similar to your holiday traditions.

## Let's get dressed Try this fashion designer activity



Auralia has asked her personal slave to get the festive clothes ready for the celebrations. During this time of year brightly coloured fabrics such as red, purple, and gold were worn by the Romans. Slaves were treated as equals during Saturnalia and also wore their finest clothes. They were even allowed to sit at the head of the table with the Commanding Officers family! Appreciate your best clothes and dress up during this week. What colours will you and your family wear? Go all out and mix and match your wildest, best and brightest clothes, the Romans did!

**Try** this fashion designer activity and dress home-made paper dolls in colourful funky fashion. Create your version of the latest holiday season collection that would make any Roman feel like a fancy pants! Grab some paper and colour markers or crayons and design your own line of clothing. Why not create a few paper dolls and dress them in the clothes you have designed? You can also use a doll you have at home and any materials you have on hand to make some outfits and dress them up.

## Let's Decorate the home Try this yarn wrapped wreath activity



Auralia likes to decorate the commanding officers home with lots of plants, garlands and wreaths of ivy and holly, pinecones, candles and nuts. In addition, no home was complete without images of the God Saturn placed around the home. It was traditional to place the decorations on windowsills, over doorways, and in stairwells.

**Try** this yarn wrapped wreath activity and decorate your home like a pro. It is fun and easy to design and make your own wreaths using materials you have around the house. For inspirational ecological materials, take a walk in a garden, park or forest and collect natural elements to decorate your wreath. You can make your wreaths any size you like and experiment with materials once you get the hang of it, but the directions below are for a simple small size.



**Directions:**

**First** Trace two concentric circles onto some card or cardboard. You can use a small bowl and a small glass. You can also draw the circles free hand if you wish.

**Next** Cut out the circle in the centre to make your wreath shape.

Then Colour your wreath shape with a green marker, wax crayon or paint.

Next Tape one end of your yarn to the back of the cardboard and cover the circle by wrapping the yarn around the entire circle. TopTip: make small yarn balls that will fit through the centre of the ring to make wrapping easier. Once you have wrapped as much as you like, cut the yarn and tape or glue the end to the back.

**Then** Glue and tie decorations onto your wreath. You can use buttons, glitter, gems, pasta shapes, branches, cut out flower shapes, or natural elements. Let your imagination go wild! For an extra festive look weave sprig of holly through it too.

Finally Attach a ribbon or some yarn in a loop so you can hang your wreath.

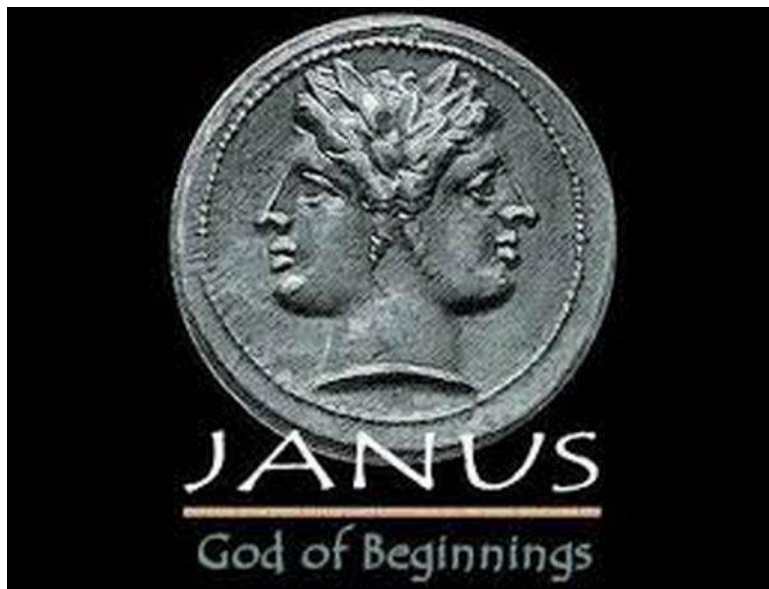
## Let's make Sun symbols & Stars Try this ornament activity



Using trees to decorate at this time of year has been a ritual for thousands of years. The commanding officer and his family are very lucky as they have an outside courtyard with plants and trees. During Saturnalia, Auralia has the children make sun symbols, stars and pictures of the two-faced God Janus who watches over the end of the old year and the beginning of the new one. The children hang these symbols on trees outdoors, as Romans did not bring trees inside.

**Try** this ornament activity and make some unique decorations for your tree, inside or out! Try to make some suns, moons, stars and even the two faces of Janus, to watch over you and your family. Below is a picture of the God Janus to help you. You can use the salt dough recipe below, clay, card, or anything else you have at home to make your decorations.





**Salt dough recipe:**

- 1 cup of salt
- 2 cups of plain flour
- 3/4 cup of hot water
- Acrylic paints
- Sealer (varnish or PVA)

**Method:**

- Add salt and plain flour to a bowl, gradually adding hot water.
- Mix together until a dough forms (make sure it isn't sticky).
- Air dry over night before putting your salt dough creations in the oven, 120 degrees for around 3 hours.
- Allow to air dry for another half day if possible to ensure the dough is fully dried out.
- Decorate with acrylic paints and seal with varnish or PVA glue.

## Let's bake Try baking Globuli Pastries



The commanding officer's family love to mix food with fun and games during Saturnalia. Auralia is in the kitchen with the children baking cookies. They hide a small bean inside one. The person who eats the cookie with the hidden bean is named King of Saturnalia!

The Romans cookies were different from those we enjoy now because they didn't use butter or sugar, and they didn't have baking soda or baking powder. Instead, they often substituted a sweet creamy cheese for butter and honey for sugar. For leavening they sometimes used eggs. This resulted in rustic cookies with flours, seeds, fruit, and oil.

Try baking Globuli Pastries, a traditional Roman Saturnalia cookie, recipe below, or make your favourite holiday cookies.

### **Roman Globuli Pastries:**

- ½ Cup Flour
- ½ Cup Ricotta Cheese (Whole Milk)
- ¼ Cup Honey
- ⅓ Cup Olive Oil
- 1 Raisin

Mix the Flour and Ricotta Cheese in a bowl with a fork until it forms a stiff dough. With wet fingers, roll dough into 1-inch balls. Inside one of those balls, hide a raisin. Heat oil in a pan on high, then lightly fry the dough balls until golden brown. When the dough balls are cooked through, roll them in honey. Chill and Serve.

## Let's Feast, have fun & Get Merry (or not!) Try creating a beautifully decorated invitation for family and friends



Auralia knows that the secret to a great Saturnalia party is good friends, great drinks and lots of food. The entire family would greet their guests with the traditional cry of “Io Saturnalia” pronounced “eeyo sa-tur-NAL-ee-uh”

An authentic Saturnalia celebration would feature a roasted pig and sausages, winter root vegetables fried in oil, fresh fruits, nuts and all sorts of drinks and plenty of them. A favourite holiday drink was made from wine and honey called Mulsum, or hot mulled wine with spices. Of course, Auralia did not let the children drink alcohol!

Before, during and after the feast everyone played trivia games and music, danced, sang, made lots of noise and even gambled. It was the one time where playing games of chance were legal. The children's favourite game was bobbing for corks in a tub of water!

Try making an alcohol-free version of Mulsum using the ingredients below as inspiration for your drink of choice. Make sure you ask an adult for help.

Choose one: Hot chocolate, Grape or Apple Juice, and add honey, pepper, clove, cinnamon, and ginger to taste. You can use one or more of these spices. Heat gently in a pan or in microwave. Allow to cool slightly before drinking. Enjoy!

Try creating a beautifully decorated invitation for family and friends to attend your special Saturnalia celebration feast. Use whatever materials you have around the house. Make sure your invitation includes the time and date and all the fun activities that will be going on.





## Let's Celebrate Freedom

### Try making a Pileus, a pointed hat to wear during your celebrations



Saturnalia was a period of freedom when everything was topsy-turvy and people's roles were reversed. What was considered abnormal was now alright and this meant that gambling, overeating, and disorderly behaviour was common place. During Saturnalia, it was traditional for all men to wear a pointed felt hat called a pileus. This wasn't just a silly party hat, but a hat that male slaves began to wear after they had been freed.

The slaves in the commanding officer home have been given their freedom during Saturnalia. Auralia knows that Saturnalia is one of the most important holidays for the slaves because they get some time off and enjoy being served a good meal with the entire family. Regina, the children's servant has just bitten into a cookie with a bean in it. HOORAY!!!, this means she is "King" of Saturnalia and can give the family crazy orders that have to be obeyed. What orders would you give your family and friends?

**Try** making a pileus, a pointed hat to wear during your celebrations. You can use newspaper, fabric, or other materials you have around the house.

Follow the simple directions below:

#### Steps

- Draw a large half-circle on your paper or fabric
- Cut out the half circle
- Fold to form a cone shape
- Staple, glue or tape at the base, and down the seam
- Decorate
- Now wear it

## Let's Tell Stories

### Try and write a story or poem about Saturnalia

Below are three objects found by archaeologists at Arbeia Roman Fort, a bone die, a candle stick, and a coin with the Emperor wearing a 'radiant crown'. This is not something he would ever have worn in real life, but is just symbolic, the spikes representing the rays of the sun, so here's a sun symbol for you!

**Try** and write a story or poem about Saturnalia using these three objects and any other information you have found out from this resource. Can you write a story about your own holiday celebrations? What objects would you include?



