

**50,000 years ago** – Wild date seeds from this era have been found in the Shanidar Cave of northern Iraq. The date features as the main food source for early cave dwellers.

**6,000 B.C.** –The Date Palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*) originates in the Persian Gulf region.

**5,000 B.C.** – The Sumerians, located in southern Mesopotamia (southeastern Iraq), cultivate the date palm as a food staple and find many uses for the rest of the tree. Its leaves are woven into devices such as baskets, its wood serves as a building material, and other parts produce rope.

**Circa 4,000 B.C.** – Hebrew scripture in the Old Testament Book of Genesis places the Garden of Eden at the juncture of the Tigris and Euphrates River, a location that would be situated in modern day Iraq.

**1792-1750 B.C** – Babylonian ruler Hammurabi's 200-article decree lists some 7 devoted solely to date palms, including a fine of 225 grams of silver to be levied against any subject who dares cut down a palm tree.

**Circa 5 B.C** – In the Qur'an it is said that date palm leaves sheltered Mary during Jesus's birth and that she ate fresh dates to ease her labor pains:

And the pangs of childbirth drove her unto the trunk of the palm-tree. She said: Oh, would that I had died here this and had become a thing of naught, forgotten! Then (one) cried unto her from below her, saying: Grieve not! Thy Lord hath placed a rivulet beneath thee. And shake the trunk of the palm-tree toward thee, thou wilt cause ripe dates to fall upon thee. (Surat Maryam)

**7<sup>th</sup> century, A.D.**– The Qur'an mentions the palm tree 20 times. In one Hadith (prophetic saying), Mohammad likens the Muslim to the palm tree because its leaves don't wither.

**Circa 717-801 A.D.** – Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, an 8<sup>th</sup>-century female Islamic saint from Basra, Iraq, is believed to have maintained such an austere and righteous path that she even denied herself the pleasure of Iraqi dates. During an illness, a friend asked her if she desired anything.

How can you ask me such a question as "What do I desire?" I swear by the glory of God that for twelve years I have desired fresh dates, and you know that in Basra dates are plentiful, and I have not yet tasted them. I am a servant (of God), and what has a servant to do with desire?

(Margaret Smith, The Way of the Mystics: The Early Christian Mystics and the Rise of the Sufis, Oxford, 1978)

**1911 A.D.** – Bernard G. Johnson, the “father of the California date industry,” establishes a USDA experimental station near Mecca, California, and plants date seeds acquired from Iraq. The successful endeavor marks the birth of the industry: today over a quarter million trees in the Coachella Valley primarily produce four varieties native to Iraq, the Barhi, Halawi, Khedrawi, and Zahidi.

**1930s A.D.** – Iraqis contend that Americans steal an entire shipload of date saplings to plant in California in an attempt to replicate the exact taste and texture of a variety of Iraqi dates.

**1930s-1979 A.D.** – With over 627 known varieties of dates, Iraq becomes a world leader in date production and exportation, peaking in the mid 1970s. After oil, dates account for Iraq’s largest export market. Renowned especially in the Middle East, the quality of the Iraqi date is believed to be the result of specific soil conditions in Basra and other regions. At its height, Iraq has the largest date palm orchards in the world with over 30 million trees.

**September 1980-August 1988 A.D.** – The Iran-Iraq War sees Iraq’s date orchards decimated in the contested al-Faw Peninsula and Basra. The number of date palms throughout the country is believed halved by the war’s conclusion.

**August 2, 1990 A.D.** – Iraq invades and annexes Kuwait, doubling its oil supply and giving it control of nearly 20% of the world’s oil reserves. Four days later, the United Nations Security Council passes Resolution 661, imposing comprehensive sanctions on Iraq and establishing a committee to monitor them.

**January 15, 1991 A.D.** – The U.N. Security Council endorses a U.S.-led coalition to use military force to drive Iraq out of Kuwait. The Gulf War begins two days later.

**February 27, 1991** – Kuwait is declared liberated and hostilities cease. The ceasefire (Resolution 687) that follows Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait obliges disarmament of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). The Iraqi date groves further deteriorate as economic sanctions remain firmly in place, save for a U.N.-sponsored Oil for Food program later instituted to provide humanitarian relief.

**January 4, 1996 A.D.** – President Clinton sends a letter to the speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives in order to keep the Congress fully informed about U.S.-Iraqi sanctions efforts. In addition to seizing a \$6m shipment of oil, he wrote, the American navy seized 20 small sailing vessels carrying \$3.45m worth of Iraqi dates, acknowledging that Iraqi dates were up there in value with crude oil.

**2000-2004 A.D.** – The Al-Moosawi Date Company in Basra packages their dates in boxes bearing the label “Dubai Dates,” a company operating out of Sharjah, U.A.E. They are exported worldwide as “Product of the United Arab Emirates.”

**March 20, 2003 A.D.** – A U.S.-led Coalition invades Iraq, resolving to disarm it and discontinue what it believes to be Iraq’s continuing development of Weapons of Mass Destruction.

**May 1, 2003 A.D.** – President George W. Bush declares the end of major combat operations in Iraq aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln, in front of a banner reading “Mission Accomplished.”

**May 22, 2003 A.D.** – The U.N. Security Council lifts its sanctions against Iraq. Of the 16 million date palms that stood before the war, only 3 million survive, with groves now replaced by an expanse of charred stumps. Many remaining trees suffer from fusarium, a fungus, resulting from the use of depleted uranium shells in allied bombings, that attacks the crowns of trees and causes them to topple over, twisting their flaccid trunks.

**2003-2006 A.D.** – U.S.-based importers shy away from the importation of Iraqi products, due to prohibitive duties and shipping costs, as well as security-related charges and regulations.

**September 2006 A.D.** – Davisons & Co., in association with Sahadi Fine Foods, signs a contract with the Baghdad-based company Al Farez Co. for the importation of one ton of Khestawi dates from the Iraqi city of al Hilla, formerly Babel. The dates, bearing the label of the Babylon Iraqi Date Company, are expected to arrive in-store by mid-October if the shipment clears U.S. Customs and Border Patrol and Homeland Security inspections. Prices will reflect the charges and duties levied on the freight, representing the complexities involved in such a transaction.

*A house with a date palm will never starve.*

(Prophetic saying)