

January

Januarius (January) was named after Janus, a sky-god who was ancient even at the time of Rome's founding. Ovid quoted Janus as saying "The ancients called me chaos, for a being from of old am I." After describing the world's creation, he again quoted Janus: "It was then that I, till that time a mere ball, a shapeless lump, assumed the face and members of a god." Numa, Rome's second king, honored Janus by founding a temple for him.¹

Janus was originally pictured as a four-faced being (see ancient statue pictured on the right) but by the time January was created he was usually shown as having two faces and was thought of as the god of beginnings.

Plutarch said it was Numa who added this month to the Roman calendar. For additional information about January's entry into the calendar, see February below.

February

January and February were both created in the eighth century B.C., shortly after the time of Rome's founding. They were added to a calendar that had been divided into ten month-like periods whose lengths varied from 20 to 35 or more days. Those lengths are believed to have been intended to reflect growth stages of crops and cattle. The winter season was not included.

When introduced, *Januarius* (January) was given 29 days and put at the beginning of the calendar year. *Februarius* (February) was given 23 days and put at the end. Then, for an undetermined period shortly after Rome's founding, months were said to have begun when a new moon was first sighted. At some later time, month lengths were separated from lunations and again became fixed. At that time, February's original length was extended by five days to give it a total of 28. If you would like to read about other nations that also added five days to their calendars close to the same time see my [8th to 4th Century B.C. Calendar Changes](#).

February became the year's second month in 452 B.C., when the Decemvirs moved it from its original position as the last month.

According to Ovid's *Fasti*, February had 29 days during common years in the original Julian Calendar.²

March

Martius (March) was named after planet-god *Mars* and was originally the first month of an ancient Latin calendar. Mars was the Roman god of war, identified with the Greek Ares. As a god, Romans ranked Mars second only to Jupiter. A Roman legend had it that Mars was the father of Romulus and Remus, founders of the city of Rome.

After January was added to the calendar, March alternated with it several times in being the year's first month.

April

When writing about April, Ovid said "I have come to the fourth month, full of honor for you; Venus, you know both the poet and the month are yours."³ Someone later pointed out that "April was sacred to Venus, and her festival—the Festum Veneris and Fortuna Virilis—occurred on the first day of this month." Apparently *Aprilis* stems from *aphrilis*, corrupted from Aphrodite, a Greek name for Venus. Some oppose this, believing the month's name may have originated from that of a sky-god named Aper or Aprus.

May

Maius (May) was originally the third month of an ancient Latin calendar. Plutarch said it was "called Maius, from Maia, the mother of Mercury, to whom it is sacred..."

June

Junius (June) was originally the *fourth* month of an ancient Latin calendar. Plutarch said the month's name was "so called from *Juno*; some, however, derive them from the two ages, old and young, *majores* being their name for older, and *juniores* for younger men."

July

July was originally named *Quintilis* and was the fifth month of an ancient Latin calendar. It was later renamed in honor of Julius Caesar. His likeness is shown to the left on a Roman coin.

August

August was originally named *Sextilis* as the sixth month of an ancient Latin calendar. Over four hundred years after it became the eighth month it was renamed in honor of Augustus Caesar (Octavian) pictured on the left.

September

Septembris was originally the *seventh* month of an ancient Latin calendar. (*Septem* is the Latin word for seven.) September thru December were the seventh thru tenth months of a calendar used by the first Romans. An ancient historian described how they became displaced to two positions higher than their names would indicate. You can read his comments at [Plutarch on the Early Roman Calendar](#).

October

Octobris was originally the *eighth* month of an ancient Latin calendar. (*Oct* is the Latin word for eight.)

November

Novembris was originally the *ninth* month of an ancient Latin calendar. (*Novem* is the Latin word for nine.)

X

December

Decembris was originally the *tenth* month of an ancient Latin calendar. (*Decem* is the Latin word for ten.)