

THE DAY THE STRESS STANDS STILL

National Hammock Day is July 22. So are you ready to really relax?

July's holiday calendar is home to more than just the birthday of American independence; it also boasts the observance that celebrates our desired independence from stress. National Hammock Day is July 22.

"Celebrating is just as easy as settling into your own hammock and giving into the relaxing sway," said Frank Rabey, public relations guy for The Hammock-Source, the world's largest manufacturer and seller of hammocks.

But why celebrate a hammock? "If you have to ask, then you're exactly why this holiday exists," Rabey said.

"A hammock is a net for your body with holes just wide enough for your worries to fall," he elaborated. "It is, in essence, your own personal relaxation station."

While many holidays seem especially designed to actually *heighten* stress – Thanksgiving dinner with the in-laws, anyone? – National Hammock Day exists purely to celebrate ridding ourselves of unhealthy, unwanted worries and anxiety.

That's the hammock's function now, sure. But that was hardly the part this lavish lawn accessory played in ages past.

Far from the ready symbol of relaxation it has long since become, the hammock started out as something functional, not fun. Though sometimes said to have been "discovered" by Christopher Columbus, an early version of the hammock was being used as beds by native peoples across the Caribbean and the Americas for about 500 years before Columbus carried a few of the curious things back to Spain with him.

Hammock materials ranged back then from old fishing nets to bark from the hammak (thus, hammock) tree, palm fronds,



Some people just need that little added push to get into the true spirit of relaxation. So this National Hammock Day, do your part for those you care about, even if they fight it a bit at first. It's for their own good, after all ...

sisal rope and various indigenous fabrics. In the 1600s, the British Navy introduced a hammock of heavy canvas as its ship's bed, with the U.S. Navy having adopted the same practice by the time of the American Civil War.

Jump forward to the late 19th century, when Pawleys Island, S.C., riverboat captain Joshua Ward's quest for a cooler night's sleep led him to experiment with hammock redesign. Ward had no interest at all in Navy-style cocooning canvas hammocks, instead setting his sites on refashioning the inferior rope hammocks of his day; rope allowed for greater airflow around the sleeper's body. For his redesign, Ward started first with thicker rope – cotton rope, not the hemp or manila rope common then – and a lattice-like weave, which eliminated the need for the bulky, uncomfortable knots that were then standard within a rope-hammock bed.

Ward's true legacy, however, is the invention of the hammock spreader bar, a narrow piece of wood with holes bored in it for ropes to pass through, to hold his hammock open at both ends even when in use. No more cocooning fit; Ward's new hammock offered, for the first time, a relaxed, open reclining experience.

And with that, the classic American rope hammock was born, becoming in the century since the very paragon of leisure.

Now there's a history worthy of the most comfy of celebrations! So here's wishing your own National Hammock Day to be a testament to reinvigorating relaxation.

For more on National Hammock Day, an actual holiday, so says the Internet, contact Frank Rabey, (800) 334-1078, Ext. 241, or frabey@thehammocksource.com. He'll tell you stuff!