



# Look Before You Leap

by Sue Burgess



**Une année bissextile** (leap year) is a year with 366 (*trois cent soixante-six*) days and not 365. February (*février*) will have 29 (*vingt-neuf*) days. The term comes from the Latin *bis-sextilis*, which means *deux fois* (bis) *sixième* (sextus), that is to say twice (*le sixième jour avant les calendes de mars*) the sixth day before the Calends of March in the Roman calendar.

Since the adjustment of the Gregorian calendar, (*le calendrier grégorien*) the year will be a leap year IF:

- the year can be divided by 4 but not by 100 (*si l'année est divisible par 4 et non divisible par 100*)
- the year can be divided by 400 (*si l'année est divisible par 400*).

So, 2016 is a leap year, as was 2008 since it could be divided by 4. 1900 was not a leap year as it could be divided by 100 but 2000 WAS a leap year as it could be divided by 400.

The habit of adding an extra day (*journée intercalaire*) in order to catch up the difference between the civil year (*année civile*) and the solar year (*année solaire*) goes back to the Romans.

Julius Caesar (*Jules César*) instituted a 365 day year with an extra day every four years. This extra day was placed just before the 24th February (*le vingt quatre février*). Later on it was fixed at the 29th February.

The Summer Olympics (*les jeux olympiques d'été*) are held every four years – each leap year. However, the Games also took place in 1900 when they were held in Paris.

In the French republican calendar (*le calendrier républicain français*) the extra day was in the autumn at Revolution Day (*jour de la révolution*) generally the day after the 21st September.

Leap years (*les années bissextiles*) give rise to different proverbs and sayings:

- *Quand février prend un jour, souvent des catastrophes il est lourd* (when February is a day longer there are often a lot of disasters)
- *N'aie nulle peur de l'année bissextile mais celle d'avant et celle d'après* (Don't be afraid of a leap year, but of the one that comes before it and the one that comes after)
- *En année bissextile, garde du blé pour l'an qui suit* (In a leap year keep wheat for the following year)
- *L'année bissextile, soyez fin, semez du chanvre au lieu du lin* (In a leap year, be smart, sow hemp instead of flax).

Please note that [www.wordreference.com](http://www.wordreference.com) also gives 'cannabis' as a translation for *chanvre*.

## VOCABULARY / VOCABULAIRE:

a leap .....	un bond / un saut
to leap .....	sauter
a leap involving risk .....	le grand saut
leap year .....	une année bissextile
to look before you leap .....	regarder où on met ses pieds
quantum leap .....	un bond en avant
leapfrog (game) .....	saute-mouton
to leap at the opportunity to do something .....	sauter sur l'occasion



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to leap over something .....	sauter par dessus
to leap on the bandwagon .....	prendre le train en marche
to leap to conclusions .....	tirer des conclusions
to increase by leaps and bounds...	augmenter de façon démesurée
to leap for joy .....	bondir de joie
a leap in the dark .....	un saut sans l'inconnu
that's one small step for a man and a giant leap for mankind .....	c'est un petit pas pour un homme, mais un bond géant pour l'humanité