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# Tu Bishvat

*the greening of Judaism*

interfaithfamily

Supporting Interfaith Families Exploring Jewish Life

# Tu Bishvat

## What Is Tu Bishvat?

Jewish Earth Day!

A New Year for Trees!

A Jewish Arbor Day!

A great excuse for a party that anticipates

# springtime!



## Decoding The Words

*Shvat* is the name of a winter month in the Jewish lunar calendar.

*Tu* is 15

Every letter in the Hebrew alphabet is also a number:

**T** (*tet*) = 9 and **U** (*vov*) = 6.

The “*Bi*” means “of” or “with”.

Now you know how to decode the name. *Tu BiShvat* is both a date and the name of a holiday celebrated on that date; it’s understood in the same way as the Fourth of July.

## Origins

Originally a time for farmers to record the age of their trees so they would know which trees were old enough to harvest, it has become a time to connect Jewish values of taking care of the earth with contemporary concerns about pollution, climate change and the preservation of the environment.

In Israel, Tu Bishvat comes in the middle of the rainy season. In the Diaspora (the rest of the world), the harvest cycle is slightly different. In the northern hemisphere, it may be rainy or snowy this time of year. Just when you are bored with the grayness of winter, and wondering if you will ever be truly warm again, Judaism provides you with a reminder that spring and the sun will come again, bringing new fruits and flowers. In the southern hemisphere, Tu Bishvat comes in the peak of summer; not an ideal time for planting. But a welcome excuse to go outdoors and enjoy nature nonetheless!

## Trees Are Holy

Judaism has always seen trees as sacred. The Torah itself is called a “tree of life.”

The importance of maintaining an orchard is exemplified by Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai, a sage of the first century, who is recorded in *Avot de Rabbi Natan* (a homiletic text) as saying,

“ If you have a seedling in your hand, and someone says to you, ‘**Look, here comes the Messiah,**’ **go and plant the seedling first,** and then come out to meet the Messiah. ”

The Torah also forbids the cutting down of an enemy’s fruit trees, even in a time of war when the wood might be needed to attack a city.

These Jewish values can be connected to ecological activism on Tu Bishvat.

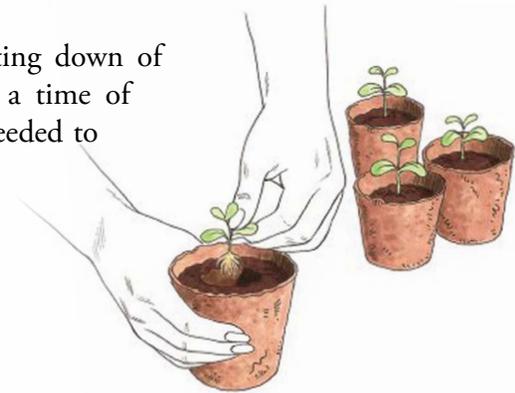


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## Caretakers Of The Earth

In the book of Genesis, humankind is instructed to be *shomrei adamah*, caretakers of the Earth, and of all God’s creations.

## How can we be caretakers of the Earth today?



RECYCLE AT HOME, SCHOOL, WORK AND EVERYWHERE ELSE.



PICK UP TRASH IN YOUR COMMUNITY;  
ORGANIZE A DAY TO TIDY UP AREAS IN YOUR COMMUNITY  
THAT ARE HEAVILY LITTERED OR FULL OF DISCARDED JUNK.



JOIN A CARPOOL, TAKE PUBLIC TRANSIT  
OR RIDE YOUR BIKE INSTEAD OF BEING THE ONLY PERSON IN A CAR.



VOLUNTEER TO WORK ON MAINTAINING TRAILS IN A NATURE PRESERVE.

RECYCLE OLD COMPUTERS, CELL PHONES AND ELECTRONICS BY  
DONATING THEM TO ORGANIZATIONS IN NEED.



SAVE PAPER BY RECEIVING BILLS ELECTRONICALLY/  
ENCOURAGING CHILDREN TO DRAW ON THE BACKS OF PRINTOUTS.

TURN OFF LIGHTS AND APPLIANCES THAT AREN'T IN USE; UNPLUG  
CHARGERS WHEN THEY'RE NOT IN USE.



LOBBY YOUR POLITICIANS TO ENACT LAWS  
TO PRESERVE THE ENVIRONMENT, ENSURING THAT FUTURE GENERATIONS  
WILL INHERIT AN EARTH THEY CAN ENJOY AND APPRECIATE AS WELL.

In these ways, Jewish values become part of our daily life.

## Activities With Children

Herbs are resilient and start growing quickly! Plant parsley seeds and learn how plants need water and sun to germinate and grow. Harvest the parsley and put it on your seder plate at Passover.

Have a scavenger hunt in your supermarket. Give out pictures of the produce of Israel: olives, dates, figs, pomelos, oranges, almonds and pomegranates. Then assign pictures to each child to find the fruits in the pictures. Another variation on this scavenger hunt would be to have children find the “seven species,” seven agricultural species listed in the book of Deuteronomy as being special to Israel. These include wheat, barley, figs, grapes, olives, pomegranates and dates.

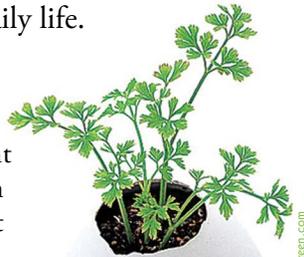


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## Tu Bishvat Seder

The most common seder is the meal we share on Passover, but *seder* just means “order” in Hebrew; any meal with a set lineup or procedure can be a seder.

Kabbalists in the Middle Ages revived Tu Bishvat, elevating it to be a joyous holiday. As a new year for the trees, they felt it deserved a new year's feast. With that, they created a seder.

Drawing on the imagery of the Tree of Life and of the New Year of the Trees, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria of Safed (a town in northern Israel) is said to have created this seder with his disciples. They gave special significance and meaning to the fruits and trees of Israel. The mystics in Safed believed that during their seder, eating ten specific fruits and drinking four cups of wine in a specified order, while reciting the appropriate blessings, would bring human beings, and the world, closer to spiritual perfection.

Many Jewish communities today celebrate Tu Bishvat with seders. While the Kabbalistic meaning behind them has been shed, other elements remain. Today, most Tu Bishvat seders are organized around four cups of wine and four types of fruit. Each cup holds wine or juice that is darker in color than the previous one. The first cup of wine or juice is white, the second is rosé, the third is a light red and the fourth is a deep red. Another common aspect to seders is that they all give meaning to the four categories of fruits, both the types of fruit and the order in which they appear. For many, the four categories of fruits and nuts are thought to relate to the four worlds of Kabbalah, four types of people and the four seasons.

**As there is no one, standardized Tu Bishvat seder, what follows is an example of the formatting and meaning one can glean from it:**

*Fruits and nuts with a hard outside and an edible inside, like walnuts, almonds, pomegranates, pistachios or coconuts.*

**Asiyah** (actualization): we open these fruits and nuts to reveal gifts that transcend their outward appearance.

**Winter:** everything lays dormant and hidden, but inside is the potential for more.

**People:** because a gruff exterior can hide one's true nature, we need to refrain from judging others based on appearances. They can also represent ways we separate ourselves from others. Eating these fruits and nuts reminds us that no matter who we are, we all carry a divine spark within.

*Fruits with soft exteriors and pits at their center, like olives, apricots, cherries and plums.*

**Yetzirah** (formation): these fruits remind us that every flowering tree was once bare, that growth can sometimes come from the innermost places.

**Spring:** the seeds in the center, though we cannot eat them, are signs of rebirth.

**People:** within all of us is untapped potential!



*Fruits that are entirely edible, such as raisins, grapes, apples, pears and raspberries.*

**Beriah** (creation): so much more will be created; so much more is yet to come!

**Summer:** though trees are full and green, their growth is not complete.

**People:** examining the fruit of our own creations and actions, we realize we can deepen our relationships in the world and with the Earth.

*That which is invisible to the eye. Instead of eating fruit, we enjoy sweet smells, like cinnamon, rosemary or bay leaf.*

**Atzilut** (presence, emanation, birth): all things are part of one another, connected. Like smells, connections can be subtle.

**Autumn:** as the cycle comes to the end, we're reminded that it will begin again.

**People:** we need to stop and take time to remember and appreciate what we cannot see.

Your seder can be a fruit-only seder or be combined with grains, vegetarian soups and salads to make a full meal. The goal is to make it an evening of fun learning, celebrating and honoring one of the four Jewish new years.

Because seders for Tu Bishvat continue to evolve each year, we recommend looking online for the best sources for readings and *haggadot* (books that outline a seder). See our listings at [www.interfaithfamily.com/tubishvat](http://www.interfaithfamily.com/tubishvat).

## Blessings For the Tu Bishvat Seder

The most common blessings said are for wine and fruit.

We say the same blessing for each of the four cups of wine at the seder that we recite on Shabbat:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגֶּפֶן.

BA-RUKH A-TA A-DON-AI  
EL-O-HEY-NU MEL-EKH HA-O-LAM  
BO-REY P'RI HA-GA-FEN.

Blessed are You, Lord our God,  
Ruler of the universe,  
Who creates the fruit of the vine.

[A traditional translation.]

Holy One of Blessing,  
Your Presence fills creation,  
forming the fruit of the vine.

[An alternative translation.]

The real focus of the seder is on serving fruit. We say this blessing for fruits that grow on trees, such as apples, pears, almonds, olives and dates:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הָעֵץ.

BA-RUKH A-TA A-DON-AI  
EL-O-HEY-NU MEL-EKH HA-O-LAM  
BO-REY P'RI HA-ETZ.

Blessed are You, Lord our God,  
Ruler of the universe,  
Who creates the fruit of the tree.

[A traditional translation.]

Holy One of Blessing,  
Your Presence fills creation,  
You create the fruit of the tree.

[An alternative translation.]

For fruits that grow in the ground, like strawberries, peanuts and rhubarb:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה.

BA-RUKH A-TA A-DON-AI  
EL-O-HEY-NU MEL-EKH HA-O-LAM  
BO-REY P'RI HA-A-DA-MA.

Blessed are You, Lord our God,  
Ruler of the universe,  
Who creates the fruit of the earth.

[A traditional translation.]

Holy One of Blessing,  
Your Presence fills creation,  
You create the fruit of the ground.

[An alternative translation.]

For grapes and other fruits that grow on vines, recite the same blessing as for wine.

## Connection To The Earth

In the beginning, God created Adam from earth – *adama* in Hebrew. Adam lived with Eve, in complete harmony with the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve tilled the earth, tended it, and the trees bore fruit which they ate; the world was perfect.

With every step or misstep, our relationship to the green world has become more distant. Exiled from the Garden, growing food only came from the sweat of Adam's brow. Cain, Adam and Eve's son, murdered his brother Abel and was punished by no longer being able to profit from the strength of the soil, causing him to wander the Earth. God sent a flood to cover the Earth and begin creation again, but soon enough man tried to leave Earth by building the tower of Babel.

*On Tu Bishvat we remind ourselves that we are one and the same as the Earth. Taking care of the world and all that grows will nurture us as well.*



**InterfaithFamily**'s mission is to empower people in interfaith relationships— individuals, couples, families and their children— to make Jewish choices, and to encourage Jewish communities to welcome them.

**InterfaithFamily** offers consultation and resources for synagogues, agencies and schools of all affiliations to assist them in their welcome and engagement of interfaith families and all those who are interested in exploring Judaism.

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