

*Tu B'Shevat* or the "New Year of the Trees" is Jewish Arbor Day.

The holiday is observed on the fifteenth (tu) of *Shevat*. Scholars believe that *Tu B'Shevat* was originally an agricultural festival, marking the emergence of spring. After the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.C.E., this holiday was a way for Jews to symbolically bind themselves to their former homeland by eating foods that could be found in Israel. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century Kabbalists created a ritual for *Tu B'Shevat* similar to the Passover *Seder*.

Today *Tu B'Shevat* has also become a tree-planting festival in Israel, in which both Israelis and Jews around the world plant trees in honor or in memory of a loved one or friend.

## **Plant A Tree**

**Bring Tu B'Shevat Home with You:** This festival has very ancient roots, going back to the practice of bringing the first fruits to the Temple. We can draw on those to bring this holiday into a modern focus.

Israel needs a prodigious number of trees, so planting one is never a bad idea. But we live in Schenectady, and this potentially lovely festival often gets lost in the bustle of our urban lives.

There are seven species of fruits and grains that are traditional on this holiday. They include wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, dates, honey, nuts with shells, and one new fruit you've never had before. You also need grape juice or wine. We are encouraged to use other fruits as well.

Put together a meal that uses some or all of these ingredients, which will give it a decidedly Middle Eastern theme and remind you of our roots. Use the occasion to talk to your family about trees that bear fruit and why they are important. Expand on this to talk about "living green". If you don't recycle in your home, now is the perfect time to start. Choose one "green" activity that you can do together:

- Start an herb garden on a window sill.
- Have a "green hour" where you turn off all the lights.
- Go paperless for a day.

- If you like craft projects, make your own paper from newspaper or rags, make some papier mache, or brew your own root beer from the seven species.
- Many people have a *Tu B'Shevat Seder*, in which the fruits are celebrated. If you want to do this, go to [this link](#), which will explain the practice. There are plenty of websites that can offer suggestions on how to do this mini-*Seder* as well. If you don't want to have a *Seder*, choose a few topics to talk about, such as vegetarianism vs. eating meat, or why the first fruits of the season are important.