

The Jewish Center

Holiday Guide to Tu B'Shevat

The semi-holiday *Chamishah Asar B'Shevat* (fifteenth of Shevat), the first day of Spring in Israel, occurs six weeks after Chanukah. The Mishnah calls it *Rosh Hashanah l'Ilanoth*, new year for the trees. Since ancient times, our people have observed the day by eating fruit grown in Israel. *Tu B'Shevat*, as the Festival is known, is modern Israel's Arbor Day, observed by planting trees. Although the holiday occurs in the middle of winter in the US, in Israel in January spring is already on its way.

In times past, it was customary to plant a tree when a child was born: a cedar for a boy and a cypress for a girl. Each child cared for his or her own tree as it grew. Branches from their very own tree were used as pole supports for the *Chuppa*, the wedding canopy, on the day of their marriage ceremony.

In recent times, the custom of the *Tu B'Shevat Seder* has evolved. This is a festive meal, reminiscent of the Passover seder, in which we eat from the Seven Species mentioned in the Bible: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates. During the seder, people also drink 4 cups of wine or grape juice ranging from all white (winter dormancy) to all red (harvest time), with mixtures of red and white symbolizing the spring and summer seasons as well. At the seder it is customary to sing songs and talk about trees and nature, and to think of our connections with the earth and the cycles of the growing season.