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The Campfire

Gather round for news, perspectives, and tales of Jewish summer camp.



The Garden of Giving

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It's rare that brand new camp programs integrate seamlessly into the hearts and minds of the camp community, never mind the hectic camp schedule. For those familiar with camp, the introduction of programs without camp "tradition", lacking in alumni connections and stories, nor part of any institutional history, often face many trials and modifications throughout the 1st year of implementation. This offseason however, a different seed was planted. It was a seed that spawned many more, as [URJ Camp George](#), in partnership with [UJA Federation](#) and [Kavanah Gardens](#), launched *Project Shlosha*.

The new *Shlosha* program originated as a Jewish Identity Building proposal submission to UJA Federation's Jewish Camping Initiatives. The intention was for the camp community to develop & use newly acquired land adjacent to URJ Camp George's existing property. The program has [Al Shlosha D'varim](#) at its core – namely the concepts of [Torah](#), [Avodah](#) and [Gemilut Chasadim](#) as guiding principles, and this summer, the land has been flourishing, literally! All activities were developed within the framework of one of the core concepts, and have been keeping campers and staff busy all summer.

Camp George's [Camp Craft and Teva programs](#) have combined with our 1st ever organic garden, aptly named, Gan Matan, the garden of giving. Consultation and training with Kavanah Garden's, Risa Strauss, led to the development of Gan Matan, an eighteen by thirty-six training garden, which also includes a refurbished welcoming hangar, new camping tents, a floating dock and a campfire for cooking. This first year at Gan Matan, campers focus on physically developing the land through greening initiatives while raising the level of our community's environmental consciousness through a Jewish lens. Each cabin in Barak, our oldest unit, has the opportunity to be tenders of the land, and is greeted with handmade teas and breads. They take part in action projects, such as creating mosaics and paintings, designing an irrigation system and making a green map of camp. Our middle unit, Kochavim, hikes and and participates in an overnight program, camping on the new land. Much effort is made to keep the garden healthy and the campers happy!

Now at the midway point of its 1st year, Gan Matan has taken organic to a whole new level. Along with great half-day programming and delicious lunches, we have seen our first fruits and veggies grow!!! Giant zucchinis, crispy cucumbers and tons of fresh herbs have all become staples of camp craft foods. Soon we will see our cherry tomatoes ripen and our green peppers too! The campers have continued to beautify the garden with mosaics in the hangar and stepping stones courtesy of one of our education projects. The overnights have been successful, and many staff have had the opportunity to run programs on the land, ensuring a prosperous future. Gan Matan is thriving! Not only does it serve as a place for kids to learn about gardening and the environment, the staff now have the opportunity to take days off there. With an eighteen person tent and multiple fire pits, this is the first time that staff have had a cost-free getaway to relax and enjoy.

Be sure to check out the latest photos and videos at www.george.urjcamp.org/blog

- Ely Rosenblum, Head of Outdoor Adventure, & Stephen Cohen, Director of Communications, at URJ Camp George