

Celebrate Tu B'Shvat: the New Year for Trees!



Produced in partnership with



UJA FEDERATION
of Greater Toronto

JULIA AND HENRY KOSCHITZKY
CENTRE FOR JEWISH EDUCATION

What is Tu BiShvat?

Tu BiShvat (the fifteenth day of the Hebrew month of Shvat) is one of FOUR new years in the Jewish calendar, celebrating the new year of the trees. Why do trees need their own new year? Well, in order to observe some of the agricultural laws outlined in the Torah, we need to know how old fruit-bearing trees are. In order to more easily keep track of trees' ages, the rabbis in the Talmud declared that on the fifteenth day of the Hebrew month of Shvat all trees turn one year older. So Tu BiShvat is kind of like a birthday celebration for all trees!

In recent years, Tu BiShvat has grown beyond an agricultural date. It is now celebrated as an ecological holiday - a day to hold gratitude for all that trees do for us and to think deeply about how we can be responsible stewards for our trees and the natural world more broadly.

How can you celebrate?

Shoresh is thrilled to share with you this resource guide to help inspire and enrich your family's Tu BiShvat celebration! For more information about Shoresh, our **nature-based Jewish programs**, and how you can **adopt your very own tree** in our Forest for the Future at Bela Farm, visit shoresh.ca.



10 Reasons to Hug a Tree Today!

“If not for the trees, human life could not exist.”

- Midrash Sifre to Deuteronomy 20:19

1. **Trees combat climate change.** Excess carbon dioxide (CO₂) is building up in our atmosphere and contributing to global climate change. Trees absorb CO₂, removing and storing carbon, while releasing oxygen back into the air. In one year, an acre of mature trees can absorb the same amount of CO₂ produced by a car driving 42,000 km.
2. **Trees provide oxygen.** In one year, an acre of mature trees can provide enough oxygen for 18 people.
3. **Trees cool off streets and cities.** Trees can cool a city by up to 3-5°C, by shading our homes and streets, breaking up urban “heat islands” and releasing water vapour into the air through their leaves.
4. **Trees save water.** Shade from trees slows water evaporation from thirsty lawns. As trees transpire, they also increase atmospheric moisture.



5. **Trees clean the air.** Trees absorb odours and pollutant gases (nitrogen oxides, ammonia, sulfur dioxide and ozone) and filter particulates out of the air by trapping them on their leaves and bark.
6. **Trees help prevent soil erosion.** On hillsides or stream slopes, trees slow runoff and hold soil in place.
7. **Trees provide food.** An apple tree can yield up to 15-20 bushels of fruit per year and can be planted on the tiniest urban lot. Aside from fruit for humans, trees also provide food for birds and wildlife.
8. **Trees heal.** Studies have shown that patients with views of trees out their windows heal faster and with fewer complications than those who don't. Furthermore, exposure to trees and nature aids concentration by reducing mental fatigue.
9. **Trees provide habitat for animals.** Maple, oak, pine, and basswood are among the many urban species that provide excellent urban homes and food sources for birds, squirrels, chipmunks and bees.
10. **Trees provide beauty.** What is more majestic to look at than a tree!?!

Inspired by our friends at treepeople.org



Get Outside: Meet a Tree

Did you know that the average youth can identify over 10,000 brand names and logos, but fewer than ten local plant species!?!? For many of us, trees can look similar to one another, especially in the winter time when many have lost their leaves. This activity encourages us to really get to know a tree, using ALL of our senses! Connecting to trees is important - when we understand how deeply interconnected we are with the natural world, we feel more inspired and empowered to act as *Shomrei Adamah*, protectors of the earth.

Instructions:

1. Pick a safe outdoor space with more than one tree.
2. Grab a partner- a parent, child, sibling, or friend! One person in each pair is blindfolded and the partner acts as their guide.
3. Guides should safely lead their blindfolded partners to a tree, making sure to alert their partners about potential tripping hazards as they go (for example, let your partner know if they need to step over a log or are walking down an incline...remember that you need to be their eyes while leading them!)

Continued on reverse side

What you need:

Blindfold



4. Blindfolded partners now have three minutes to “meet” their tree using all of their senses except for sight. Feel free to give some examples of how blindfolded partners can get to know their tree:
 - What does the bark feel like?
 - Does the tree have a distinct smell?
 - Does the tree have needles or bare twigs?
 - Are there branches low enough to reach?
 - How thick are the branches? How thick is the trunk? Can you wrap your arms around to give it a hug?
 - Are there any identifying features on the ground by the tree such as rocks, roots, or stumps?
5. Once the blindfolded partner has “met” their tree, the guide leads them away carefully (don’t forget to be their eyes!), trying to disorient them slightly.
6. The blindfolded partner can now remove their blindfold and, remembering all of the things they learned about their tree without using their eyes, try to identify the tree they just met!
7. Switch so that blindfolded partners and guides each get a turn to try each role.



Get Outside: Mah Rabu Nature Collage

In Psalm 104, we are reminded that there are so many different kinds of things in the natural world! Each creature, plant, and micro-organism is unique and serves a special function in its environment. This activity encourages us to get outside and witness and appreciate the incredible diversity we can find in our backyards!

What you need:

Mah Rabu card
(see reverse)

Instructions:

1. Pick a safe outdoor space to explore.
2. Place your Mah Rabu card on a flat, level surface.
3. Collect some beautiful natural objects.*

Here are some suggestions to guide your gathering:

- a. Find five different kinds of leaves
 - b. Find a stick exactly as long as your index finger
 - c. Find something that holds seeds (eg. acorn, pinecone)
 - d. Find something that makes you say WOW!
4. Decoratively arrange your items on the Mah Rabu card.

**It is important to respect the nature we explore!
Please think twice before deciding to pick a leaf or flower
that is alive!*



מָה-רַבּוֹ מַעֲשֵׂיךָ ה'
כֹּלָם בְּחָכְמָה עָשִׂיתָ
מִלְאָה הָאָרֶץ קִינְיָנְךָ

*Mah rabu ma'asecha Ado-nai kulam bechochmah
asita malah ha'aretz kinyanecha*

How great/many are Your works G!d, all of them You have made
with wisdom – the earth is full of Your creations.

Psalm 104:24



Eco Art: Grassy Heads

Did you know that trees are plants? And Tu BiShvat, the new year for the trees, is a great time to think about what ALL plants need to survive. This creative activity allows you to grow a mini “forest” of wheatgrass. Just make sure your seeds have everything they need to grow - sun, soil, water, and air!

What you need:

- Paper cup (you can try making your own using the origami paper provided in this kit!) or recycled container
- Potting soil (provided)
- Wheat seeds (provided)
- Materials for decorating (try using recycled materials you find at home and/or natural materials from outside!)

Photo credit:

theconnectedmama.com; toddlerapproved.com;
multipurposemama.com



Instructions:

1. If creating your own cup, assemble origami paper cup using directions provided. If using a recycled container, clean container well.
2. Decorate your cup or container with a face or body of a creature who will soon have silly green hair! Be creative - you can use crayons, markers, googly eyes, and any recycled materials you can find at home and/or natural materials you can find outside...the possibilities are endless!
3. Fill your cup or container with approximately 3/4 cup of potting soil (provided).
4. Sprinkle wheat seeds (provided) on the surface of your cup or container. Soaking seeds in water for 6-8 hours beforehand will increase their rate of germination, but is not necessary.
5. Cover your seeds with a very thin layer of potting soil.
6. Place your cup or container in a dish or shallow bowl. Place in a sunny, warm spot.
7. Water seeds daily. If possible, use a spray bottle so seeds are watered gently and evenly. The soil should be kept moist but not soaking.
8. Look for signs of growth daily!
9. Once your "hair" is 4-6cm long, you can give your creature a hair cut and add the (delicious and very nutritious) wheat grass trimmings to a salad or soup!

Tu BiShvat NOSH: Fruits and Nuts

The holiday of Tu BiShvat originated in Biblical Israel. Some people celebrate the holiday today by enjoying fruits and nuts from trees that grow well in Israel, such as pomegranates, figs, dates, and almonds. Southern Ontario enjoys a much colder climate than Israel, and so the fruit and nut trees that are native to the region of the world we call home are different (and delicious!). See the reverse of this card for some trees and nuts that are native to Southern Ontario. Can you find any of them now at your local farmer's market to use in your Tu BiShvat celebration? Are there any that you are eager to try once they are back in season?

Did you know???

Some people celebrate Tu BiShvat by hosting a seder, a structured meal with special rituals, modelled after the Passover seder. They eat different fruits and nuts throughout the seder to represent the divine presence in the natural world.

Our friends at Hazon (hazon.org) have developed a fantastic **Family Tu BiShvat Seder** that is available for download at <https://tinyurl.com/HazonFamilySeder>



Fruits and Nuts of Southern Ontario



Serviceberry
Amelanchier laevis



Black Walnut
Juglans nigra



Black Raspberry
Rubus occidentalis



Pawpaw
Asimina triloba



Butternut
Juglans cinerea



Pin Cherry
Prunus pensylvanica



Hazelnut
Corylus americana



Canada Plum
Prunus nigra

Tu BiShvat Ritual: Dipping Apples in Maple Syrup

We all love dipping apples in honey for Rosh Hashanah...so why not bring some sweetness into another new year celebration!?! Try this emerging Tu BiShvat ritual of dipping apples in maple syrup (both of which come from trees!) to celebrate the new year of the trees.

We hope you enjoy this unique and delicious way of celebrating trees and all that they do for us, while blessing our tree community members with a year of growth, health, and sweetness!

What you need:

- Apples
- Maple syrup
- Brachot/blessing card (see reverse)

Instructions:

1. Slice apples, removing core and seeds
2. Dip apple slices in maple syrup
3. Say a blessing (see reverse)
4. Enjoy!



Blessing said over fruit from a tree



Hebrew

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְרֵי הָעֵץ.

Transliteration

Baruch atah, Ado-nai, Elohei-nu melech ha-olam, borei pri ha-eitz.

English

Blessed are You, G!d, Creator of the Universe, who creates fruit of the tree.

Make it your own!

In addition to or instead of the traditional blessing, take a moment to hold gratitude for the trees that gift us with apples and maple syrup and think of a blessing to give to the trees for sustaining us through nourishing food and medicine.

Tu BiShavat is also a great time to celebrate our *local* trees so see if you can source local, organically grown apples and sustainably produced maple syrup from your neighbourhood farmer's market or grocery store!

