

TU BISHVAT

Tu Bishvat is a Jewish holiday occurring on the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Shevat. It is also called *Rosh HaShanah La'llanot* literally 'New Year of the Trees'. In contemporary Israel, the day is celebrated as an ecological awareness day, and trees are planted in celebration.

Traditionally, Tu Bishvat was not a Jewish festival. Rather, it marked an important date for Jewish farmers in ancient times. The Torah states, "When you enter the land [of Israel] and plant any tree for food, you shall regard its fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden for you, not to be eaten" (Leviticus 19:23). The fruit of the fourth year was to be offered to the priests in the Temple as a gift of gratitude for the bounty of the land, and the fifth-year fruit—and all subsequent fruit—was finally for the farmer. This law, however, raised the question of how farmers were to mark the "birthday" of a tree. The Rabbis therefore established the 15th of the month of Shevat as a general "birthday" for all trees, regardless of when they were actually planted.



Fruit trees were awarded special status in the Torah because of their importance in sustaining life and as a symbol of God's divine favor. Even during times of war, God warns the Israelites, "When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees..."

In modern times, Tu Bishvat has become a symbol of both Zionist attachment to the land of Israel as well as an example of Jewish sensitivity to the environment. Early Zionist settlers to Israel began planting new trees not only to restore the ecology of ancient Israel, but as a symbol of renewed growth of the Jewish people returning to their ancestral homeland. Tu Bishvat by contributing money to the Jewish National Fund, an organization devoted to reforesting Israel.

For environmentalists, Tu Bishvat is an ancient and authentic Jewish "Earth Day" that educates Jews about the Jewish tradition's advocacy of responsible stewardship of God's creation as manifested in ecological activism. Among them, contemporary versions of the Tu Bishvat seder, emphasizing environmentalist concerns, are gaining popularity.

Tu Bi Shvat in Rhodes

On Tu Bishvat, it was the custom in Rhodes to exchange plates filled with fruit, sweets and wine throughout the community.

The children were bearers of the exchange. The children would carry a little hand-made satchel called "tallega" around their neck. As they stopped at each home, they would be given a treat of some kind of sweets, which they would accumulate in their satchel.