

Tu B'Shvat



Tu BiSh'vat or the "New Year of the Trees" is Jewish Arbor Day. The holiday is observed on the 15th (*tu*) of the Hebrew month of Sh'vat. Scholars believe that originally Tu BiSh'vat was an agricultural festival, marking the emergence of spring. Although the celebration of Tu BiSh'vat has a long and varied history, the theme most commonly ascribed to the holiday today is the environment. It is considered a festival of nature, full of wonder, joy, and thankfulness for God's creation in anticipation of the renewal of the natural world. During this festival, Jews recall the sacred obligation to care for God's world, and the responsibility to share the fruits of God's earth with all.

In the 17th century, Kabbalists created a ritual for Tu BiSh'vat that is similar to a Passover seder. Today, many Jews hold a modern version of the Tu B'Shevat seder, whereby foods native to the land of Israel such as barley, dates, figs, grapes, pomegranates, olives, and wheat are typically eaten.



In modern times, Tu BiSh'vat was nourished by the rise of the Zionist movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which re-emphasized the Jewish people's connections to the land and the natural world. It was the Zionist pioneers who, with strong financial support from Jews throughout the world, donated trees to mark *smichot* (special occasions) and re-forested the land of Israel, largely under the auspices of the Jewish National Fund (*Keren Kayemet l'Yisrael*). As a result of this emphasis on tree planting, on Tu BiSh'vat and all year long, Israel stands as the only country in the world with an almost constant net *growth* of trees.

The holiday has become a tree-planting festival in Israel, in which Israelis and Jews around the world plant trees in honor or in memory of loved ones and friends

