

Tu B'Shvat, the "New Year of the Trees,"

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The origin of Tu B'Shvat, the "New Year of the Trees," is found in the Mishna (Rosh Hashanah 1:1)

It is an agricultural deadline for determining the age of fruit trees, which dictates tithes and the prohibition against eating fruit during the first three years (Orlah). Established as the 15th of Shevat by Beit Hillel, it marks the start of the spring sap rise in Israel.

Historical Evolution:

- **Ancient Agricultural Origin:** The date was, and is, used to calculate agricultural years for fruit, separating one year's crop from the next according to Torah law.
- **Talmudic Basis:** It is one of the four "New Years" mentioned in the Talmud for agricultural, rather than liturgical, purposes.
- **Kabbalistic Influence (16th Century):** Rabbi Yitzchak Luria (the Ari) and his disciples in Safed introduced a Tu B'Shvat Seder, which involves eating fruits and drinking four cups of wine to represent the "Tree of Life" and spiritual repair.
- **Modern Zionist Context:** In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was transformed into a festival of ecological awareness, with tree-planting ceremonies to symbolize the Jewish return to the land of Israel.

Today, the day is marked by eating fruits (especially the "Seven Species" of Israel), holding modern seders, and planting trees.