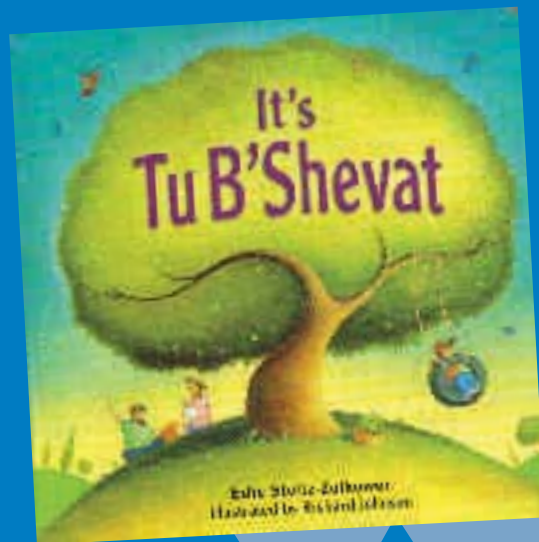




It's Tu B'Shevat

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Other Books About Tu B'Shevat:

Behold the Trees by Sue Alexander

Grandpa and Me on Tu B'Shevat by Marji E. Gold-Vukson

Joshua's Dream by Sheila Segal

Pearl Plants a Tree by Jane Breskin Zalben

Sammy Spider's First Tu B'Shevat by Sylvia Rouss

The Never-Ending Greenness by Neil Waldman





Tu B'Shevat

Believe it or not, *Tu B'Shevat* is one of four new years in the Jewish calendar. *Tu B'Shevat* marks the New Year of the Trees and has many similarities to the American Arbor Day. It is a time when Jews around the world give thanks for trees and eat foods native to Israel in appreciation of the fruits they offer.

The name *Tu B'Shevat* refers to the date in the Jewish calendar on which the holiday occurs: the 15th day of the month of Shevat. (*Tu* represents the Hebrew letters *tet* and *vav*, which together form the alpha-numeric expression of the number 15.)

Historically, *Tu B'Shevat* marked the beginning of the fruit harvest in Israel. Farmers would offer tithes (one tenth of their crop) which would be sent as gifts to the Temple in Jerusalem. In ancient times this minor holiday also was used as a marker for the age of a tree.

In the 17th century, mystics in Safed, Israel, created a special celebratory *seder* (meal with a traditional order of events) for *Tu B'Shevat*, reminiscent of the Passover *seder* in that four cups of wine are consumed. At *Tu B'Shevat* the cups of wine vary in color from white to light pink to dark pink and finally red, symbolic of the four seasons.

While it might seem a bit odd to celebrate a holiday devoted to trees and harvest in January or February, this is the time during the secular/solar calendar at which *Tu B'Shevat* falls. In Israel, the land is dry and trees are blooming! *Tu B'Shevat*, then, marks the unofficial beginning of springtime. At this beautiful season of the year, Israeli school children often visit the forests of the Jewish National Fund where they plant trees to help rebuild the land.



This story offers several suggestions of the many gifts that trees give the world. Why are trees important to you? Why is it important to plant trees? Point out to your child all the things in your house that originally came from trees.

Take a walk with your children and look at some particularly big trees in your neighborhood. Together try to imagine what the world must have looked like when that tree was planted.

Plant! A fun project is to plant some parsley seeds in a styrofoam cup. Draw a face on the side of the cup. Once the parsley spouts, it looks as if it is the hair on the head of the face. Then you can use the parsley at your Passover *seder*!

Create a *Tu B'Shevat seder*. You can look for models on the Internet or in Jewish books, or create your own. Sing songs with your children, pile your table high with different kinds of fruit and nuts (extra points for foods from Israel) and talk about where the foods come from.

Donate money to have a tree planted in Israel through the Jewish National Fund. As a family decide if you would like to plant that tree in honor or in memory of someone special.

Tu B'Shevat is a wonderful time to focus on ecology and environmental responsibility. Think of ways your family can help preserve our beautiful world.