



To help enrich your appreciation of the upcoming holiday, Kolel is happy to provide this “fact sheet.” We hope it helps you prepare both spiritually and physically. Please feel free to study with us any time at [www.kolel.org](http://www.kolel.org) or at any of our classes at the Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre, the Bathurst Jewish Community Centre, or the Family Resource Centre at the Promenade. You can reach us at 416-636-1880 ext 255.



## TU B'SHVAT

### WHAT IS IT?

The fifteenth day of the month of Shevat—literally! The Hebrew letters tet and vav equal the number 15 and are not an actual word but the sound those two letters make when put together. Pronounced in Hebrew “Too bih-sh’vat” with the accent on “too”.

Also called Rosh Hashanah La-ilanot (New Year of the Trees) and Chag Ha-ilanot (festival of the trees.)

### WHY IS IT?

The Talmud tells us that the fifteenth of Shevat was “the new year of/for the trees.” It was the date for deciding when the trees in Israel were mature enough so that their fruit could be harvested, and the annual tithe on fruit trees could be collected. The tithe was based on the age of a tree, as was the ability to eat of its fruit (no fruits are to be eaten in the first three years after a tree’s planting, from Leviticus 19:23-25); so Tu B’shtvat became the marker of a tree’s “birthday.” By then the early winter rains were mostly over and the period of budding had begun.

### WHEN IS IT?

The 15th of the Hebrew month Shevat, which usually falls around February.

### WHERE IS IT FROM?

The Talmud, the Mishnah in Rosh Hashanah 1:1 cites four dates as “new years”—the first of Nisan for kings, the first of Elul for tithing cattle, the first of Tishre for the world itself, and the first of Shevat for trees, though Hillel teaches it is the 15th, and it is his opinion we follow.

### WHAT DO WE DO?

No rituals except those dealing with the tithes were established for Tu B’shtvat so in time “folk” traditions became its rituals. Beginning in the late

16th century the custom of eating fruits from the Land of Israel on Tu B’shtvat arose. By the end of the 17th century a kabbalistic (mystical) tradition of preparing a Tu B’shtvat Seder had become popular, and is being revived today. Verses about trees and the land are recited, songs of nature are sung, fruits are blessed and eaten, and four cups of wine are drunk: using white and red the colour is changed from white to light red, half and half, and finally all red to symbolize the changing of the seasons. It has also become a tradition to plant trees in Israel through the Jewish National Fund (JNF) at this time, in honour or in memory of loved ones. Tu B’shtvat symbolizes our connection to the land and our stewardship of our own natural resources, and has become a time for Jewish ecological concerns to be shared and taught. The verse “Is the tree of the field a man that it should come under siege before you?” (Deuteronomy 20:19), forbidding the cutting down of fruit trees even in times of war, reminds us that our lives are bound up with nature, and that we and nature are not as separate as our modern culture suggests. And of course the tree is central in Jewish thought—the Torah is our “Tree of Life.” Though Tu B’shtvat arrives in the Diaspora during the winter we remember that spring—and thus renewal and rebirth—is on the way.

### WHAT DO WE EAT?

We eat foods made from or directly of the seven species of Israel: olives, grapes, wheat, barley, figs, dates and pomegranates. Many people add carob (known as bokser) and almonds, which bloom in Israel just around Tu B’shtvat; and eat a new fruit which they haven’t tasted yet that year, or ever!

### WHAT DO WE SAY?

There is no special greeting for Tu B’shtvat.