



Venture into Tu B'Shevat



What is Tu B'Shevat?

For 2-4 year olds:

The words "*Tu B'Shevat*" actually are a date on the calendar. The Hebrew calendar's months have different names than the ones we are used to and one of them is called "*Shevat*." *Tu B'Shevat* means the 15th day of the month of *Shevat* and that's the day we celebrate the "birthday of the trees."

The Torah says that we should not eat the fruit from brand new baby trees. We should not eat any until the tree is five years old, so the tree has time to get big and strong. But, since trees are planted at all different times, it might be hard to remember all the different birthdays. To make it easier, the Rabbis decided that the 15th of *Shevat* would be the birthday for all trees.

Tu B'Shevat comes later in the winter when it's not so rainy anymore and the dirt is ready for trees to be planted. Sometimes we also call Tu B'Shevat "Israel's Earth Day" and we remember that it's our job to take care of the trees and the earth.

For 5-9 year olds:

The words "*Tu B'Shevat*" mean "the 15th day of the month of *Shevat*."

The Torah says that, when you plant a new tree, you shouldn't eat its fruit for the first three years of its life. You should just let it grow, leaving any fruit on the tree. In the fourth year, farmers should offer the fruit to the Temple as a thank you for the land and the harvest, and then finally, in the fifth year, the farmer could keep all the fruit.

But, the question is: how would all the farmers keep track of the "birthday" of a tree — how would they know when each tree was ready to harvest if they planted them at all different times of the year? The Rabbis decided that the 15th of the month of *Shevat* would be a general "birthday" for all trees, regardless of when they were actually planted. So, even if a tree was planted in another month or on another day, they still counted the 15th of *Shevat* as its birthday.

Why the 15th of *Shevat*? This date comes after the middle of winter (usually in February), when most of the rain in Israel has already fallen, leaving the soil damp and ready for the planting of new trees.

Tu B'Shevat is often called "Israel's Earth Day" or "Israeli Arbor Day." Sometimes, this day is celebrated as a way to remind Jews of our duty to care for the natural world.

For ages 10+

The words "*Tu B'Shevat*" literally refer to the 15th day of the month of *Shevat*. "*Tu*" stands for the Hebrew letters "*tet*" and "*vav*", which together have the numerical value of 9 and 6, adding up to 15. But there are several reasons we celebrate "the birthday of the trees" on this date.

The Torah says that any fruit that grows on newly planted trees should not be eaten for the first three years. In the fourth year, farmers should offer the fruit to the Temple as a thank you for the land and the harvest, and then finally, in the fifth year, the farmer could keep all the fruit. But — how would all the farmers keep track of the "birthday" of a tree — how would they count the years? The Rabbis decided that the 15th of the month of *Shevat* would be a general "birthday" for all trees, regardless of when they were actually planted.

Why this date? Tu B'Shevat falls after mid-winter (usually in February), when most of the annual rainfall in Israel has already fallen, leaving the soil ready for the planting of new trees.

Tu B'Shevat is often called "Israel's Earth Day" or "Israeli Arbor Day." Sometimes, this day is celebrated as a way to remind Jews of our duty to care for the natural world.