

Shemítah on
One Foot





The *shemita* year is here and its details are many. In order to review all of the laws of *shemita* and learn them systematically, a book is necessary. For this reason, we put out *The Consumer's Guide to Shemita*, which covers the laws of *shemita* in a comprehensive fashion.



Upon popular request, we also put together a practical, abbreviated guide on the laws of *shemita* that apply on a daily basis. These laws are presented without sources or references. Those interested in delving deeper into the topic can refer to *The Consumer's Guide to Shemita*. It is our hope and prayer that this booklet will be helpful to the Jewish People.





Consumerism during *shemita*

Every year we should try to buy fruits and vegetables only from stores with *kashrut* certification and during the *shemita* year much more so. When you don't know the source of fruits or vegetables, keep two things in mind:

-  **The *sefichin* prohibition** – *Chazal* forbid eating vegetables that began growing during the *shemita* year. Vegetables sold in the market without *kashrut* certification could be forbidden to eat due to *sefichin*.
-  ***Kedushat shevi'it*** – Fruits and vegetables that have *kedushat shevi'it* (*shemita* sanctity) should be handled as such and it is forbidden to buy or sell them.

If you received fruits or vegetables and don't know their source, refer to the *shemita* calendars on the Torah VeHa'aretz website: if during this time of the year, vegetables might be *sefichin*, they should not be eaten. Fruits and vegetables that at this point generally have *kedushat shevi'it* should be handled as such.

What will be in the supermarket?

During the *shemita* year it is forbidden to work the ground as usual and grow fruits and vegetables like any other year. To supply produce to the general produce in Israel, there are several solutions. Consumers have several options to buy their groceries:

Stores with various *Badatz* certifications

These stores sell produce imported from abroad or *yivul nochri*, produce grown in fields of non-Jews in the Land of Israel. This does not support Jewish farmers in Israel or our stronghold on the Land of Israel.



Stores with regular *kashrut* certification

These stores sell various types of produce: imports, *yivul nochri*, and produce from Jewishly-owned fields sold to non-Jews through *heter mechirah*.

Otzar Ha'aretz stores

Otzar Ha'aretz is a unique initiative to sell the most preferable produce during the *shemita* year. This program brings consumers fruits and vegetables grown by Jews, based on the most optimal halachic ranking during the *shemita* year.



- 1 Otzar beit din.** Fruits and vegetables that grow in fields where *shemita* laws are observed in full. It is preferable to buy such produce since (1) it has *kedushat shevi'it* and (2) in this way we support *shemita*-observant farmers.
- 2 Sixth-year produce.** Fruits and vegetables grown during the 6th year and stored in refrigerators. This produce does not have *kedushat shevi'it*.
- 3 Detached platforms.** Vegetables that grew in hot houses on platforms detached from the soil. These vegetables do not have *kedushat shevi'it*.
- 4 Aravah / Olei Mitzrayim.** Vegetables that grew in southern Israel in these areas the laws of *shemita* are less strict. Vegetables grown there at the beginning of *shemita* have *kedushat shevi'it* while those that grow during *shemita* rely on *heter mechirah lechumra* and don't have *kedushat shevi'it*.

When purchasing produce in Otzar Ha'aretz stores, look at the signs on the produce. If the produce is from *otzar beit din* it has *kedushat shevi'it*; if the produce is from other sources, it does not. Produce from *otzar beit din* should not be purchased at greater quantities than the amount purchased for average weekly groceries and should be handled as sacred.

Ready-made food during *shemita* (restaurants, catering)

Besides all of the other *kashrut*-related details, check out the sources of fruits and vegetables. Most businesses with a *mehadrin* certification use *yivul nochri* or imports. Most businesses with regular *kashrut* certification use *heter mechirah* produce.

Buying flowers

During *shemita*, only buy bouquets from stores that keep the laws of *shemita* and whose flowers were not planted during *shemita*.



Kedushat shevi'it in the kitchen

The Torah commands us to safeguard the sanctity of *shemitah* produce. Produce with *shemitah* sanctity (*kedushat shevi'it*) can reach the kitchen in two ways:



Kedushat shevi'it applies to the produce itself and to any food it is mixed with. Ex: if oil with *kedushat shevi'it* is used to dress salad, the entire salad has *kedushat shevi'it*; if one *kedushat shevi'it* vegetable is in a soup, the entire soup has *kedushat shevi'it*.

Handling kedushat shevi'it produce

Food processing



It is permissible to process *shemitah* produce in conventional ways, but not in ways that most people do not process that given fruit or vegetable. Ex: grating melons, squeezing eggplants.



Shemitah produce may be eaten in the usual way, even if some might be wasted. Ex: It is permissible to eat half of an apple, even though the other half will spoil; babies can be fed a *shemitah* banana, even though they will not finish all of it. At the same time, it is best to try to eat all of the fruit or vegetable to minimize waste.

Leftovers

For peels, scraps, and leftovers of fruits and vegetables with *kedushat shevi'it*, proceed as follows:



Small bits that are insignificant and are generally discarded in the garbage (ex: leftover salad, soup, seeds) can be thrown away in the regular garbage. It is also permissible to wash bits of food stuck to the walls of a pot, on cutting boards, graters, etc.



Significant amounts (ex: plates with uneaten food, a significant amount of food left in a pot) of leftover food should be placed in a designated receptacle or bag (*pach shevi'it*, *shemitah* bin), when each type of leftover is in a separate bag (uncooked, raw). When the food begins to rot (after a few days – raw food; two days – cooked food; liquids – keep out uncovered overnight), it is possible to discard the food in the regular in a plastic bag.



If it is impossible to keep leftovers until they spoil (ex: public kitchens), bag edible leftovers (some are stringent to double bag) and place it in the regular garbage.

Using leftovers



Leftovers and scraps that are still fit for human consumption should not be fed to animals or pets. However, it is permissible to place peels at a distance from animals, and they can approach the peels and eat them on their own. It is also permissible to feed animals peels and leftovers that are not meant for human consumption.



Composters. It is permissible to place *shemitah* peels and scraps in your composter. Every time you add a new layer, first lay newspaper or clippings/leaves to separate them and the old peels that already began to rot. A week after adding the peels it is permissible to mix the composter.

Giving shemitah produce to non-Jews

While it is forbidden to give non-Jews *shemitah* produce, but one should not prevent them from taking produce with *kedushat shevi'it* on their own.

Taking shemitah produce outside of Israel

Shemitah produce is supposed to be eaten in the Land of Israel only. When flying abroad, **avoid** bringing food with *kedushat shevi'it*.





The home garden

You are responsible for what takes place in your garden, whether or not you are the one tending to it. If a professional gardener tends to your garden, make sure that s/he observes *shemitah* laws. If your garden is shared with others (apartment buildings), try to convince others to hire a *shemitah-observant* gardener for your joint garden. If you are unsuccessful, let them know that you will not take part in paying for gardening activities. Instead, your HMO dues will cover cleaning and electricity expenses.

Dos and don'ts during *shemitah*

- ✗ Do not plant or sow during *shemitah*.
- ✓ Water your garden during *shemitah* to maintain plants and prevent them from dying. Program your irrigation system to supply only the amount of water necessary to keep your plants alive.
- ✓ If you have an automatic fertilizing system, load it before *shemitah* with enough fertilizer for the year. If you fertilize manually, do so before *shemitah*. Slow-release fertilizer is best. Only if absolutely necessary, it is possible to fertilize to prevent the plant from dying.
- ✓ **Weeds** – It is permissible to weed if you are concerned that weeds will take over or provide shelter to pests. It is best to use herbicides, mow above ground with an electric scythe. Do not uproot, till, or hoe.
- ✓ **Pruning bushes, trees, and living fences** – Pruning is allowed to maintain the plant's shape. Likewise, you may trim full living fences for maintenance and trim tree branches that prevent passage or are hazardous. Do not prune to encourage growth or fill in the gaps of a fence.
- ✓ **Mowing the lawn** – You may mow full lawns regularly. Do not mow lawns with bald spots to encourage growth.
- ✓ **Non-agricultural/gardening activities** – It is permitted to perform such activities, such as paving roads and sidewalks and erecting supporting walls, without filling in the garden with dirt.

Garden plants



Annual plants that sprouted on their own during the *shemitah* year are considered *sefichin* and may not be eaten or used. Plants that began to grow before *shemitah* are not *sefichin* and may be eaten and used.



Vegetables harvested during the *shemitah* year have *kedushat shevi'it*. Herbs growing in the garden that are picked during *shemitah* also have *kedushat shevi'it*.



Fruit that began growing before the beginning of the *shemitah* year, even if harvested during the *shemitah* year, do not have *kedushat shevi'it*. Only fruit that began to develop during the *shemitah* year have *kedushat shevi'it*. This is true even if the fruit is harvested after the *shemitah* year is over.

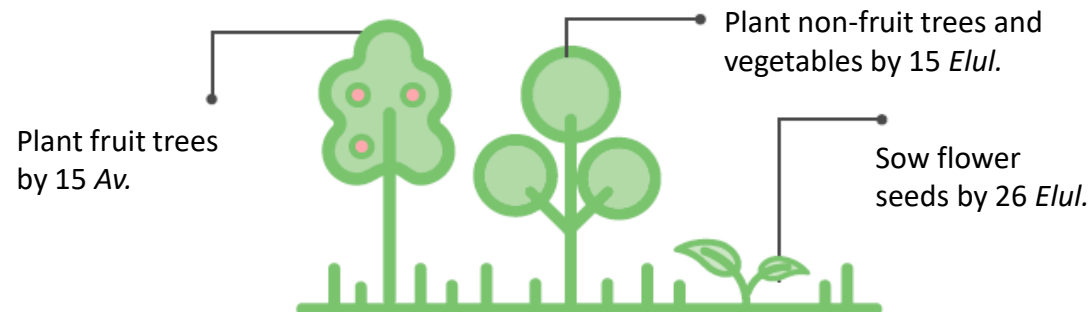
Hefker

When fruits or vegetables with *kedushat shevi'it* are growing in your garden, you should allow anyone to enter your garden to harvest them. If you are concerned that people might damage your garden or garden equipment, it is permissible to limit entrance and place ownerless (*hefker*) produce outside the home for the taking.

Preparations for *shemitah*

Actions that can be performed before *shemitah* should be done in advance, even when permitted during *shemitah*. Apply slow-release fertilizers, prepare the irrigation system, prune trees for aesthetics and safety, etc.

All agricultural activities are permitted until the onset of *shemitah*, except for planting and sowing trees and plants. Planting and sowing deadlines are as follows (there may be exceptions in certain cases):





Planters

All *shemitah* laws apply to plants in planters growing under the open sky, whether in the yard, on the roof, porch, etc. This is true of all planters, composed of any material, even if placed on a surface that disconnects it from the ground.

Shemitah laws do not apply to planters that meet the two criteria below:

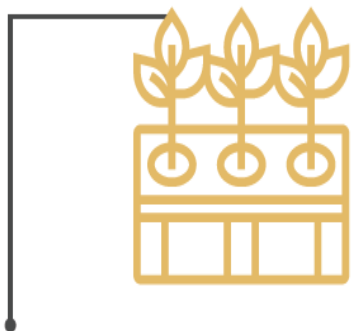
- ✓ The planters are under a roof, indoors, under a sunshade or pergola with more than 50% material. Planters sitting on windowsills are considered indoors as long as the foliage does not spill over from the windowsill and the entire planter is under a ceiling.
- ✓ The planter is disconnected from the ground: planters sitting on the floor on second-story floors or higher; plants on the ground floor only on the floor when sitting on nylon sheets, plastic plates, etc. (the disconnecting surface needs to be larger than the plant's foliage).

If your planters meet the two criteria above, you may water, prune, fertilize and otherwise tend to them as usual. However, **do not plant in them** during *shemitah* without a pressing need.

- ✗ Large planters that exceed 330L are considered connected to the ground. *Shemitah* laws apply to such planters even if they are detached from the ground. It is best to be stringent for planters with a volume exceeding 70L.

Hydroponics

Home hydroponic systems are considered detached from the ground when in a structure with a roof and a surface underneath the plants detach them from the ground (nylon sheets, etc.). In this case, it is possible to tend to them during *shemitah* as usual and even plant new plants. If under the open sky, only minimal care is permitted to prevent plants from dying.



Moving planters

- ✗ Do not move perforated planters from place to place in a garden. If needed, it is permissible to do so only if it was not placed directly on the ground. It is better to drag the planter to a new location rather than lifting it and putting it down. *Lechatchilah*, wrap the planter in cellophane or a plastic bag before moving it.
- ✗ If a plant is growing indoors, avoid taking it outside when exposed to the air. You may take it outside when wrapped in cellophane or in a plastic bag.
- ✓ Indoors you may transfer plants from place to place, even if the purpose is to improve their growing conditions (under a window, more light, less light).



Buying plants

It is forbidden to buy plants that were planted during *shemitah*. Make sure you buy flowers and other plants from nurseries that grow them in a permitted fashion only (detached surfaces, *heter mechirah*). Plants grown primarily for their fragrance have *kedushat shevi'it*. Such plants should be purchased together with an item without *kedushat shevi'it* (*havla'ah*).

Optimally, when transferring plants from the nursery to your home, wrap them in cellophane or a plastic bag from top to bottom. Of course, these plants should not be planted in the garden.





Bi'ur

Bi'ur
calendars



Shemitah produce is supposed to be eaten and not stored for the coming years. For this reason, when a crop is no longer growing in the field, we are commanded to perform *bi'ur*; that is, remove the produce from our ownership. In practice, most private consumers do not have fresh fruits and vegetables that are subject to *bi'ur* at *bi'ur* times. *Bi'ur* is relevant especially to products with a long shelf-life: wine, oil, pickled olives, jams, liquors, dried fruits, etc. Schedules with *bi'ur* dates for each type of produce are available on our website.

When *bi'ur* time comes



Remove from your home *shemitah* produce whose *bi'ur* time has come. In the presence of three people, declare the produce ownerless for the poor and anyone else, and say: “אחינו בית ישראל: כל מי שצריך ליטול יבוא ויטול.” “Brothers of the House of Israel: Anyone who needs to take should come and take.” Afterwards, you may take the produce.



If you cannot remove the produce from your home, bring three people into your home and declare it ownerless in their presence. If you cannot do so in front of three friends, you can take the produce into a public area and leave it there even when others are not present.

After *bi'ur* time is over



If *bi'ur* was not performed intentionally, it is forbidden to eat the food after the *bi'ur* time. If unintentional (you weren't aware it was *bi'ur* time), declare it ownerless right away.



If your friend gives you produce after *bi'ur* time and you aren't sure they declared it ownerless on time, you can perform *bi'ur* immediately and eat it.



The *bi'ur* obligation does not apply to produce that is ownerless or that belongs to *otzar beit din* at *bi'ur* time. For this reason, it is permissible to buy products marked *otzar beit din*, such as wine and oil, even long after *bi'ur* time is over.



The eighth year

Some *shemitah* laws accompany us into the year following *shemitah*, the eighth year.

Consumerism



Fruits that began growing during the *shemitah* year have *kedushat shevi'it* even if harvested after the *shemitah* year is over (common for citruses, avocado, olives, and grapes). Be sure to purchase them in the proper manner during the eighth year.



Vegetables harvested after the *shemitah* year do not have *kedushat shevi'it*, however the *sefichin* prohibition still applies in the eighth year. For this reason, if vegetables were grown in a forbidden manner and harvested during the *shemitah* year they will always be forbidden to eat.

Until the dates noted in the *sefichin* and *kedushat shevi'it* schedules for each vegetable, make sure you buy your vegetables from a place with reliable *kashrut* certification.

Garden care

From *Rosh Hashanah* of the eighth year, all work in the garden is permitted. It is permissible to plant or otherwise work the soil in any way.

The prohibition of engaging in activities on behalf of fruit that began growing during the *shemitah* year apply also during the eighth year. It is forbidden to perform actions on behalf of the fruit to enhance their growth. However, it is permissible to engage in activities to protect the fruit.

During the eighth year it is permissible to perform all activities to benefit trees, even if the fruit will also be enhanced as a result.

If fruit has *kedushat shevi'it* it is ownerless, even during the eighth year, and it is forbidden to prevent people from entering orchards or gardens to pick them. This applies until the end of *Cheshvan*. After this time it is permissible to lock gardens and orchards, and perform the *mitzvah* of *hefker* by taking the fruit outside of the gate.



For more information on
shemítah, check out
our website:

