

6

Community Supported Agriculture and Gardens

The increasing popularity of Jewish gardens and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) projects makes it even easier to bring healthy food and awareness of local food and farming issues to your synagogue, community center, or institution. Hazon's food work began with the launch of the first ever Jewish CSA in 2004. Since then, the Hazon CSA program has expanded to include nearly 70 sites across the US, Canada, and Israel. We've seen firsthand how a CSA can bring a community together, inspire new programs and learning, and have a very real effect on supporting sustainable agriculture. Collectively, Hazon CSAs have put nearly \$7 million in Jewish purchasing power behind sustainable agriculture since 2004.

If you want to go beyond a CSA, what better place to learn about the miracles of growing food than in a garden where you can actually watch the process happen? People of all ages can learn something new in a garden, finding joy and intrigue in the unfolding drama of growing plants. A garden at your institution can connect your community to the growing cycle. It can also, if it's big enough, grow enough food to feed you, or perhaps even supply a soup kitchen in your area. And it can become a living laboratory where you can learn about Jewish agricultural laws and food blessings with an entirely fresh perspective.

This section uses material from the Jewish Farm School's Jewish Gardening Workshop. Explore this and other resources at jewishfarmschool.org.

Start a Hazon CSA!

Hazon's CSA program is the first ongoing effort in the American Jewish community to support local, sustainable agriculture. Founded in 2004, our CSA program now includes nearly seventy CSAs in the US, Canada, and Israel, and over 2,300 households. The Hazon CSA program has helped the Jewish community to put over \$7 million dollars behind sustainable agriculture and supported Jewish institutions such as synagogues and JCCs to create innovative educational programming around the intersections of Jewish tradition and contemporary food and environmental issues.

Hazon's CSA program will help you through your first year of planning, marketing, organizing, and running your CSA project. We'll also help you create engaging, high-quality adult and family Jewish education around food and agriculture.

"I have struggled connecting with the Jewish community because I have not found myself in it. Joining a Jewish CSA was a great way for me to connect my Jewish identity with things I am passionate about, such as food politics and sustainable living. I am glad that the Jewish community recognizes that food issues are Jewish issues. Thank you for creating a space in which people like me who struggle with connecting to the Jewish community can feel welcome and invited."

Esty, Brooklyn NY

Host a Farmers' Market

A farmers' market is a great way to support local farms, as well as give your community easy access to wonderful, fresh produce. You may want to invite a few farmers or local vendors to an event you're already planning (i.e. Sukkot fair, Lag B'omer picnic) or set up a weekly or monthly market. Make sure you think about what kind of traffic you'll have— you want to make sure your vendors sell enough to make it worth their time!

The Riverdale YM-YWHA hosts a very successful farmers' market in their community's downtown that has been thriving and helping build community. Read more about it in the programs section of their website, www.riverdaley.org.

For suggestions on starting a farmers' market, including signage, management, by-laws, budgets, and fees, visit: http://www.organic-growers.com/farmers_markets.htm

Start a Jewish Garden

Gardening is an activity that can rejuvenate Judaism and Jews on many levels. For one, gardening serves to reconnect the Jewish spirit to the earth. Two thousand years of Jewish urbanization has forged an estrangement from nature that reaches to the core of the Jewish psyche. Gardening restores familiarity with our local ecologies and deepens our understanding of where our food comes from. Even more consequential, intimacy with nature deepens the Jewish sense of wonder and heightens our consciousness of God's countless miracles.

This sense of wonder, the sensitivity to the web of life that supports us both physically and spiritually, is an integral aspect of Jewish consciousness and thus a prerequisite for Jewish living. The famous verse from Breishit 2:15 states, "And the Lord God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to till it and to tend it." The Torah's notion of human responsibility to steward the earth, as well as the rest of our tradition's rich collection of teachings concerning the relationship between humanity and the natural world, become irrelevant and, even more, incomprehensible to the Jew who is not in relation to nature. Jews must reacquire themselves with the earth. Gardening suits such a noble and formidable task. There is little else that reminds a person of the feeling and smell of nature quite like placing one's hands directly in the earth. Gardening reawakens our dulled senses to the lifeblood of our planet.

The Jewish connection to the earth emerges from our people's agricultural roots. As we cut Judaism off from its own heritage, we in turn lose our connection to our agricultural history and the ecological themes in our holidays. For example, the agricultural themes inherent during the growing and harvest season from Tu B'Shvat, the beginning of the budding of trees through Sukkot, the final harvest, lose their meaning without our continued intimacy with the cycles of nature. By reconnecting with the natural world through gardening we allow these aspects of our tradition to speak to us in new ways and to bring greater meaning to our lives.

Finally, gardening can also be used to bring Jewish text to life. Even for Jews for whom the world of Jewish texts is already familiar and accessible, Jewish gardening offers us rich opportunities for opening up the world of the Torah, Rabbinic texts, and the siddur to in new, vibrant, and creative ways.

Plant Fruit Trees

Within your garden plan, be sure to include some fruit trees as well. Fruit trees may not provide the instant gratification that growing vegetables does, but after a few years, these trees will provide hundreds of pounds of fruit for your community! Fruit trees are perennial plants, while most common garden vegetables are annual plants. The difference between them is that annuals complete their life cycle from seed to seed in one growing season, while perennials live many years. Their deep roots and woody bodies allow for more resilience against pests and against drought. Once they are established, they also require less work to maintain than your vegetables will.

If your trees are planted in a community garden, synagogue, school, or community center, think of your fruit trees as a shared orchard. When the harvest comes in, be sure to find creative ways to share the harvest with community members. Gather together for work parties and harvest celebrations. Host fruit preservation workshops. Donate excess harvests to local food banks.

As part of Jewish agricultural practices, once every seven years was the Shmita, which marked a year-long agricultural fallow period. During this time, there was no tilling of soil, and no seeds were planted. Since vegetables would be hard to come by on this year, much of the fresh harvest was dependent upon the abundance of fruit trees and other perennial plants. To learn more about Shmita, and the role of fruit trees during this year, visit hazon.org/shmitaproject.

Each winter, during the full moon of the Hebrew month of Shvat, your fruit orchard would be a wonderful place to creatively celebrate Tu B'Shvat, the New Year of the Trees. Also, growing fruit trees allows us to symbolically celebrate the biblical tradition of orlah (Leviticus 19:23-25): during the first three years of growth, no fruits were harvested from a tree. On the fourth year, fruit were sanctified and brought to the Temple, and on the fifth year they could be eaten. How would you celebrate the first harvest of your fruit tree? And how would you 'sanctify' these fruits?

Themes for Your Jewish Garden

While a garden lends itself to all kinds of different programs, you may wish to create a garden that has a specific focus or educational goal. Here are a couple suggestions, with program ideas:

A Garden for Jewish Rituals: Havdalah. A Havdalah

garden consists of plants that can be used for the Havdalah ceremony and allows gardeners to connect the act of gardening with religious practice. Not only does it give a deep and spiritual framework for the physical labor, it can also foster a deeper connection to the Jewish ritual. One major advantage of a Havdalah garden is that many fragrant herbs, such as lavender, sage, mint, rosemary, thyme, marjoram, are hardy perennials and will come back year after year. Additionally, these plants will grow more robust with the weekly harvesting of leaves for Havdalah.

Program suggestions:

- Dry herbs and make Havdalah kits
- Make Havdalah in the garden
- Learn the *brachot* (blessings) related to smell

Israel and Biblical Gardens. Many people are interested in biblical plants. A biblical or Israel garden can serve as a great tool when teaching about Israel, both ancient and modern. Seeing the numerous plants that are mentioned in the Torah can really help young gardeners connect with the sometimes distant text. The plants you grow in an Israel garden can be limited to the seven species, or you could expand it to include as many biblical plants as you can find and grow.

Program suggestions:

- Tour of Israel through the garden
- Prepare a biblical meal
- Construct a biblical agricultural calendar

Great Gardens All Around the Country!

The Greenpoint Interfaith Food Team Garden Project

Congregants at the Greenpoint Shul wanted to take unused land behind their synagogue and build a garden to grow produce for the soup kitchen at the nearby Greenpoint Reformed Church. They found seeds for free at a farmers' market festival and used Craigslist to find topsoil and a person to deliver it. A volunteer got rainwater barrels donated and plants came from local garden shops and one member's own yard.

Initial work to prepare the space included clearing the brush, cleaning out the garbage, and leveling the ground. Once that was complete, they brought in the soil. The soil went down on July 4th, and the garden had its first harvest in August. The garden is completely organic, and it has seven beds complete with tomato plants, cucumbers, zucchini, eggplants, basil, thyme,

and plenty of other vegetables.

It took a combined effort and a combination of skills from people who were willing to devote their time and energy to really get this project off the ground. The community seems to be enthusiastic about this new project that simultaneously makes their Jewish institution greener, and helps to feed a much larger community of people in need.

Improving the World Around Us One Tomato at a Time

“Beginning this Fall our facility will be home to a new community garden. In addition to providing daily educational opportunities for our students, the garden’s fresh, organic produce will also give our children a chance to experience tikkun olam by feeding those in need at SOVA: Community Food and Resource Program, and PATH (People Assisting The Homeless). It is our hope that the garden will show our students the impact every action can have and that even the smallest tomato or berry can help heal the world.

Moreover, the garden is intended to unify our community in the pursuit of helping others. Serving as a sacred space (*makom kadosh*), the garden will become a source of pride for the entire community, providing a chance to physically work together to help our broader community.

Each year students and families can add to our garden just as they do to our community as a whole and we will be able to watch with joy as the garden grows from a few plants to an expansive preserve.” - Cassie Weinstock, Los Angeles, CA

Beans & Tomatoes in New Rochelle

“About a year ago, I read about a church in Maryland that set aside some of its property for a garden and donated the produce to its local food kitchen. I thought that would be a wonderful mitzvah project for Temple Israel of New Rochelle.

The TINR’s Brotherhood and Sisterhood each contributed \$300. Individual members of the Brotherhood donated another \$70 for plants. Children in TINR’s Early Childhood Program started tomato seeds, planted the tomato plants in the garden, and brought in black and white newspapers for mulch. They enjoyed the opportunity to pet the worms before I placed them in the garden. I did not use any fertilizer or herbicides in the garden.

I had consulted with our local food pantry about what types of vegetables they wanted and they requested green beans and tomatoes. We started harvesting green beans on June 30 and tomatoes on July 13. For

most of the summer, we harvested twice a week early in the morning and there were anywhere from 2 to 5 members at each harvest. One person would then take the produce to the HOPE Community Food Kitchen in downtown New Rochelle. In our first year, we harvested over 114 lbs. of green beans and over 183 lbs. of tomatoes!

- Richard Grayson, New Rochelle

A Year in the Life of a Jewish Garden

This section by Daron Joffe, Former Director of Gan Chaim

January-February

- Tu B’Shvat fruit and nut tree planting and garden seder
- Groundbreaking community celebration
- Garden design and build workshops
- Nutrition, preservation, and cooking workshops
- Seed planting in local greenhouse
- Indoor gardening for schools, vacation camps, and after-school programs
- Horticultural therapy activities for seniors and people with special needs
- Adult Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) education programs
- Start seed planting indoors
- Primary activities: Designing, mulching, planting trees, pruning, and building

March-May

- Spring gardening workshops for adults and families
- Spring garden programs for day schools, camps, volunteer groups, and families
- Passover seder in the garden
- Community planting party
- Primary activities: Tilling, composting, planting, transplanting, and watering

May-June

- Open house tours
- Staff training
- Summer garden activities for campers, students, and people with special needs
- Summer garden workshops and programs for adults and families
- Activities: Planting, transplanting, weeding, transplanting, and mulching

June-August

- Intensive camp gardening activities: about seven sessions day, five days/week
- Summer gardening workshops and programs for early childhood, teens, adults, seniors, and people with special needs
- Weeding, trellising, planting, transplanting and harvesting

August-October

- Fall gardening workshop
- Food preservation workshop
- Theater in the garden
- Intergenerational activities and family day programs
- Volunteer groups to the garden
- After-school programming
- Field trip to a local farm
- Plant garlic, onions, spinach, collards, and kale
- Plant seasonal color and cover crops
- Fall plantings of bulbs, perennials, and over-wintering crops
- Winter gardening classroom science projects

October-November

- Sukkot arts and crafts workshops
- Sukkot harvest celebration in the garden
- End-of-season Sukkot festival at the farm
- Nutrition workshops
- Home landscaping workshop
- Volunteer groups to the garden
- After-school programming
- Early childhood programs
- Family and intergenerational programs
- Winter garden classroom science projects

December

- Volunteer groups at the garden
- After-school programs
- Early childhood programs
- Family and intergenerational programs
- Special needs horticultural therapy programs
- Winter garden classroom science projects
- Expand and evaluate programs and curriculum