There are four New Years:

- The first of the month of Nisan is the New Year for counting the reign of Jewish monarchs and for fulfilling your vows to the Temple.
- The first of the month of Elul is the New Year for assessing your tithe of animals; Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Simeon say: It’s on the first of Tishri.
- The first of the month of Tishri is the New Year for calendar years, for sabbatical years, for jubilee years, for counting the age of your food trees, for assessing your tithe of vegetables.
- The first of the month of Shvat is the New Year for assessing your tithe of tree fruit and nuts—per the School of Shamai; the School of Hillel says: it’s on the fifteenth of Shvat (Tu bi-Shvat).

When you enter the land and plant any tree for food, you shall regard its fruit as its foreskin.
Three years it shall be uncircumcised for you, not to be eaten.
In the fourth year all its fruit shall be set aside for jubilation before The Lord; and only in the fifth year may you use its fruit—that its yield to you may be increased:
I The Lord am your God.

Leviticus 19:23-25

3. You shall set aside every year a tenth part of all the yield of thy sowing that is brought from the field... then the Levite... and the stranger, the fatherless and the widow in your settlements shall come to eat their fill, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the enterprises you undertake. —Deuteronomy 14:22,29

Mishnah Rosh ha-Shanah 1:1

What significance does a new year have for trees? For what purposes does the year start on the 15th of Sh’vat for trees? The new year for trees can be analogized to the beginning of a fiscal year. There are a series of commandments relating to crops, produce, and harvests that are only practiced in the land of Israel. After grains and fruit are gathered, there is a mandatory gift called "Terumah" that must be given to any person who is a Kohain, a "priest." After this gift is given, there are then a series of gifts that can be generalized under the term "Ma’aser," meaning "a tenth." The first of these gifts is called "Ma’aser Rishon" - The First Tenth. This gift, consisting of 1/10th of the harvest, is given by the farmer to any member of the tribe of Levi after the "Terumah" has been taken. After this gift has been given to the Levi, there are two other Ma’aser gifts, only one of which is taken in a particular year. (There is a system that dictates which Ma’aser is given in which year). The first of these "gifts" is called "Ma’aser Sheni" - The Second Tenth. This "gift" consists of 1/10 of the remaining crops, and it is to be taken by the owner of the field to Jerusalem to be eaten there. The other "Ma’aser" is "Ma’aser Ani" - The Tenth of the Poor. This "gift" consists of 1/10th of the remaining crops, and it is to be given to poor people.
Our Rabbis taught: 'It is forbidden for you to enjoy (the use of) something in this world without first reciting a blessing; anyone who enjoys something in this world without a blessing is misappropriated sacred property' 1.

Rebbe Levi posed a problem: It is written: The earth is the Lord's and all that it holds (Psalms 24:1) and it is also written: The heavens belong to the Lord, at the earth was given over to human beings (Psalms 115:16). Isn't there a contradiction here regarding the earth?

The first verse applies to the situation that exists before reciting a blessing; the second verse is for reciting a blessing!

—Talmud of Babylonia, Berakhot 35a/b

The most important discipline of Judaism involves the blessing. When a blessing is recited before eating, then the act itself becomes a spiritual undertaking. Through the blessing, the act of eating becomes a contemplative exercise. Just as one can contemplate a flower or a melody, one can contemplate the act of eating.

One opens one's mind completely to the experience of chewing the food and fills the awareness with the taste and texture of the food. One then eats slowly, aware of every nuance of taste.

Rebbe Ze'ev Wolf [d. 1800] of Zhiltomir (in the Ukraine) was the village innkeeper. A Jewish wagon driver entered and asked for a glass of brandy. As he was about to drink it without reciting a blessing, the rebebb stopped him and said, "Do you realize by what marvelous laws God has produced the fruit of the soil before it became the drink that you enjoy?"

The driver promptly recited the blessing, and the rebebb answered, "Amen!"

—Me'orot ha-Gedolim 2:28a

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan
USA

Jewish Meditation: A Practical Guide (1985)
“The trees rustle in the summer on the mountain, on the slope of the valleys; let them fringe the roads and give shade by day to the wanderer and shelter to the tired laborer.”

Chaim Nachman Bialik

Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai received Torah from Hillel and Shammai....
He used to say:
If you have a sapling in your hand, and someone should say to you that the Messiah has come, stay and complete the transplanting, and then go welcome the Messiah.

Asef de-Rabbi Natan B §31

It was a custom in Beitar that when a boy was born they planted a cedar tree, and when a girl was born, a cypress.
And at the time of their marriage, they trimmed the branches from the trees to make a chuppah.

— Gittin 57a

G-d said, “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food. And to all the animals on land, to all the birds of the sky, and to everything that creeps on earth, in which there is the breath of life, [I give] all the green plants for food.”

Beraschit 1:29-30
FRUIT AS A METAPHOR
AND OTHER TEACHING

1. The Sages compared the entire nation of Israel, scattered all over the world after the Destruction of the Second Temple, to the useful tamar. “Like the date palm of which none is expected: its fruit is for eating, its branches for blessing, its fanned are for thatching, its fibers are for rope, its webbing for site, its thick trunks for building—and so it is with Israel, every soul has its purpose.”—Adapted from Beshit Rava 41

2. Why is Israel compared to a grapevine? When you want to improve its fruit, you dig it up and replant it elsewhere and it improves. So, when the Holy One wanted to make Israel known in the world, what did he do? He up-rooted them from Egypt and brought them to the wilderness where they flourished. They received the Torah and became known in the world. —Shemot Raba 44

3. Even as wine is not stored in vessels of either gold or silver, but is laid up in common earthenware vessels, so can the words of the Torah abide only with the humble of spirit.—Sifre to Deut. 11:22, adapted.

4. The vine has both bigger and smaller clusters of grapes. The bigger, heavier clusters bend low, while the smaller, lighter clusters hang high. So it is with students of the Torah, the more learned one is, the humbler he is.—Midrash, Levitucus Rabbah 56, adapted.

5. Why is the Law compared to the fig tree? The majority of trees, the olive, the grapevine, the date-palm, are plucked only once, but the fig tree is plucked little by little. Even so is it with the Law. One studies a little today, and more tomorrow, because its study cannot be completed either in a year or in two years.—Midrash, Numbers, Rabbah, 12, 9, and 21.

6. The roots of the fig are soft but they break through the hard stone.—Yerushalmi Taanit 1

7. Rabbi Tarfon likened the people of Israel to a pile of walnuts. If one walnut is removed, each and every walnut in the pile will be shaken. When a single Jew is in trouble, every other Jew is shaken and affected.—Avot DeRabbi Natan 18:1

8. "My beloved spoke, and said to me, rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land..."

9. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourishes, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give you my love.—Song of Songs 2:10-12, 7:13

10. To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

Carob — Charuv
The carob has a special place in Jewish life; during the war with Rome, the Israelites lived under a siege and managed to survive by eating the fruit of the carob tree. The Hebrew words for carob (charuv), sword (cherov), and destruction (charban) have a similar linguistic root. The carob is even sword shaped. It reminds us to temper even this joyous occasion with the remembrance of suffering throughout the world.
Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria, a Talmudic sage of the 1st century CE, said: Anytime our wisdom exceeds our good deeds, to what are we likened? — to a tree whose branches are numerous but whose roots are few; then the wind comes and uproots it and turns it upside down.... But when our good deed exceed our wisdom, to what are we likened? — to a tree whose branches are few but whose roots are numerous; even if all the winds of the world were to come and blow against it, they could not budge it from its place....

Rabbi Eleazar ben Azaria... used to say:

Ope whose wisdom exceeds one’s deeds, what is this like?
    Like a tree that has many branches and few roots,
    so that when the wind comes, it uproots it and turns it over —
    Such a person is like a bush in the desert,
    Which does not sense the coming of good:
    It is set in the scorched places of the wilderness,
    In a barren land without inhabitant (Jeremiah 17:6).

But one whose deeds exceed one’s wisdom, what is this like?
    Like a tree that has few branches and many roots,
    so that even if all the winds in the world come and blow at it,
    they cannot move it out of its place —
    Blessed is one who trusts in the Lord,
    Whose trust is the Lord alone.
    Such a person is like a tree planted by waters,
    Sending forth its roots by a stream;
    It does not sense the coming of heat,
    Its leaves are ever fresh;
    It has no care in a year of drought,
    It does not cease to yield fruit... (Jer. 17:7-8).

Mishnah Pirkei Avot 3:17

Two people were once fighting over a piece of land.
Each claimed ownership,
and each bolstered the claim with apparent proof.
After arguing for a long time,
they agreed to resolve their conflict by putting the case before a rabbi.
The rabbi sat as an arbitrator and listened carefully,
but despite years of legal training
the rabbi could not reach a decision.
Both parties seemed to be right.
Finally the rabbi said,
"Since I cannot decide to whom this land belongs, let’s ask the land.”
The rabbi put an ear to the ground, and after a moment stood up.
"My friends, the land says it belongs to neither of you—
but that you belong to it.”

Source unknown

The land must not be sold beyond reclaim,
for the land is Mine:
you are but strangers resident with Me.
Throughout the land that you hold,
you must provide for its redemption.

Leviticus 25:23-4

You make springs gush forth in torrents;
They make their way between the hills
Giving drink to all the wild beasts;
The wild asses slake their thirst.
The birds of the sky dwell beside them
And sing among the foliage....
You make the grass grow for the cattle
and herbage for human labor
that people may get food from the earth
wine that cheers the human heart
oil that makes the face shine
and bread that sustains human life.
The trees of the Lord drink their fill,
the cedars of Lebanon, God’s own planting,
where birds make their nests;
the stork has her home in the junipers.
The high mountains are for wild goats;
the crags are a refuge for rock-badgers.

Psalms 104:10-18

6. Because of Rabi Akiva they said:
Any city which has no fruit in it has no
Torah scholar foremost in his
generation in it, because the varieties of
fruit open the eyes. — Sanhedrin 17b

All trees converse [me-si-chim] (so to speak) with one another;
all trees converse (so to speak) with mankind.
All trees were created for human companionship....

Midrash Genesis Rabbah §11
Said Rabbi Yohanan:
All his life, the righteous Honi the Circle-maker was troubled by this verse:
_The Lord restored the fortunes of Zion—we were like dreamers._ (Psalms 126:1)
He thought, "Can someone really dream for 70 years?"

Once Honi the Circle-maker was walking on the road and saw a man planting a carob tree.
Honi said: "You know a carob tree takes 70 years to bear fruit; are you so sure that you will live 70 years so as to eat from it?"
"I found this world provided with carob trees," the man replied, "and as my forebears planted them for me, so will I plant for my offspring."
Honi then sat down to eat and was overcome with sleep. As he slept, a small cave formed around him, so that he was hidden. And thus he slept for 70 years.

When he awoke, he saw a man gathering carobs from that same tree, and eating them.

"Do you know who planted this carob tree?" Honi asked.
"My grandfather," the man replied. "I must have been like a dreamer for 70 years!" Honi exclaimed....

Talmud of Babylonia, _Ta'anit_ 23a

Rabbi Nahman once asked Rabbi Isaac to bless him as they were saying goodbye.
Rabbi Isaac replied, "Let me give you a parable.
A person had traveled a long way in the desert and was feeling weary, hungry, and thirsty.
Suddenly the traveler came upon a tree covered with broad leaves that provided shade, filled with sweet fruits, and watered by a brook that flowed nearby.
The traveler rested in the tree's shade, ate of its fruits, and drank its water.

"About to leave, the traveler turned to the tree and said, 'O tree, beautiful tree, how shall I bless you? Shall I wish that your shade is pleasant? It is already pleasant. Shall I say that your fruits should be sweet? They are sweet. Shall I ask that a brook flow by you? A brook does flow by you. Therefore, I will bless you this way: May it be God's will that all the shoots taken from you be just like you!"

"So it is with you," Rabbi Isaac said to Rabbi Nahman.
"What can I wish you? Shall I wish you Torah-wisdom? You have Torah-wisdom. Sustenance? You have sustenance. Children? You have children. Therefore I say: May it be God's will that all whom you have a chance to influence be like you!"

Talmud of Babylonia, _Ta'anit_ 5b–6a

Once when Rav Abraham Isaac Kook was walking in the fields, lost deep in thought, the young student with him inadvertently plucked a leaf off a branch. Rav Kook was visibly shaken by this act, and turning to his companion he said gently, "Believe me when I tell you I never simply pluck a leaf or a blade of grass or any living thing, unless I have to."
He explained further, "Every part of the vegetable world is singing a song and breathing forth a secret of the divine mystery of the Creation."
For the first time the young student understood what it means to show compassion to all creatures.

_Wisdom of the Jewish Mystics_, p. 80
I see You in the starry field,
I see You in the harvest's yield,
In every breath, in every sound,
An echo of Your name is found.
The blade of grass, the simple flower,
Bear witness to Your matchless power,
In wonder-workings, or some bush aflame,
We look for God and fancy You concealed;
But in earth's common things You stand revealed
While grass and flowers and stars spell out Your name.

Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra+
Spain/Italy/Provence, 1089–1164 CE
transl. Rabbi Sidney Greenberg/Rabbi Jonathan D. Levine (adapted)

In order to serve God,
one needs access
to the enjoyment of the beauties of nature,
such as the contemplation of flower-decorated meadows,
majestic mountains, flowing rivers, etc.
For all these are essential
to the spiritual development
even the holiest of people.

Rabbi Abraham ben Maimonides+
Egypt, 1186–1237
quoted in Ha-Migrik La-Avodat ha-Shem, p. 165

All that [we] see—
the heaven, the earth, and all that fills it—
all these things
are the external garments of God.

Rebbe Shneour Zalman+
Lyady, Belorussia, 1745–1813
Tanya 542 (1796)

Know that all healing is of the earth—gifts of the trees—
especially potent during the month of Iyyar [May].

Rebbe Nahman of Bratslav+
Podolia, Ukraine, 1772–1810
Likutei Moharot §277

In order to serve God, one needs access to the enjoyment of the beauties of nature, such
as the contemplation of flower-decorated meadows, majestic mountains, flowing rivers,
and so forth. For all these are essential to the spiritual development of even the holiest of
people. (Rabbi Abraham ben Maimonides)
Tu BeShvat anticipates the Final Redemption, the return to Israel and the return to the Garden of Eden.

"Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "When the ploughman shall overtake the reaper And the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; The mountains shall drip with sweet wine, And the hills shall flow with it.
I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel, And they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; They shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, And they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.
I will plant them upon their land And they shall never again be plucked up out of the land Which I have given them," says the Lord your God. (Amos 9:13-15)

But you, O mountains of Israel, Shall shoot forth your branches, And yield your fruit to My people Israel, For they will soon come home.
For, behold, I am for you, and I will turn to you, And you shall be tilled and sown;
And I will multiply people upon you, The whole house of Israel, all of it;
The cities shall be inhabited and the waste places rebuilt; And I will multiply upon you man and beast; And they shall increase and be fruitful; And I will cause you to be inhabited As in your former times,
And will do more good for you than ever before.
Then you will know that I am the Lord. (Ezekiel 36:8-11)

Prophecy about the Land of Israel, and say to the mountains and the hills, to the watercourses and to the valleys,
**INTRODUCTION** Human beings and the natural world are on a collision course. Human activities inflict harsh and often irreversible damage on the environment and on critical resources. If not checked, many of our current practices put at serious risk the future that we wish for human society and the plant and animal kingdoms, and may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain life in the manner that we know. Fundamental changes are urgent if we are to avoid the collision our present course will bring about.

"When you besiege a city many days to bring it into your power by making war against it, you shall not destroy the trees thereof by swinging an axe against them; from them you may eat but you may not destroy them; for is the tree of the field human to withdraw before you?" Deut.20:19-20. This prohibition serves as the foundation for an important principle of Jewish law: bal tashchit — the needless destruction of anything is wrong (various interpretations of this principle in the Talmud!).

...Not only one who cuts down trees, but also one who smashes household goods, tears clothes, demolishes a building, stops up a spring, or destroys articles of food with destructive intent transgresses the command "you must not destroy." Such a person is not flogged, but is administered a disciplinary beating imposed by the Rabbis. (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings and Wars 6:8,10)

"This text becomes the most comprehensive warning to human beings not to misuse the position which God has given them as masters of the world and its matter by capricious, passionate or merely thoughtless wasteful destruction of anything on earth. Only for wise use has God laid the world at our feet..." S.R. Hirsh, 19th century

4. The purpose of this mitzvah [do not destroy] is to teach us to love that which is good and worthwhile and to cling to it, so that good becomes a part of us and we will avoid all that is evil and destructive. This is the way of the righteous and those who improve society, who love peace and rejoice in the good in people and bring them close to Torah: that nothing, not even a grain of mustard, should be lost to the world, that they should regret any loss or destruction that they see, and if possible they will prevent any destruction that they can. Not so are the wicked, who are like demons, who rejoice in destruction of the world, and they are destroying themselves. (Sefer Ha-Chinuch, No. 529)
SONGS

Let us sing a song the Israeli pioneers sang while they planted:

Artzah alinu, artzah alinu, artzah alinu. (2)
K’var charashnu v’g’am zaranu (2)
Aval od lo katzamu. (2)

We have come up to the land, we have
tilled the soil, and sown the seeds, but we
have yet to harvest our crop.

(Tune: London Bridge)

We thank G-D for trees we’ve got
For orange and apple, Oh how good!
For cherry, lime and apricot.
For houses made out of wood,
For all these things, thanks a lot,
For cooling shade when it is hot;
On Tu B’Shevat.
On Tu B’Shevat.

ALL SING:

GARDEN SONG
<< Music on Second Song Sheet >>

Inch by inch, row by row,
Gonna make this garden grow,
All it takes is a rake and hoe,
And a piece of fertile ground.

Pullin’ weeds and pickin’ stones
Man is made of dreams and bones
Feel the need to grow my own
Cause the tie is close at hand.

Inch by inch, row by row,
Someone bless these seeds I sow,
Sun, please warm them deep below,
’Til the rain comes tumblin’ down.

Plant your rows straight along,
Temper them with prayer and song,
Mother earth will make you strong,
If you give her love and care.

LO YI-SA GOI EL GOI CHE-REV
Nations Shall Make War No More

E-retz za-vat cha-lav (2 hand-claps)
E-retz za-vat cha-lav ud-vash (2)
E-retz za-vat cha-lav, za-vat cha-lav ud-vash (4)

Lo yi-sa goi el goi che-rev, lo yil-m’du od
mil-cha-ma (2)

And everyone ’neath their vine and fig tree
shall live in peace and not afraid (2)
And into plowshares beat their swords,
nations shall learn war no more (2)

Lo Alekha

It is not your duty to complete the
work.

Neither are you free to desist from
it.