

9

Getting at the root of it all: planting an edible garden

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 intriguing 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.

A garden can be a few pots or raised beds, or it can span a reclaimed parking lot or abandoned lot next to your institution. Gardens take work, and it's best to consider your resources fully to make sure the scope of your project matches the time and effort you and your community are willing to put in. Remember, though, even a few plants can be a wonderful learning opportunity.

➔ This section uses material from the Jewish Farm School's Jewish Gardening Workshop from June 2009. Download the entire document at hazon.org/foodguide/ch9

Why Jewish Gardening?

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, this 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 for whom nature is not an entity with which to be in relation. Jews must reacquaint 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 ones 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 Succoth, the final harvest --all of these central elements of our tradition 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 in a variety of ways 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 our students in new, vibrant and creative ways.

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 different 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
- Preparing a biblical meal
- Constructing a biblical agricultural calendar

➔ **MORE LNKS at hazon.org/foodguide/ch9**

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. One congregant, Natalie Soleil, happened to be an accomplished gardener, and with support from Rabbi Maurice Appelbaum (who was able to secure a small grant from Yeshiva University for the project)—the garden was born in Spring 2010.

The organizers were able to get most of their supplies donated. They found seeds for free at a farmer's market festival, and used Craigslist to find topsoil and a person to deliver it. A volunteer got rainwater barrels donated. Plants came from local garden shops and one member's own yard. Soleil lent her own tools, and the group shredded newspaper to make mulch.

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.

Once the garden starts producing vegetables in abundance, the produce will be donated to the soup kitchen. 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. Rabbi Appelbaum is part of the regular watering crew, and the community seems to be enthusiastic about this new project which is simultaneously making their Jewish institution greener, connecting them to people from other faiths, and helping to feed a much larger community of people in need.

If you want to start a food security garden at your shul, here's some advice from Natalie Soleil:

- Fundraise. Find people who are willing to support your project so you can afford whatever basic resources you need.
- Try to get most of your supplies through donation. Talk to the people in your area and your city to find as many potential sources of support and information.
- Make sure you have skilled people working on your project. A couple of knowledgeable people will help you get the project off the ground a lot more efficiently, and will help to direct unskilled people in manageable tasks.

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
- 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, 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

- Sukkoth arts and crafts workshops
- Sukkoth 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