

Welcome to Making a Local Lulav

With Rabbi Shoshana Meira Friedman

Please drop in the chat:

- ❖ Your name
- ❖ City, State
- ❖ Tribal land you are on
<https://native-land.ca/>
- ❖ A brief description or memory of a favorite tree



What is a Lulav & Etrog?



Leviticus 23:40

וּלְקַח
תָּם לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן פְּרֵי יֶעֶז הַדֶּרַךְ כַּפַּת תְּבִי

**On the first day [of the festival of Sukkot]
you shall take
the fruit of beautiful trees,
branches of palm trees,
boughs of leafy trees,
and willows of the brook,
and you shall rejoice before your God
YHVH for seven days.**

***Etrog* Citron**



- ❖ “Fruit of a beautiful tree”
- ❖ Smells yummy & is edible
- ❖ Symbolizes the heart
- ❖ Precious, delicate
- ❖ Not native to land of Israel (originally from India/China)
- ❖ One of 3 original citrus species



Lulav



Date Palm Frond

- ❖ “Branches of palm trees”
- ❖ No smell, but part of the tree is edible
- ❖ Symbolizes the spine
- ❖ Makes a clacking sound when shaken
- ❖ Monocot - closely related to grasses



Hadas Myrtle



- ❖ “Branches of leafy trees”
- ❖ The Hebrew translated as leafy - *avot* - may mean interwoven leaves or branches
- ❖ Has smell but is not edible
- ❖ Symbolizes eyes (because of shape of leaves)
- ❖ Grows as a low-lying shrub

Aravot Willow



- ❖ “Willows of the brook”
- ❖ No smell or taste
- ❖ Symbolizes mouth (a leaf looks like the shape of closed lips)
- ❖ Comparatively easy for North Americans to access

Why do we wave these species?

The Torah says

- ❖ We wave to rejoice on our most joyous holiday.

The Talmud says

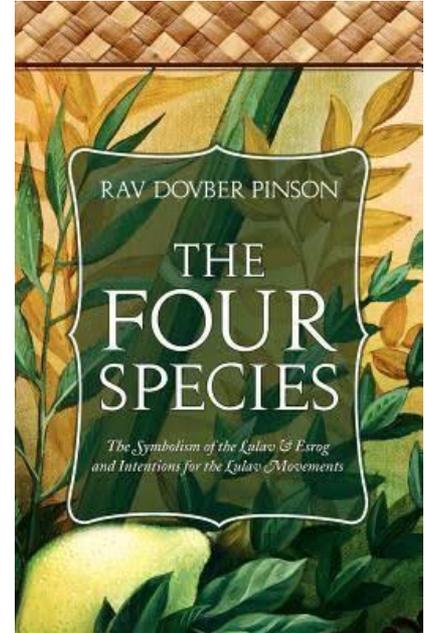
- ❖ We wave to call on the right rains for the coming year.
- ❖ We wave to protect ourselves from harmful rain and dew.

Religious Anthropology says

- ❖ This is a Jewish rain dance.
- ❖ We give thanks for the year's harvest & pray for the coming winter's rain.

Mysticism says

- ❖ We wave to praise God who is in all 6 directions (right, left, front, back, up, down).
- ❖ We wave to draw in positive energy and put out positive energy.
- ❖ We wave to pray for specific spiritual qualities in ourselves.



Boston, MA

Rabbi Shoshana Meira Friedman

Etrog → Apple

Lulav → Bamboo

Myrtle → Arborvitae/Eastern white cedar

Willow = Willow

- ❖ Apple, like etrog is not native here but has come to represent abundance.
- ❖ Bamboo is straight like a spine. As monocots, palms are more closely related to bamboo than any tree that grows near me. The choice honors my interest in plant evolution, & the quest for sustainable, renewable resources. Also, it makes a great clacking noise.
- ❖ Arborvitae leaves are interwoven scales, like myrtle. Oldest living tree species in Eastern N. America. “Tree of Life.”



Bamboo

Arborvitae

Willow

Apple

Boston, MA

Rabbi Laura Bellows

Etrog → Black walnut

Lulav → Phragmites

Myrtle → Sugar maple

Willow = Willow

- ❖ Black walnut is a ripe, local fruit
- ❖ Rabbi Laura uses phragmites for quills in her scribal arts
- ❖ Sugar maple leaves were bright, calling to mind the eyes of the myrtle



Piedmont, NC

Noah Rubin Blose

- ❖ *Tulip Poplar (Lulav)*: Taste and no smell. These branches from a strong and significant fruiting plant hold a prayer and a demand: No more strange fruit. A commitment to transform the structures and trauma of anti-black violence in the landscape of the South. The Poplar also offers the promise of sweetness, and abundant nectar for the bees.
- ❖ *White pine (Myrtle)*: Smell and no taste. Breathing its beautiful scent offers an appreciation for sensuality and the senses.
- ❖ *Willow (Willow)*: Neither smell nor taste. A prayer for clean water for all and a commitment to care for this planet that is our home.
- ❖ *Apple (Etrog)*: Smell and taste. This delicious, sweet-smelling fruit is grown in the mountains and shaped like a heart. Apples are both part of the history of colonization here and have been cultivated by indigenous people for generations, so this serves to recognize that we are still on colonized land.

SOURCE:

<https://jewishcurrents.org/decolonize-sukkot>



Ann Arbor, MI

Miriam Saperstein

- ❖ I've moved a lot in the past year, so this Sukkot my lulav is all about connecting to plants in order to ground myself in what home means for me. At the same time, I acknowledge that the land I am learning to call home has been home to many indigenous populations, including the Ojibwe, Odawa and Potawatomi—the land that the University of Michigan was built on was taken from these tribes.
- ❖ *Rose (Lulav)*: I harvested the rose from in front of the house where I live in Ann Arbor. It symbolizes the prickly and sweet nature of returning home.
- ❖ *Lavender (Myrtle)*: I harvested this lavender from my mom's garden behind my childhood home in Metro Detroit. This is a place, and plant, that soothes me and that I've known my whole life.
- ❖ *Redbud (Willow)*: I harvested this branch from a tree by the Huron River. Swimming and mikvehing there is helping me feel connected to this area.
- ❖ *Black walnut (Etrog)*: I learned about this fragrant plant on a Jewish farm in Connecticut, but it's also found in Michigan; it's become a personal symbol of reconnecting to the land, wherever I am.

SOURCE: <https://jewishcurrents.org/decolonize-sukkot>



East Bay, CA

Gabi Kirk

- ❖ *Coast live oak (Lulav)*: Native California oaks can easily grow to be 500 years old. They don't like growing too close to bodies of water and prefer to tap deep roots. Acorns of various oak species are the key food source for dozens of native animals and were/are a crucial food source for California Indian nations including the Chochenyo and Karkin Ohlone, on whose land I live.
- ❖ *California bay (Myrtle)*: California bay grows in the coastal mountain ranges to the west, often along rivers and creeks. It is fragrant and its leaves can be used as flavoring or for tea.
- ❖ *Coastal redwood (Willow)*: This stands in for the willow. Redwoods are fog drinkers, and get a lot of water directly through their leaves. They have remarkably shallow root systems for being some of the oldest and tallest trees in the world.
- ❖ *Ponderosa Pine Pinecone (Etrog)*: Pinecones are fertile and filled with countless seeds, like an etrog, symbolizing fertility. Native creatures and fire both help open the cones and disperse the seeds, symbolizing rebirth from catastrophe.

SOURCE:

<https://jewishcurrents.org/decolonize-sukkot>



How to Shake Your Local Lulav

Before you shake:

TRADITIONAL BLESSING

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha'olam

Asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al n'tilat lulav

Alternative Blessing with Feminine God pronouns:

Brucha at Yah, Elotheinu M'kor ha'Chayyim

Asher kidashtanu b'mitzvotah v'tzivatanu al n'tilat lulav

TUTORIAL ON HOW TO HOLD & WAVE A LOCAL LULAV



FAQs

Which species should I pick?

There is no one right answer for which species to select. It depends on where you live and what feels right to you. You can try something one year and change it up the next year. This is creative Jewish ritual at its best.

I recommend spending some time learning about trees, plants, and the land where you live as a form of Torah study. Then select four species based on your study.

What criteria should I use for selecting species?

There are many ways to do this. Here are some common ones:

- Species that look/smell similar to the traditional four.
- Species that respectively represent the heart, spine, mouth, and eyes in some way.
- Species that represent qualities you want to prioritize in your life or see manifest in the world this year.
- Species or individual trees that you have a close personal relationship with.
- Species that have a particular connection to water.

How do I harvest the branches?

I take clippers and a big bag with me. When I approach a tree, I take a breath and acknowledge the tree's personhood. I ask permission in my heart to harvest, and "listen" for a reply in my intuition. This is an I-Thou moment. I am intentionally treating the tree as kin, not commodity. Assuming I get a "yes" I make my cuttings and thank the tree. Sometimes I sing to the tree as an offering of gratitude.

How do I bind my local lulav together?

You can bind your local lulav with a natural fiber, or just bundle it all in your hands. Bonus cool points if you can bind them *with* one of the species you are using, but this can be tricky.

FAQs continued

When & where do we shake lulav?

We shake lulav on the first seven days of Sukkot except Shabbat. In a sukkah if possible, but anywhere is fine. During the morning ideally, but any daylight hours are fine. If you go to Sukkot services, you will shake there.

How do I store my Four Species?

I recommend putting them in the fridge, and even in water like flowers, or inside a crisper or plastic bag helps keep them fresh.

What do I do with my four species after the holiday?

You can compost them. But a lovely custom is to dry them and save them to use as fuel on a fire for burning chametz before Passover. Some fruit can dry well and be used as *b'samim* (spices) for havdalah.

Does shaking a local lulav fulfill the mitzvah of shaking lulav & etrog?

According to traditional rabbinic law, no. For 2,000 years Jews have been shaking palm frond, etrog, myrtle, and willow and halachically that is what is kosher. However, many modern Jews are comfortable adapting rabbinic mitzvot. Feminine language for God in prayer is one well-known example. Many of these Jews are highly educated in Judaism and change customs with great care, reverence, and caution. Other Jews don't think twice about adapting traditions. You can choose what is right for you and your family.

I like the idea of a local lulav... but I also want to shake a traditional lulav & etrog. What should I do?

Many Jewish congregations purchase a small number of sets that all community members can use. You can ask to shake one of these, and also make your own local lulav.

RESOURCES ON LOCAL LULAV **Hyperlinked**

My own relevant essays:

[“Creating a Local Lulav”](#) in The Sacred Earth: Jewish Perspectives on Our Planet

[“Teaching My Child to Love a Dying World”](#) in the New York Times, about trees

[Hazon’s Local Lulav: Shake Local Guide](#) from Hazon

[The Local Lulav: Decolonize Sukkot](#) from Jewish Currents

RESOURCES ON TREES - Rabbi Shoshana's starter kit

APPS: [Picture This](#) is my favorite - it's accurate & informative, & great for gardening as well as field identification. There are other decent free ones out there, too. But if you're willing to pay for excellent info, this is worth it. Using this app won't teach you *how* to identify trees though. Personally, I only use it for non-tree plants since identifying trees is a personal passion.

GUIDES: *For every guide, spend time reading the introduction on HOW to use it before you try and use it!*

[Tree Finder](#) by May Theilgaard Watts - this is a dichotomous key, and great for honing your observation skills.

[The Tree Identification Book](#) by George W.D. Symonds - large close up b&w photos of leaves, fruits, twigs, & bark

[Princeton Field Guides Trees of Eastern North America](#) (but choose for your region) - very thick, includes many species, & much more botanical information than a basic guidebook. Read the intro for basic tree evolution & biology!

BOOKS ABOUT TREES (there are many, but these are my favorites)

[The Hidden Lives of Trees](#) by Peter Wohlleben - easy to read, popular science book. You'll never see trees the same again.

[Can You Hear the Trees Talking?](#) By Peter Wohlleben - geared to kids & teens but great for adult learners too. Much of the same information as Hidden Lives of Trees but packaged with photos & experiments.

[A Natural History of North American Trees](#) by Donald Culross Peabody