

SUKKOT @Home

Plus Shemini Atzeret & Simchat Torah!

A Jewish LearningWorks Guide for Families with Young Children



The Jewish LearningWorks @Home Guides are designed to enrich your family's experience of the holidays. They empower parents with stories, rituals, "how to" information, traditions, projects, activities, values, resources and more.

הג שמחה!

Happy Holidays!

HAPPY SUKKOT!

חג סוכות שמח

Chag / Sue-Coat / Sah-may-ach

The Sukkot holiday begins on a full moon, the eve of the 15th day of the Hebrew month of *Tishrei*, usually between late September and mid-October. The week-long holiday of Sukkot marks the fall harvest and the start of the rainy season in Israel. When is Sukkot this year? Find out here:

www.hebcal.com/holidays/sukkot

The Torah tells us that Sukkot was one of three major festival holidays (along with *Pesach*/Passover and *Shavuot*/Feast of Weeks) in which Israelite pilgrims journeyed to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. They would bring an offering from their crops in order to express their gratitude for the harvest.

Sukkot is referred to by several names including *Chag HaAseef*, Festival of Ingathering [of crops], *Chag HaSukkot*, Feast of Booths, and *Z'man Simchataynu*, Season of Our Joy. It is packed with fun rituals, values and traditions to share with children!



A note on transliteration: "Ch" is the guttural sound made by the Hebrew letter *Chet*, as in *Chanukah* or *Chutzpah*.

This @Home guide includes many rituals, traditions, activities and social action projects that are associated with the holidays of *Sukkot*, *Shemini Atzeret*, and *Simchat Torah*. You won't find the words "should" or "ought to" in these pages. We hope to inspire you to experiment with practices that spark your interest. The Jewish community as a whole is enriched by diversity, creativity and pluralism, and we firmly believe that there is no one "right" way to be Jewish or to celebrate the holidays.

Sukkot Rituals & Traditions



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The Sukkah

The name of the holiday comes from the Hebrew word *sukkah*, a booth or hut erected for shade. The Israelites lived in frail *sukkot* (plural of *sukkah*) during their 40-year wandering in the desert from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. In addition, farmers slept in sukkah-like structures to be near their crops during harvest time in Israel. Traditionally observant Jews eat all of their meals in a sukkah for the entire week and sleep in a sukkah each night. In this way, the weeklong holiday of Sukkot reconnects us to the earth and the way our food is grown. Spending time in a sukkah gives us the opportunity to express gratitude for the bounty of food we are blessed to have and the sturdy dwellings we typically call

“home.” The sukkah is a reminder of the fragility of our lives and our dependence on nature.

The roof of a sukkah, called *s’chach*, is constructed directly under open sky. It is made of raw vegetation that has not been used or prepared for any other purpose and is no longer growing in the ground. Depending on the climate where you live, popular choices include western cedar, bamboo, and palm fronds. The *s’chach* covers enough of the roof that there is more shade than sun during the day, rain can get through, and some stars can be seen at night. It’s the *s’chach* that makes a sukkah a sukkah. The walls can be made of any material that can withstand a normal wind. Permanent walls, like the side of a house or a porch, can also be used. Get creative!



Beautifying a sukkah enhances the holiday's joy and provides endless ways to make your sukkah unique. Check out some ideas in the "Family Activities" section below.

There are countless ways to build a sukkah and many websites/videos to guide you. Here are just a few:

How to build a sukkah in 30 minutes or less:
<https://tinyurl.com/30MinSukkah>

Building and decorating your sukkah on a budget: <https://tinyurl.com/BudgetSukkah>

Plan for a PVC pipe sukkah:
<https://tinyurl.com/SukkahPlan>

One of many sites to purchase sukkah building kits or kosher bamboo mats for s'chach:
www.sukkot.com/products/sukkah-kits

Many synagogues and other Jewish organizations build a communal sukkah and are welcoming to visitors who would like to eat or socialize in them. To find a sukkah near you, go to: www.localsukkah.org

Blessing for Dwelling in the Sukkah

This blessing can be said any time you eat, sleep or spend time in the sukkah during the week-long holiday.

Audio clip from InterfaithFamily:

<https://tinyurl.com/DwellSukkah>

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר
 קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוֵּנוּ לַיֵּשֶׁב בַּסֻּכָּה

Baruch Atah Adonai Elohaynu Melech
 HaOlam Asher Kid'shanu B'Mitzvotav
 Vitseevanu L'Shev B'Sukkah.

Blessed are You, Divine One, Our G-d,
 Ruler of the Universe, who adds
 holiness to our lives and who gave us
 the mitzvah to dwell in the sukkah.

Arba'ah Minim / The Four Species

The *Arba'ah Minim* (Four Species) are made up of an *etrog* and a 3-part *lulav*. The *etrog* is a citron, related to the lemon, and the *lulav* is a bouquet of willow, myrtle and palm branches. On Sukkot, we wave the *Arba'ah Minim* in 6 directions: east, west, south, north, up, and down. This is a way of acknowledging our dependence on the land and our need for rain, as well as a reminder that holiness is all around us. Some say that the *Arba'ah Minim* are shaped like, and symbolic of, the human body. The *etrog* is the heart, the palm branch is the spine, the willow is the mouth, and the myrtle is the eye. In embracing them, we bring our whole selves to the holiday.

In synagogue, congregants parade in circuits with the *Arba'ah Minim* each day of Sukkot

(except Shabbat) while reciting prayers for prosperity. It is a sight to behold! The seventh day of Sukkot is called *Hoshana Rabbah* and on this day seven circuits are made. Some have the tradition of beating willow branches until the leaves fall off on Hoshana Rabbah, symbolizing a casting off of sins.



It is likely that you can order a set of Arba'ah Minim through your local Judaica store or synagogue. Sets are also available online at websites like: www.alljudaica.com, www.lulavandetrogsets.com, and <http://www.gotetrog.com>.

The blessing that is recited before waving the Arba'ah Minim:

Audio clip from InterfaithFamily:

<https://tinyurl.com/LulavBlessing>

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר
קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל נְטִילַת לולָב

Baruch Atah Adonai Elohaynu Melech
HaOlam Asher Kid'shanu B'Mitzvotav
Vitseevanu All Neteelat Loolav.

Blessed are You, Divine One, Our G-d,
Ruler of the Universe, who adds
holiness to our lives and who gave us
the mitzvah to take up the lulav.

The first time we wave the Arba'ah Minim each year, we have the opportunity to say the *Shehecheyanu* blessing. Here is a video from our friends at BimBam (www.bimbam.com) that teaches the Shehecheyanu and explains when and why we say this blessing of gratitude: <https://tinyurl.com/ShehechiyanuVideo>

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
שֶׁהֵחָיָנוּ וְקִיָּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמֶן הַזֶּה

Baruch Atah Adonai Elohaynu
Melech HaOlam She'heh'chee'anu,
v'kee'ah'mah'nu, v'higee'anu,
lahz'mahn ha'zeh.

Blessed are You, Divine One, Our G-d, Ruler
of the Universe, who has kept us alive,
sustained us, and brought us to this time.

Hachnasat Orchim / Welcoming Guests

Hachnasat Orchim, welcoming guests, is a time-honored tradition among Jews. It is a great mitzvah to invite others into our homes, especially those who are needy, and Sukkot is an extra special time to do so. Here is a BimBam video for parents that further explains the Jewish value of *Hachnasat Orchim*:

<https://tinyurl.com/WelcomeGuestsVideo>

One way we can practice *hachnasat orchim* on Sukkot is through the ritual of *Ushpizin* ("holy guests" in Aramaic). The *Zohar*, the classic book of Jewish mysticism, tells of seven *ushpizin* that visit each sukkah that symbolically welcomes them in. These guests traditionally include Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and King David. Many add these women: Sarah, Deborah, Rebecca, Miriam, Leah, Rachel,

and Ruth. Each night, one or two of the *ushpizin* can be honored for their righteous qualities. See Family Activities section.

Simchat Beit HaSho'ayvah

Simchat Beit HaSho'ayvah means "Rejoicing at the House of the Water Drawing." In ancient Jerusalem, every morning of Sukkot there was a water ceremony accompanied by great fanfare. Since the holiday marks the beginning of the rainy season in Israel, a great public ceremony was held to pray for the year's rainfall. Masses of people would sing and dance with musical instruments and lit torches while carrying water up from the springs to the Temple. Our sages wrote, "Whoever did not see the rejoicing of the *Simchat Beit HaSho'ayvah* never saw rejoicing in his lifetime." Modern day celebrations of *Simchat Beit HaSho'ayvah* often include festivals with music, dance and other creative expressions of appreciation for rain.



Shemini Atzeret & Simchat Torah

Immediately following the seventh day of Sukkot, we head into *Shemini Atzeret*, “The Eighth [day of] Assembly,” and one day later into *Simchat Torah*, Rejoicing of the Torah. In Israel and in many Reform communities, Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are celebrated on a single day.

Starting on Shemini Atzeret and continuing until Passover, we add a plea for wind and rain to our prayer services. We also recite *Yizkor*, the Jewish memorial service, in synagogue on Shemini Atzeret. It is customary for those who are remembering a close family member to light a 24-hour *yahrtzeit* candle at home before the holiday begins. More information can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/YahrtzeitCandles>

Simchat Torah marks the completion of our annual cycle of Torah readings. As soon as we finish a scroll with the story of the Israelites seeing the Promised Land and the death of Moses, we immediately open another scroll and start the cycle again with the Torah’s depiction of the creation of the world. In synagogue, all of the scrolls are taken out of the ark. During seven *hakafot*, circuits, the community sings and dances while joyfully carrying the Torah scrolls, typically late into the evening. Children often join the fun while waving flags or other banners they’ve created. Many congregations do one or more *hakafot* outside, either going around the synagogue or parading near the building. The seven *hakafot*, along with the singing and dancing, are repeated at services the next morning.



Family Activities

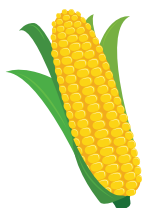


The sukkah reminds us of our connection to the natural world.

Do some gardening, volunteer for a beach clean up, sketch or paint a beautiful landscape, seek out a ranger-led activity in a nearby park, or take a family walk in nature.



Sukkot is a celebration of abundance. Have each family member share something they are grateful to have.



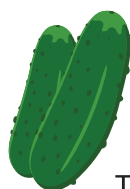
Make sukkah decorations for your (or someone else's) sukkah. Take a walk in your neighborhood to collect fallen branches and leaves. Some common sukkah decorations include colorful garlands, fruit, vegetables, gourds, Indian corn, flowers, lights, children's artwork, mobiles, and lanterns. Beans, popcorn and macaroni strings are popular decorations, as are paper chains.



Make your sukkah walls out of materials that can be painted or decorated such as bed sheets. Have guests sign or draw on your walls so you'll remember their visit.



Check out Fair Trade Judaica for sukkah decorations like these Jewish blessing flags: <https://tinyurl.com/JewishBlessingFlags>



Check out Bible Belt Balabusta:

<https://biblebeltbalabusta.com> for crafts and activities including an edible sukkah, a Lego sukkah, an edible Torah scroll, etrog projects and more.

Additional Sukkot crafts can be found here:

<https://tinyurl.com/SukkotCrafts>



Make water conservation signs to put up around your home. Check out the kids games and challenges at:

www.wateruseitwisely.com/kids



Build a model sukkah out of recycled materials you find at home.



Write a poem or letter to read to your own personal *ushpizin*. For example, symbolically "invite" guests from your family's ancestry and tell stories you remember of them. Alternatively, welcome the spirits of modern day heroes or friends who have qualities you admire. What questions would you like to ask your guests?



Learn about and support farmworkers through organizations such as Farmworker Justice:

www.farmworkerjustice.org

and The Center for Farmworker Families:

www.farmworkerfamily.org



Consider inviting friends or neighbors to your home or sukkah to share a meal over the holiday. As Sukkot celebrates the fall harvest, dishes are often made from autumn fruits

such as apples and pears as well as root vegetables like sweet potatoes, and carrots. Squash soups, hearty stews and casseroles are also common. Similar to Rosh HaShanah, dishes with honey and pomegranates tend to be popular. Try some of these harvest recipes:

<https://tinyurl.com/RecipesForSukkot>



Have a sukkah sleepover party. Don't have a sukkah? Build an indoor fort out of pillows and blankets or pitch a tent and camp in your backyard.



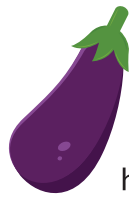
Get out your telescope for an astronomy-themed evening. Make moon and star decorations for your sukkah or your home's dining room.



Learn about traditions related to hospitality from other religions and cultures.



Moses Maimonides (also called the Rambam) was one of the greatest Jewish scholars of all time. He taught that the sukkah reminds us to live modestly, even in times of fortune, in order to keep our values in perspective. Have a conversation about what it means to your family to live modestly.



Visit a local farm to see how some of your favorite produce is grown and harvested. Alternatively, visit a farmer's market and talk to the farmers. Thank them for their hard work and support them by purchasing some of their produce. Your children can even make thank you cards to deliver!



Visit an apple orchard or pumpkin patch. Some farms permit families to pick their own fruits and vegetables. Check out www.pickyourown.org to locate a farm in your area. The website includes crop calendars to explore what's in season, recipes, and directions for how to freeze, can, dry, or preserve your harvest. You can also find produce festivals here:

<http://www.pickyourown.org/festivals.php>



Consider joining a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) farm. Find one near you here: <https://tinyurl.com/CSAfinder>



Find a local organization that collects items for people transitioning from homeless shelters into homes, such as:

www.tprojects.org/donate/items



Volunteer with Habitat for Humanity (www.habitat.org) or Rebuilding Together (<https://rebuildingtogether.org>)



Check out the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable to find organizations focused on these issues:

<http://jewishsocialjustice.org/members>



Collect food and/or volunteer at a local food pantry or soup kitchen.



Consider taking your children to a nearby synagogue on Erev Simchat Torah, the evening the holiday begins, to experience the joyful singing and dancing. If you need help locating one, contact your local Jewish Community Center or Jewish Community Federation.



Sing songs about the rain, create rain sticks:

www.giftofcuriosity.com/diy-rain-stick-craft and/or make up your own rain dances.



From the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (www.rac.org): Sukkot occurs when the weather begins to turn. Organize a clothing drive to collect warm items such as coats, hats and gloves. Contact a shelter to ask what is most needed.



Simchat Torah celebrates completing the annual cycle of reading the Torah and beginning the cycle over again. With the recent start of the new school year, both parents and children may have beginnings and/or accomplishments to celebrate. Make a family list.



Read Jewish books with your children about these holidays and the values they represent. We recommend:



It's Sukkah Time!
by Latifa Berry Kropf



The Best Sukkot Pumpkin Ever
by Laya Steinberg



Tamar's Sukkah (2015 edition)
by Ellie B. Geller



Sammy Spider's First Sukkot
by Sylvia A. Rouss



Sammy Spider's First Simchat Torah
by Sylvia A. Rouss



Bubbe Isabella and the Sukkot Cake
by Kelly Terwilliger



Maya Prays for Rain
by Susan Tarcov



Bagels from Benny
by Aubrey Davis



I Say Shehechyanu
by Joanne Rocklin

Find more books about Jewish holidays and values at: www.pjlibrary.org

Interested in receiving future @Home guides? Contact Deb Fink, Director of the Family Education and Engagement Initiative: dfink@jewishlearningworks.org

*Happy Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret
and Simchat Torah!*