



Easy Peasy Sukkot Guide

Seed

The Sukkah

On Sukkot we commemorate the special protection that Hashem gave the Jewish people as they journeyed through the desert. We re-live this by replacing our usual home with a temporary living space – the Sukkah, thus demonstrating that Hashem's protection is more important to us than the roof over our heads.

Building your Sukkah

The minimum requirements of a Kosher Sukkah are two walls of length 70cm each, built at a right angle, and a third partial wall connected to one of them. The schach covering (see page 3) for the roof must be placed at a height of at least one metre. It is correct to build a Sukkah with four walls and a larger size and height so one can sit comfortably in it as one would at home.

The following are the key points to know when building a Sukkah:

Location

Your Sukkah must be located on land that you own or you have permission to use. It must be in a place that is safe and comfortable to use for eating and sleeping i.e. not in a place where there is a foul smell or danger of being robbed.

Your Sukkah must be sturdy enough to withstand a regular wind in the place it is located.

Make sure there are no overhanging branches or roofs above your Sukkah.

Schach: natural
roof covering
used in a Sukkah



Walls

Ideally your Sukkah should have four walls. If you have less than three full walls consult your Rabbi to ensure that they are sufficient.

Your Sukkah may be any shape but must have a minimum width of 70cm and a minimum length of 70cm.

The walls may be made of any material that does not move around in a regular wind. Therefore, if the walls are made from cloth or material they must be tied taut so they do not move around in the wind, and one should also have three straps or poles around three walls in case the material becomes untied. Most store bought Sukkahs are made in this fashion. Consult a rabbi regarding the positioning of these straps if you make your own Sukkah. Alternatively, it is sufficient if the material is tied with cable ties since there is no concern that it will become untied.

Sukkah roof

Many people with an outdoor Sukkah have a hinged roof over their Sukkah that can be closed if it rains. This roof may be open and closed on Shabbat and Yom Tov. Make sure the roof is open when eating in your Sukkah and when placing the schach on your Sukkah.

You may leave schach on the Sukkah from one year to the next but it must be lifted up and placed back down each year before Sukkot with intent to use for your Sukkah.





Schach – Roof Covering

The roof covering is called schach and must be made from a natural, unprocessed material that has been cut from the ground and has not been fashioned into any type of utensil or food. The simplest material to use are branches cut from a tree – look for one with large leaves that will provide lots of shade and not fall off during Sukkot. Many people in England use laurel branches.

Thin pieces of wood (less than 8cm thick) may also be used as schach but not wider pieces since they resemble the roof of a house. Many people buy schach mats made from thin pieces of wood joined together. These need a hechsher to show they were made for schach, not for lying or sitting on.

Your schach must be sufficiently thick enough to provide more shade than sun however, should ideally not be too thick so that one can see the stars through it at night. In colder countries such as England it is preferable to make your schach thicker so that your Sukkah is warmer, even though you cannot see the stars. In any case, schach may not be so thick that heavy rain cannot permeate it.

Schach should rest on a material that itself is kosher for schach. Therefore, if your Sukkah is made from metal poles you should place wooden beams on top of them so the schach rests on the wood.

Similarly, if you are concerned your schach may blow away in a regular wind you should hold it down with a material that is itself kosher for schach such as a heavy branch. Alternatively, you can tie it down with string made from a natural material.





Decorations

It is customary to make the Sukkah beautiful by decorating the walls with posters, and the schach with hanging decorations. All hanging decorations should hang within 30 cm of the schach. Once Sukkot begins the decorations may not be taken down to use for another purpose e.g. hanging fruits may not be eaten.

Skylight succah

Some people have a skylight built into their house which is opened during Sukkot and schach placed over the space to use as a Sukkah. In this case, one does not need to build walls for the Sukkah, since the walls of the house serve as the walls of the Sukkah. To facilitate this, the skylight must be positioned within 1.92 metres from the walls of the house. If this is not the case, you may need to construct a temporary wall next to the skylight. Consult with your Rabbi before installing a skylight Sukkah or if you are unsure regarding the above measurements.

Make sure the skylight is open when placing the schach on your Sukkah.

Using your Sukkah

The mitzvah of the Sukkah entails making the Sukkah your home for the duration of Sukkot. Eating, sleeping and socialising should take place in the Sukkah rather than in one's house (nowadays, many people do not sleep in the Sukkah as explained below). Nevertheless, the accepted practice is to only make a blessing on the Sukkah when one eats. Therefore, when spending time in a Sukkah it is correct to eat the amount specified below in order to make a blessing on the Sukkah.

The blessing on the Sukkah is:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ
בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לֵישֵׁב בַּסֻּכָּה

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam asher
kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu leishav ba'sukkah*

Who is Obligated?

Men (over 13 yrs old) are obligated in the mitzvah of Sukkah. Women are not obligated, but fulfil a mitzvah if they choose to sit in the Sukkah. As with all mitzvot, children from the age of five or six should be educated to fulfil the mitzvah of Sukkah.

Mitzvah/Mitzvot:
commandment/s



Eating

Food that is eaten in a substantial amount must be eaten in the Sukkah, and one makes a blessing on the Sukkah as well as the blessing on the food. Less than this may be eaten outside the Sukkah although some are stringent to eat all food and drink in the Sukkah.

Bread - If one eats a piece of bread that is larger than the volume of two small matchboxes (kebeitzah) it must be eaten in a Sukkah.

Mezonot that is baked e.g. cakes or biscuits - if one eats an amount larger than the volume of two small matchboxes (kebeitzah) this must be eaten in a Sukkah. One should also spend some time in the Sukkah (5 or 10 minutes).

Mezonot that is cooked e.g. pasta - only requires a Sukkah if eaten as a meal.

A meal consisting of other foods such as meat, fish, potatoes etc - does not require a Sukkah but it is best to eat in the Sukkah when possible. Do not make a blessing on the Sukkah.

When drinking wine in a prolonged manner, such as sitting with friends (bikevius) - one should drink in the Sukkah but not make a blessing. Other drinks in this manner should also be drunk in the Sukkah if possible.

Make sure the table you are eating at is also inside the Sukkah.

Sleeping

It is a mitzvah to sleep in the Sukkah and some people do this throughout sukkot. Nowadays, many people are lenient and do not sleep in the Sukkah since it is too cold or because they are not able to sleep in the Sukkah as husband and wife. Nevertheless, it is correct to sleep in the Sukkah when possible.

Other activities

One should live in their Sukkah as they would live in their house. Therefore, as many activities as possible should be done in the Sukkah such as receiving guests, reading and learning. However, pots and pans may not be brought into the Sukkah since this is disrespectful to the mitzvah, nor may one use the Sukkah for something that belittles it such as washing up.

Mezonot: Grains

Beitzah: amount -
volume of two
small matchboxes



Exemptions from Sukkah

The Torah obligates us to live in the Sukkah as we live in our homes. Therefore, one whose Sukkah causes him pain or distress may leave the Sukkah since he would also leave his house in a similar circumstance. Examples of this are rain, bad smells, flies and one who is unwell. As mentioned earlier, one may not build his Sukkah in a place that he will always be in discomfort e.g. where there is a foul smell.

The first night of Sukkot

Throughout Sukkot one is only obligated to eat in the Sukkah if one wants to eat bread or mezonot in the quantities detailed above. If one does not want to eat these quantities, there is no obligation to eat in the Sukkah. However, on the first night of Sukkot one is obligated to eat bread in the Sukkah. Some authorities maintain that this obligation applies even if it is raining or one has other discomfort that would usually exempt him.

Therefore, if it is raining on the first night and it may stop, one should wait an hour or two to eat in the Sukkah. If it does not stop raining, or one is sure that it will not stop then he should make kiddush and eat one slice of bread (kezayit) in the Sukkah whilst it is raining without making a blessing on the Sukkah. The rest of the meal may be eaten inside the house. If the rain stops later on he should wash and eat more than a kebeitzah of bread in the Sukkah and say a blessing on the Sukkah.

One should act similarly on the second night but does not need to wait until the rain stops.

Shabbat and Yom Tov Candles

Shabbat and Yom Tov candles should be lit in the room that one is eating. Therefore, if possible, one should light candles in the Sukkah. However, if this is dangerous or impractical, one should light the candles inside the house in a room that he will use during the meal e.g. the kitchen.

Kezayit: amount -
volume of a small
matchbox

Kebeitzah: amount
- volume of two
small matchboxes



The Arba Minim (Four Species)

The Arba Minim are

Lulav – palm branch

Etrog – citrus fruit

Hadasim – myrtle branches

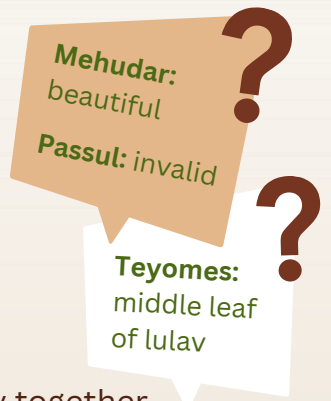
Aravot – willow branches

It is a mitzvah to take the four species together every day of Sukkot. In this section we will explain how to choose and use your Arba Minim.

Choosing your Arba Minim

The Torah states that our Arba Minim should be beautiful – mehudar. In the following paragraphs we will define what constitutes an invalid (passul) item, a kosher item and a mehudar item.

Please note we have listed the most common problems that arise, to enable you to avoid them when initially choosing a set. However, if you discover one of these problems during Sukkot always ask a Rabbi whether you may continue to use your set.



Lulav – Palm branch

The lulav should be green and straight and its leaves should lie closely together.

Look carefully and you will see that each leaf of the lulav is in fact two leaves closed tightly together. Pay careful attention to the middle leaf – this can be identified by locating the spine of the lulav (the solid green part from where the leaves branch off), the leaf that emerges from the top of the spine is the middle leaf (teyomes). In a mehudar lulav, the middle leaf should not be split at all, but the lulav is only passul if the majority of the length between the tip of this leaf and the spine is split.

Sometimes, two leaves emerge from the spine in which case you must make sure that neither are split. If the two leaves of the middle leaf have split apart until they look like a “V” shape the lulav is passul.

If even the smallest amount of the middle leaf has been cut off the lulav is invalid. If there are two middle leaves, as long as one is whole, the lulav is kosher.

If the top leaves are bent the lulav is kosher but not mehudar.

Often the top leaves of the lulav are brown since they have been burnt by the sun. The lulav is still mehudar.

Some lulavim have a brown substance holding their leaves together (called koreh) this does not need to be removed and the lulav is still mehudar.



Etrog – Citrus Fruit

Your Etrog should be yellow or light green and should ideally be straight and free of all blemishes.

An etrog that is missing even the smallest piece is passul. However, a hole made by thorns on the tree that has healed is kosher.

The stick at the top of the etrog is called the pitam and the stalk at the bottom is called the ukatz. If either of these is missing completely the etrog is passul.

The top section of the etrog – from where it begins to narrow towards the top, is called the chotem.

An etrog often has blemishes in this area that are caused by a number of factors. These can be grouped into three categories:

- A) Black or white spots and raised leaf marks
- B) Brown marks such as those caused by bruises and thorns
- C) Smooth leaf marks

Category A blemishes invalidate the etrog if found in one place on the chotem or on two or three places such that the majority of the circumference of the etrog is blemished. Category B blemishes invalidate the etrog if found in two or three places such that the majority of the circumference is blemished. Category C blemishes are considered part of the normal appearance of the etrog and do not invalidate it.

All the above blemishes are only an issue if they can be seen by the naked eye when the etrog is held at arm's length.

An etrog that has been grafted with another fruit such as a lemon is passul. Therefore, always make sure to buy your etrog from an orchard that has a hechsher testifying to its pedigree. You can request this from the seller.



Hadasim – Myrtle Branches

You need three branches of hadasim with green leaves that cover the stem.

If the top of the stem has been cut off, the branch is passul. However, if the stem is intact but the branch is missing the top leaves it is still kosher.

The leaves of the hadas should grow in rows of three spanning the length of the branch. The three leaves should be sufficiently aligned so that one can draw a circle around the branch connecting the points where they branch off. A hadas that grew with only two leaves in each row is passul. Ideally, there should be three leaves in each row for 30cm of the length of the branch or for at least 16cm.



Aravot – Willow Branches

You need two aravah branches with green leaves.

The Talmud gives specific signs to identify the aravah. For this and other reasons one should not cut branches from a willow tree himself but rather should buy aravot from a reputable seller.

If most of the leaves of the aravah have dried out or fallen off it is invalid. If the leaves turn black or are dried out but still attached, it is still kosher but not mehudar.

If the top of the stem has been cut off the aravah is passul.

Using your Arba Minim

There is a mitzvah to take the arba minim every day of Sukkot besides for Shabbat. Each day we make the blessing of “al netilat lulav” before fulfilling the mitzvah and on the first day we also make the blessing of “Shehecheyanu”. You can find these on p.630 in the Artscroll siddur.

Hold the lulav in your right hand together with the hadasim and aravot. These three species should be tied together with a palm branch. Usually, people use a container that has three slots woven from palm leaves called a koisheklach. With the spine of the lulav facing you, place the hadasim on the right side and the aravot on the left. Hold the etrog in your left hand next to the lulav.

If you are left handed, hold the lulav in your left hand and the etrog in your right hand.

Pick up the etrog upside down, hold it alongside the lulav, make the blessing, and then turn the etrog the right way up. Then shake the arba minim in six directions – forward, right, back, left, up and down. Hold them whilst saying hallel and shake them as indicated in your siddur.

We also hold the arba minim whilst walking around the shul and saying hoshanot – see p.726 in the Artscroll siddur.

Hoshanot:
prayer said
on Sukkot

Hallel: prayer
said on festivals
and Rosh Chodesh
(new month)

**For any further questions and easy
peasy answers contact Rabbi Dov
Birnbbaum at Seed's halacha
hotline 07341 479 282**



Family Shul Experience
Beis Moshe v'Chaya

