

SHMITA

INTRODUCTION TO SHMITA

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Every seventh year, fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes grown in Eretz Yisrael are subject to the laws of “shmita,” which entail letting the land rest.

Holiness of Shmita Produce

Fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes, etc., grown in Eretz Yisrael holiness. This holiness determines how we may treat fruit during shmita, including how to eat it and how to dispose of it.

Which Produce Is Subject to Shmita Laws?

All fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes that grow in Eretz Yisrael are subject to shmita laws. However, since there is a rabbinic decree that we may not eat vegetables and grains (called “sfichin”) that grow in Eretz Yisrael during shmita year, we will mainly be discussing fruits.

NOTE Vegetables, grains, and legumes that are not raised in halachic Eretz Yisrael are never subject to shmita laws. So if a fruit or vegetable was grown outside the borders of Second Temple period Eretz Yisrael, you may eat that fruit or vegetable with no shmita concerns. Such areas may include much of the southern part of the State of Israel, including the Arava and southern Negev all the way to Eilat, land south of Gaza, etc. Some people include the Golan. Many people also include any land currently “owned” by Arabs.

Plants grown off the ground or inside a house are also not subject to shmita.

When Is Shmita?

The next shmita year will be observed beginning Rosh Hashana, September 2014.

SHMITA: FRUIT

Shmita: Fruit: Otzar Bet Din

SITUATION You may not sell shmita fruit in the normal manner.

WHAT TO DO An otzar bet din can be set up to distribute fruit and pay the farmer for his work on distributing. The otzar bet din then distributes the fruit to the public and gets reimbursed for the expenses.

Shmita: Fruit: Who May Eat

Shmita produce is ownerless and free for use by anyone.

Shmita: Fruit: How To Eat

You may eat fruit of the shmita year in Eretz Yisrael, but only in the normal way for eating that fruit.

Shmita: Fruit: How To Dispose Of

You may not put shmita peels, cores, and other waste parts into the garbage (unlike teruma, you may not double-bag them and put them in the garbage). You must put them aside to rot before disposal.

Shmita: Canned Fruit from Eretz Yisrael

You may not buy canned fruit or other produce from Eretz Yisrael (even in later years) if the produce grew during a shmita year (except through an otzar bet din). This may be a problem with exports from Israel.

SHMITA: GRAIN AND VEGETABLES

Shmita: Grain and Vegetables: Benefiting From

You may not use grain and vegetables grown in Eretz Yisrael from a shmita year in any way (and no benefit may be derived from them).

SHMITA: PLANTS

Watering the Ground during Shmita

In Eretz Yisrael, you may not pour water on the ground during a shmita year if plants will benefit.

Spitting Seeds During Shmita

In Eretz Yisrael, you may spit seeds on the ground during a shmita year as long as they are inedible.

SHMITA: WINE

Buying and Using Shmita Wine

You may not buy wine from grapes grown in Eretz Yisrael during a shmita year unless you buy it from an otzar bet din. Even if you do buy from an otzar bet din, it is not recommended to buy shmita wine since you:

- May not waste even one drop,
- Must use it only in the normal way, and
- May not dispose of the residue in the bottle until it has become unpotable.