



Make Sukkot A Truly "Green" Holiday



ARZA is the national membership organization connecting American Reform Jews and Israel through Education, Advocacy and Travel.

ARZA Resources for An Eco-Zionist Sukkot Celebration

Hearing the words "green sukkah," initially we might picture the evergreen branches on the roof (schach) of a sukkah. If we turn our mind's eye just a bit toward the east, however, our vision of "a green sukkah" might also encompass the Sukkot traditions of Israel's Kibbutz Lotan, a community of Reform Jews committed to living an environmentally-oriented, "eco-Zionist" lifestyle, intertwined with Reform Jewish values.

Kibbutz Lotan members Leah Benamy and Alex Ciccelsky have prepared some very practical (and fun!) tools for you and your congregation to use during Sukkot. There are separate pages of instructions to print and share for each of the three ideas for a green Sukkot.

About Kibbutz Lotan

To learn more about Kibbutz Lotan, a dynamic Reform community in the Arava desert, click onto www.kibbutzlotan.com. A group of young Reform Jews, including several American NFTY alumni, established Kibbutz Lotan in 1987. A visit to Lotan is an unforgettable experience! "Frommer's Guide to Israel 2008" calls it a place that is "showing Israeli society how to recycle, live inventively, and create communities that are fun, filled with beauty, and in harmony with nature and the land." Contact Kibbutz Lotan to arrange for unique, rustic accommodations as well as a variety of workshops and tours for individuals, families, and all types of groups.

Why make Sukkot A Green Holiday, Anyway?

Sukkot is perhaps the most "environmentally-oriented" of the three ancient pilgrimage festivals (the

other two are Passover and Shavuot) when ancient Jews traveled from all over Eretz Israel to worship at the Temple. In Jewish tradition, it is a mitzvah "to dwell in the sukkah". Indeed, of the 613 traditional mitzvot, eating in the sukkah is one of only two mitzvot that completely envelop us in body, as well as spirit (the other is immersing in a mikvah, a ritual bath). Coming at a time of year when summer's warmth is fading and chilly nights remind us winter is around the corner, our sages intended that time spent in a sukkah should inspire reflection on our human frailty, the transitory nature of our possessions, our connection to our surroundings and God's ultimate concern for our well-being as we struggled in the wilderness. Indeed, from within the flimsy walls of our "sacred shanties", how can we possibly ignore nature? Our very celebration of this holiday is dependent on the weather. Torah commentators debated how heavily it must rain before we abandon the sukkah to eat inside. (One famous answer is that we stay in the sukkah as long as the rain does not dilute our soup!) Keep in mind that while we are hoping for clear skies this Sukkot, on Kibbutz Lotan and throughout Israel, rain might be most welcome, if only to alleviate the drought that has beset Israel for several years now.

Three Ideas for a Green Sukkot

- **Create a "Recycled Sukkah":** Instructions and photos for a creating a colorful "recycled sukkah" from materials you might otherwise throw away.
- **Host a truly eco-friendly dinner in your sukkah:** Practical ways to minimize waste while enjoying a seasonal meal.
- **Watch, talk and learn in your sukkah:** An educational program that informs and stimulates reflection about contemporary lifestyles, environmental awareness and Jewish values.

What an occasion, then, for us as Jews and as individuals living in the 21st century to explore more deeply how we can relate more purposefully to our fragile natural environment. Sukkot gives us an opportunity to reflect, in a Jewish context, on whether our contemporary lifestyle connects us to or cuts us off from the natural world.



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How to Create a Recycled Sukkah by Rabbi Leah Benamy, Kibbutz Lotan

A resource for you, your Rabbi, Educational Director, Youth Group Leader, and Committee Members, e.g. ARZA, WRJ/MRJ, Social Action, etc.

We on Kibbutz Lotan have the great privilege of living and working full-time in a community where all of us are committed to a special way of life. One of our core values, as stated in our community's vision statement, is living in a way that nurtures the Earth and our particular corner of it: "We strive to fulfill the biblical ideal 'to till the earth and preserve it', in our home, our region, the country and the world. We are working to create ways to live in harmony with our desert environment."

Two years ago Kibbutz Lotan's school-age children entered a regional contest to create "The Most Recycled Sukkah". The kids had fun putting their imagination and creativity to work building our communal sukkah, and their parents took pride not only in their efforts, but also in the message we succeeded in getting across, i.e.

that not everything is junk after it fulfills its original purpose! Of course, it also meant a heightened sense of ownership of that year's kibbutz sukkah for the kids, some of whom went on to encourage their families to build the same sort of sukkah at their houses. Since then, we adults have noticed that our children on Lotan have given greater attention to the second "R" of the trio 'Reduce, Reuse and Recycle': When my daughter relabeled a second-grade binder "Third Grade", rather than throwing it away and buying a new one, I knew she "got it".

On the following page are photos of sukkot built by the children from the communities of Kibbutz Ketura and Kibbutz Grofit – and the First Prize Winner from Kibbutz Lotan!

Suggestions for creating your own "Recycled Sukkah"

Create "stars" to sparkle inside your sukkah. Take all those old CD's and DVD's, paint the labeled side, and decorate the shiny side with colored paper cut into triangle "rays". Hang from the roof.

String together chains of empty (and rinsed!) soda cans and bottles. Cover toilet paper rolls and string them together, too.

Create a groovy beaded entrance with soda bottle tops. Punch or drill two holes in the sides of plastic soda bottle tops. Insert a string and tie a knot for each cap. Create a dozen or more strings full of bottle tops and you have your beaded doorway.



Create an "I Spy" game for visitors. Line the top border of your sukkah with plastic figures and other small odds and ends your children collect. Have your kids create a poster of their own "I Spy" challenge. All your guests will be occupied with a fun game between dinner courses!

Think creatively about materials for walls. Take a look at the photo on the next page of large egg cartons tied together. What about breaking down the sides of corrugated cardboard boxes? How about old sheets or towels destined for the rag pile? A challenge: Create mats by weaving together plastic bags from the super market.



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Recycled Sukkot Created by the Children of Kibbutz Ketura, Kibbutz Grofit and Kibbutz Lotan



Kibbutz Ketura



Kibbutz Ketura



Kibbutz Grofit



Kibbutz Lotan First Prize Winners



A Sukkot Program to Reflect on How We Live In Our World or “What’s so Jewish About Environmentalism?” By Alex Cicelsky, Kibbutz Lotan/Center for Creative Ecology

A resource designed to be used and facilitated by you, your Rabbi, Educational Director, Youth Group Leader, and Committee Members, e.g. ARZA, WRJ/MRJ, Social Action, etc.

Ideally, this program will take place in a sukkah, perhaps as the centerpiece of an eco-friendly potluck dinner.

The objectives of this educational program are:

1. To educate congregants about the impact our contemporary consumer-oriented lifestyle has on the environment.
2. To highlight for congregants Jewish texts focusing on the relationship between God, humanity and the earth.
3. To engage congregants in a discussion about personal choices, Jewish values and global responsibility, by incorporating information from the film and insights from Jewish texts.

The program in three easy steps:

1. View together **The Story of Stuff**, a lively, creative film about consumerism and its environmental impact. You will need to download, The Story of Stuff, www.storyofstuff.com and either burn it onto a CD or DVD, or upload to show it on a computer screen.
2. Ask individuals to read aloud the Jewish texts on the following page to the entire group.
3. Discuss the questions on the following page within small groups at each table.



Jewish Study Texts and Discussion Questions For "What's so Jewish About Environmentalism?"

Text Portion 1

Behold my works, how beautiful and commendable they are. All that I have created I have created for your sake, be careful not to corrupt or destroy My world; for if you corrupt it there will be no one after you to repair it. (Midrash Kohelet Rabbah VII: 2.1)

Text Portion 2

"God Everywhere, Wherever I turn my eyes, around on Earth or to the heavens/I see you in the field of stars/ I see You in the yield of the land/in every breath and sound, a blade of grass, a simple flower, an echo of Your holy Name." (Abraham ibn Ezra, renowned Torah commentator)

Text Portion 3

It should not be believed that all the beings exist for the sake of the existence of humanity. On the contrary, all the other beings too have been intended for their own sakes, and not for the sake of something else. (Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, 456).

Text Portion 4

Master of the Universe, grant me the ability to be alone; may it be my custom to go outdoors each day among the trees and grass and all growing things, and there may I be alone, and enter into prayer. (Nachman of Bratzlav, Maggid Sichot, 48).

Discussion Questions

- What new things did you learn from the film?
- What new Jewish insights did you gain from the texts?
- As a citizen of the globe, what responsibility do you believe you have in the choices you make? What guidance does Judaism offer regarding individual responsibility, the choices we all make, and our role in the world?
- How is your lifestyle in line with minimizing your negative impact on the environment? How is it out-of-sync? Are there feasible options available for making different choices if you want to reduce your impact on the environment?
- In what ways does your congregational community live according to eco-aware, Jewish values? Are there some practices your community might consider changing?



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Steps for an Eco-Friendly Sukkot Meal at Home or at Your Congregation

A resource for you, the Youth Group, the Religious School, ARZA, Social Action and other Committees.

Plan a special potluck meal in your sukkah that reflects a heightened consciousness of our connection to nature and our impact on the environment. Below are a few ways to make this gathering an eco-friendly event. We hope these innovations will spark questions and discussion among the sukkah guests:

1. Designate your potluck dinner a "meatless meal". From the fertilizers used in producing feed to shipping meat to your table, the beef industry is an incredibly intensive consumer of petroleum products. One of the most significant steps city-dwellers and suburbanites can take to decrease their "carbon footprints" is reducing their red meat consumption.
2. Encourage attendees to look for and buy locally-grown, in-season produce, organic if possible -- apples and zucchini from a nearby farm instead of South American melons and hothouse tomatoes shipped cross-country.

3. Request that congregants bring their own "place settings"—non-disposable plates, forks, cups, even cloth napkins – and eliminate the heaps of paper, plastic and styrofoam that usually accumulate at group gatherings. Create a clean-up assembly line guaranteed to have the kids lining up to help out: a station for contributing food scraps to your or the congregation's new compost pile, a tub with warm, soapy water for a quick wash, and clear water to rinse. Finish by pouring the "gray water" around trees and shrubs.

Environmental concerns loom large in the minds of today's young people. Teens may be your most enthusiastic guests at this eco-friendly meal. Think about issuing a special invitation to your congregation's teen youth group to participate and ask them to play a role in serving at the buffet table and supervising the clean-up.