



Sukkot:
traditions, rituals,
how-tos, and
meaning-making

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It's about the journey

Sukkot is:



A marker of seasonal shifting from summer (mystically-speaking, a time of emotional upheaval) to fall (a time of joy and celebration).



An agricultural festival celebrating the bounty of earthly, autumnal resources. Think American Thanksgiving, but in a hut.



A reminder of our exodus from Egypt, and the partnership forged there between Jews and God. It's a time for pure joy and celebration.

The most recognizable *Sukkot* ritual is the construction of a little huts called a *sukkah*. The word *Sukkot* in Hebrew is literally the plural of the word *sukkah*. *Sukkot* lasts for 7 days. It's customary to build a *sukkah* and spend as much time as possible inside of it. Some folks even eat and sleep inside their *sukkah*. The *sukkah* becomes like your home for the week.



Some Sukkot traditions:



Building a traditional *sukkah* takes space, time, and planning, but it's really fun if you have capacity for it. (Keep scrolling for details on how to construct a traditional *sukkah*, and for some ideas about simpler, re-envisioned *sukkot*.)



The actual *sukkah* is just a jumping off point for decor! Decorating a *sukkah* is half the fun. Fairy lights, hanging fruit, paper chains, lanterns, rugs, and pillows are just a few ideas to get you started. Basically, you want to create an environment that is comfortable and welcoming. Somewhere you'd actually like to spend some time in.



Another beautiful *sukkot* ritual involves calling ancestors into the *sukkah*. *Sukkot* is a time to reconnect to our roots as ex-slaves in Egypt, and that means all of the people who came before us. You can get as creative as you like with this ritual. Consider creating an altar of family photographs and heirlooms, or journaling about your connections to relatives who have passed on.



Lastly, *Sukkot* is an opportunity to gather together with your friends and family, whether in your *sukkah* space or not. Inviting people to your *sukkah* and visiting your friends in their *sukkah* is half the fun!





The *Lulav and Etrog*: embodying Divine energy



What are the *lulav and etrog*?

The other traditional symbols for *Sukkot* is the *lulav* and *etrog*.

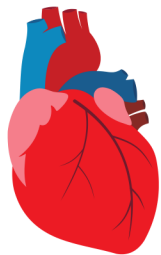
The *lulav* is a collection of 3 native plants of Israel, palm, willow, and myrtle branches . The *etrog* is a citron, a large fruit similar to a lemon.

Jewish mystics believed the *lulav* and *etrog* represents our body: eyes, mouth, spine, and heart. If you look at the different plants you can see this. The tradition is to gather them all together go into the *sukkah* and shake them together in all six directions – east, south, west, north, up and down – it's metaphorically as if you are simultaneously shaking them with all of your intention and surrounding yourself with Divine energy.



Willow:

Represents the mouth, through which we speak love or hate



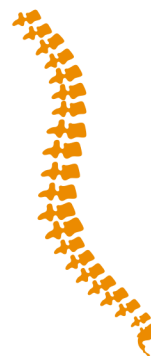
Etrog:

Represents the heart, that we can keep open or closed to ourselves or others



Palm frond:

Represents the spine, with which we stand strong



Myrtle:

Represents the eyes, through which we seek enlightenment

Traditional specifications for building a *sukkah*:

We now know that the *sukkah* is the centerpiece of Sukkot: a space outdoors to eat, entertain, and even sleep! Like many other Jewish holidays, we spend this holiday in community with family and friends, and so build the *sukkah* with open walls to welcome people in. At HMI, we believe in making your *sukkah* your own, but Jewish law gives us a host of guidelines for anyone wishing to construct a traditional dwelling:

1. At least one person must be able to fit inside along with a table.
2. The walls of the *sukkah* may be made of any material, but must be sturdy enough to withstand an ordinary wind.
3. You have to wait until after Yom Kippur to start *sukkah* construction. Metaphysically-speaking, it's considered auspicious to begin building your *sukkah* *immediately after* Yom Kippur because building a *sukkah* is considered a *mitzvah/a good deed*, and good deeds shouldn't be put off.
4. The roof of the *sukkah* must be constructed out of "detached products of the soil." In other words: wood, branches, leaves, sticks, palm fronds, bamboo, or anything else that is natural and comes from the ground.
5. The roof of your *sukkah* should provide more shade than sun.
6. Don't build your *sukkah* under a tree. Nothing should come in between the roof of your *sukkah* and the open sky.
7. You can use a pre-existing wall (like from your home or garage) as one or more walls of your *sukkah*, but those walls must also be covered by the natural roofing materials described above.
8. A *sukkah* must have at least two full walls plus part of a third wall. It is preferable, however, that the *sukkah* have four complete walls.
9. You don't have to build your own *sukkah*. You can sit in someone else's *sukkah* and still complete the mitzvah and get all that good Divine energy!

Also: Construct your *sukkah* outdoors, ideally in a spot that's most accessible to your residence. Popular *sukkah* locations include: porches, backyards, courtyards, lawns, balconies and rooftops. Basically, any location under the open sky.



A *sukkah* perched on a balcony in Jerusalem.

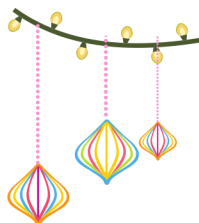


Re-imagined *sukkah* concepts: thinking outside the (thatch-roofed) box

Not all of us have access to the outdoor space or construction materials necessary to construct a traditional *sukkah*. We would normally encourage apartment-dwellers, folks with too little time, or anyone else who just doesn't have it in them to build one to scout out local *sukkahs* in your area and invite yourselves to sit in one! Below are some ideas for how to get some of that Divine *Sukkot* goodness by thinking a little outside of the thatch-roofed box:



Make a pillow fort in your living room. Eat meals in there, sleep in there, even wave your *lulav* in there!



Decorate your living space like the inside of a *sukkah*. Use fairy lights, lanterns, paper chains, and fruit to turn your home into a *Sukkot* sanctuary.



Re-create a night sky by sticking glow stars all over your ceiling so you can look up at them before you fall asleep.



Call the people you love. Share a meal together, look at family photos, talk about your ancestors, and celebrate the abundance in your lives.



Go camping! Undo the rain flap on your tent so you can see the sun and stars and feel the elements.



Make a fire — indoors or outdoors — and roast marshmallows to help welcome the spirit of the outdoors.



Build a *lulav*: foraging & floral arrangements


It's possible to order all the plants you need to make a *lulav* from Israel, and many congregations make them available as well. But even without a traditional *lulav* you can connect to this powerful ritual. If it's environmentally allowed, go for a nature walk and collect local plants that are native to your area. Or head to your local flower shop and choose the greenery and florals that speak to you. How might you interpret the plant species to represent the eyes, mouth, spine, and heart? Bring your *lulav* into your sukkah space to help set the stage for your own meditation on Divine energy (whatever that means to you).



Make an "etrog" cocktail or mocktail

The *etrog* is a lemon-like citrus fruit, so why not honor the tradition of this symbol by whipping up a delicious drink!

4 OZ LIQUOR (VODKA, GIN, WHISKEY, OR BRANDY)
1.5 OZ FRESH LEMON JUICE
1.5 OZ SIMPLE SYRUP* OR HONEY SYRUP*
2-3 DASHES BITTERS (OPTIONAL)



HINT:
4oz = 1/2 cup
0.5oz = 1 Tbsp



Combine first 3 ingredients and ice in a cocktail shaker or mason jar.

*Shake your concoction in all six directions (north, south, east, west, up, and down) for at least 30 seconds to honor the ritual of the *lulav* and call in Divine energy.*

Strain into 2 martini glasses or over fresh ice. Top with bitters if using.

***TO MAKE SYRUP:**

Combine 1/4 cup sugar or honey + 1/4 cup hot water. Stir to combine.