

Succot

This fact sheet on the holiday comes from Jewish Care.

Succot is a week long festival. The first two days of the festival are kept as Shabbat. The middle few days are called Chol Ha-Mo'ed, when you can work. The last day of Succot is called Hoshannah Rabbah. The two days after Succot are called Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah. These are separate festivals to Succot, but they are connected.

What is Succot?

The festival of Succot starts five days after Yom Kippur. It is quite a change—from one of the most serious days to one of the most fun! Succot is so happy that, in Jewish prayer, it is called the “Season of our Rejoicing”. It’s also one of the three pilgrimage festivals, the other two being Passover and Shavuot.

Succot has two sides: historic and agricultural. Historically, Succot recalls the 40 years when the children of Israel were wandering in the desert and living in temporary shelters before coming to the promised land of milk and honey. Agriculturally, Succot is a harvest festival and is often called a “Festival of Ingathering”.

How is Succot celebrated?

On Succot, people are instructed to live in the Succah (a specially built dwelling) in memory of the time when the children of Israel wandered in the desert. Some people eat every meal in the Succah, and many also sleep in the Succah (unless rain prevents it). As it is a dwelling, the Succah needs walls and a temporary roof in order to qualify as a kosher Succah. Also, there should be a table and chairs inside the Succah so that people can eat in there if they want to.

The walls. These can be built of any material, as long as they are strong enough to resist a strong wind. Wood, concrete, or even blankets are all suitable. The Succah

may be built free standing or against a building, but it must be under the sky and not under a tree or an over-hanging roof.

The roof. This is the most important part of the Succah, since it is the roof that makes the Succah a temporary dwelling. The roof is made only from things that grow in the earth, like leaves, branches, bamboo or straw. The covering of branches should be the only thing that stands between the sky and the people underneath. To keep the Succah, the roof may be covered with plastic when not in use but must be taken off again before use. Adding plastic sheets makes the Succah unkosher and becomes the same as sitting inside.

Decorations. It is a tradition to use fruit and other decorations to make the Succah festive, but it is not a religious requirement. Apples, oranges and lemons are the best fruit to use.

Kiddush. Everyone should be encouraged to go into the Succah for Kiddush (unless it rains). A special blessing is made each time Kiddush is made in the Succah.

The Arba Minim: Four Species

Another part of Succot is the shaking of the four species (Arba Minim), in all directions (north, south, east, west, up and down). The four species are the citron (Esrog or Etrog), palm branch (Lulav) three myrtle branches (Hadassim) and two willow branches (Aravot). These branches are held together and shaken in a special way while a blessing is said on every day of the festival (except on Shabbat). During the the seventh day of Succot, Hoshannah Rabbah, a service may be held when willow branches will be beaten on the ground.

Having a Succot party

Succot is a very happy time, and you can have lots of parties. It is a mitzvah (good deed) to invite people into your home and to be hospitable. If you have a Succah, it's even nicer to invite people there to celebrate. You can even ask your guests if they would like to bring imaginary friends!

Since Succot is a harvest festival, fruit is key. One thing you can do in your Succah is try a fruit tasting session. You can also have your family and guests make paper fruit to hang in the Succah. Other ideas to decorate the Succah would be making paper chains, or asking family and guests to draw or paint pictures for the walls.

Appropriate greetings for this festival are “Good Yomtov” or “Chag Sameach”.