

# Shemittah

We are in the midst of a *shemittah* year, the final year of a 7-year cycle, when there are many restrictions on farming and produce in *Eretz Yisroel*. *Shemittah* lasts for just one year – from *Rosh Hashanah* to *Rosh Hashanah* – but preparation for *shemittah* starts well before *Rosh Hashanah*, and the effects of *shemittah* are felt for some time after the year ends.

Many of the tasks that farmers do are restricted during *shemittah*, and, therefore, those who will observe the *mitzvos* of *shemittah* started preparing before *Rosh Hashanah*. Some of them rushed plantings or pruning, others modified their greenhouses so that they can plant in them during *shemittah*, and some even planted specific crops many months ago, so that their fields would qualify for a special status (שדה ניר) for *shemittah*.

And it was not just farmers. Homeowners asked for guidance on how to prepare their flowers and gardens, and how they will care for them during *shemittah*. How often can I water my plants? Can I weed my yard? Is there anything wrong with digging and building on my property? The city councils (עירייה) of the different parts of *Eretz Yisroel* went through the same process – trimming palm trees, rushing plantings, and adjusting schedules for watering etc., to avoid violating the prohibitions of *shemittah*.

Manufacturing companies and exporters had an even larger issue to contend with – if they do not have produce to work with and sell during *shemittah*, they will go out of business and not

even have any clients after *shemittah*. Some of them saw no choice but to rely on the *heter mechirah* and essentially sell the same produce they do during all the other years. In those cases, the manufacturer will lose their *mehadrin hashgachah* for the year – as *mehadrin* and mainstream American *hashgachos* do not rely on *heter mechirah*. (Consumers should be alert for these changes and check more carefully for kosher symbols on products from Israel they are used to purchasing.)

Companies that do not rely on the *heter mechirah* will either source raw materials from outside *Eretz Yisroel*, parts of the State of Israel which are not *halachically* in the borders of *Eretz Yisroel*, greenhouses that are designed to be excused from the *halachos* of *shemittah*, or farms owned by non-Jews in *Eretz Yisroel*. In many cases, these products are marked to indicate how the company avoided *shemittah* concerns – יבול נכרי (produce of non-Jewish fields), ששית (produce of the 6th year, i.e., before *shemittah*), מצע מנותק (specially designed greenhouses), etc.

All of that is fine and good for manufactured products that bear certification. The *hashgachah* on the package is the consumer's assurance that the product complies with the *halachos* of *shemittah* just like it confirms that other *halachos* of *Yoreh Deah* – including those specific to *Eretz Yisroel* – are followed.

But what about raw fruits and vegetables? Two important *halachos* for vegetables (and grains) are (a) vegetables harvested during *shemittah* are considered “*shemittah* produce”, and (b) (to

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discourage farmers from planting on *shemittah*) Chazal forbade just about all *shemittah* vegetables as *sefichin*. This means that any carrot, bell pepper, or herb harvested in *Eretz Yisroel* from September 2021 until September 2022 cannot be eaten (for those who do not rely on the *heter mechirah*). In fact, *Eretz Yisroel* is a major exporter of the aforementioned items – especially during *shemittah*, when their local customers who are more sensitive to *shemittah* will avoid them – and consumers in the United States should be on the alert for them. Thankfully, the law in the USA is that fruit stores must post the country of origin for whatever they sell, and kosher consumers are encouraged to look at those signs so they can avoid *sefichin* (and in other years to know to be *mafrish terumah* and *ma'aser*). [Frozen foods will also be marked with the country of origin.]

Different Rabbinic groups in *Eretz Yisroel* prepare charts which detail when every fruit, vegetable, herb, and flower is a *shemittah* concern, and at the cRc, we are using the charts prepared by Rav Yosef Ephrati.

Another choice for consumers in the Chicagoland area is to shop from fresh fruits and vegetables at Sarah's Tent or Ted's. In each of these stores, cRc *Mashgichim* ensure that the fresh items sold there are free of *shemittah* concerns (and that *terumah* and *ma'aser* are separated, if necessary, during all other years), which means that people can shop with confidence. At Sarah's Tent, all products in the store are certified, so people can even purchase items from the store shelves without having to worry that they might have *shemittah* (or other) concerns.

The status of fruit is somewhat different. There is no prohibition of *sefichin* for fruit, so *shemittah* fruit may be eaten but must be treated with *kedushas shevi'is* which – briefly – means it cannot be wasted, discarded (while edible), used for an atypical purpose, bought and sold in the typical manner, or taken out of *Eretz Yisroel*. So, a *shemittah* orange may be eaten but must be eaten “correctly”. The other difference is that fruit are not “*shemittah* produce” based on when they are picked, but rather when they reach a certain state of growth during *shemittah*. This means that fruit harvested during the first few months of *shemittah* will not be *shemittah* produce, and *shemittah* fruit will first come to market in the late winter and spring of 2022. One of the most famous examples of this is the *esrogim* we will use in a year from now, which – if they come from *Eretz Yisroel* – will be *shemittah* produce and need to be treated with *kedushas shevi'is*.

The above is all true for fresh fruits and vegetables. Frozen items have a longer shelf life and will, therefore, be on the market even well after *shemittah* ends. Items which are preserved – like canned foods or wine – will be around for the very longest time. Sometimes a *shemittah* product will show up many years after *shemittah*, and consumers are encouraged to check kosher symbols to be sure that what they are buying is kosher.

Most of us do not have the privilege to live in *Eretz Yisroel* and fulfill the *mitzvos* that are specific to that land, but when we come across *shemittah* produce we should grab the opportunity to do so in whichever way we can.



## Shemittah by Rabbi Dovid Cohen

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