

Shmita in the Garden; Preparation and Observance

Garden and Field Alike

The obligation of Shmita applies equally to the garden as it does to the field. Preparing the garden for the Shmita year before it arrives can help maintain one's garden in good condition for the duration of the Shmita year, and evade possible transgression throughout it.

Preparation During the Sixth Year

Anything which can be done for the garden during the sixth year should not be pushed off for the Shmita. Therefore, to the extent that it is possible, it is advisable to plant vegetation before the Shmita that require less upkeep and maintenance.

Before Rosh Hashanah of the Shmita Year

Fertilization – One should fertilize their garden with materials that break down over an extended period of time, thereby minimizing the need to fertilize during the Shmita year.

Pruning – One should prune their plants and shrubbery before the Shmita year begins.

Tightening – One should tie and tighten the trees in order to strengthen them, to the extent that it is necessary.

Spraying – One should spray their garden against weeds and unwanted grass.

Planting – It is permitted to plant bare-rooted fruit trees until the 15th of Av. Bare-rooted non-fruit trees are permitted to be planted until the 15th of Elul. Trees with a “root zone” (compact soil surrounded the roots) that can usually live within their surrounding soil for up to two weeks may be planted until Rosh Hashanah.

Grass Mats – It is permitted to lay out grass mats until Rosh Chodesh Elul.

Grass Seeds – One may plant grass until Rosh Chodesh Tamuz.

Other Seeds – One may plant seeds of other vegetation until three days prior to Rosh Hashanah. Fragrant flowers should be planted with enough time that they will germinate before Shmita.

Care During the Shmita Year

Only actions which are for the immediate upkeep of the vegetation are permitted during the Shmita year, as opposed to those which enhance or improve it.

Covering the Roots – If a tree's roots become uncovered during the Shmita year, and there is a realistic concern that the tree will perish if not cared for, it is permitted to cover its roots with dirt.

Pruning and Trimming – One may prune or trim the branches of a tree only for the immediate upkeep of the tree itself, but not for the sake of its fruit.

Hedge – It is permitted to work on one's hedgerow, even for beautification, so long as it is only to upkeep its current state and not to fill in gaps.

Lawn Mowing – It is permitted to mow one's lawn, even for beautification, so long as it is only to upkeep its current state and not to improve it or fill in holes.

Covering Fruit – It is permitted to cover fruit on the tree with a protective cover so long as its purpose is for protection of the fruit and not for its improvement.



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Hoeing – It is permitted to hoe on condition that in its absence damage will be caused to the trees.

Watering – It is permitted to water one's garden for the purpose of preventing its diminishment, and there are authorities who permit watering freely in such a case. In cases where there is an automated computerized watering system, one should set it during the sixth year.

Fertilization and Spraying – It is permitted to fertilize and spray one's garden so long as it is for the purpose of preventing damage. As mentioned above, one should attempt to do as much of this as possible during the sixth year.



Permitted Gardening – Not for the Purpose of Developing the Garden

Pruning – In a situation in which branches are obtrusive to a walking path, or damaging other branches, it is permitted to prune them in an irregular manner or in a way which it is clear that it is being done not for the benefit of the tree, such as pruning only one side of the tree and not the other. In a situation where the tree at hand is a fruit tree, one must take precautions to ensure that no fruit is destroyed during the pruning process. Accordingly, it is forbidden to trim a fragrant rose hedge, as destroying the roses is unavoidable.

Picking Flowers – It is permitted to pick non-fragrant flowers in a manner which is clear to onlookers that it is not being done for the benefit of its place of growth.

Removing Stones – It is permitted to remove stones from one's garden if one needs the stones. However, one must do so in a manner which is clear to onlookers that it is not being done for the benefit of the field itself, such as not clearing all the stones.

Potted Plants

Potted plants which are in the garden have the same status as any other plant in the garden, even if there is no hole in the pot.

Potted plants which have no holes, or have holes but are resting on a plate, are exempt from the laws of Shmita if they are located under a roof. There are those who say that to be exempt just a roof is not sufficient but they must be indoors.

If the pot in which a plant is resting breaks, whether it is at home or in a greenhouse, it is permitted to move the plant along with its dirt to a new pot on condition that the plant would be able to survive with the dirt that it has for at least the duration of two weeks.



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Additional answers on Shmita can be found in volumes 3, 5 & 6 of "Shut Bemareh Habazak"