

## The Etrog

“And you shall take on the first day [of Sukkot] the **fruit of goodly trees**, branches of palm-trees, and boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook...” (Leviticus 23:40).



The rabbis of ancient times interpreted the “fruit of goodly trees” to mean the etrog. The etrog is a particular variety of the citron, a citrus fruit from a tree with fragrant leaves. But how did these rabbis come to that conclusion? Biblical sages felt that a “goodly tree” had to look beautiful *and* have delicious fruit. Contenders included the pomegranate with its gem-like luscious fruit, but the tree becomes bare and unattractive in the winter. Another possibility was the majestic carob tree, but its fruit, the seed-pod, was not attractive enough. So the elegant etrog tree was chosen. The leaves are green all year long, and the fruit smells delightful and never rots. Rather, it slowly dries out as it ages. (See picture below.)

Many Jewish ritual objects are symbolic of ideals or virtues. The etrog is no exception. The etrog symbolizes perfection, and the hunt for an ideal etrog is likened to the desire to feel the Divine presence in one’s life. The parts of the lulav and etrog represent the human body. The tall palm fronds denote the spine, the myrtle leaves signify eyes, and the willow leaves mimic the mouth.



Dried etrog on the left, etrog with *pitom* on the right.

The etrog is the heart. The lulav and etrog, also known as the Four Species as mentioned in the Biblical quote at the top of the page, are waved in a ritual ceremony that shows devotion to God with all of one’s body and soul. The etrog is the only one of the Four Species that has both a pleasant taste and aroma, so it sets the standard of achievement for which to strive – knowledge of both Torah and good deeds.

The laws regarding *etrogim* (plural) require an elongated fruit with textured and flawless skin. Its stem and pistil (called the *pitom* in Hebrew) must be intact. Some etrogim grow without an external pistil, so whoever holds it doesn’t have to worry about breaking the end.

## How can children explore the etrog?

The etrog is a citrus fruit, most resembling the lemon or lime. (Sometimes etrogs are green.)

- **Look** at the etrog next to a lemon, lime, and orange.  
What looks the same and what looks different?  
Which fruit will be heavier? (The etrog weighs less for its comparative size, because it is mostly rind and very little pulp.)
- **Feel** the skin of the lemon, orange, and etrog. How are they the same or different?  
Put a little bit of paint on the outside of the fruit and roll it on paper. What do the prints look like?
- **Smell** the skin of the lemon and etrog. Now scratch and sniff – does the aroma change?
- **Slice** open a lemon and an orange horizontally, to see its round shape. Examine the seeds and the texture of the pulp.  
What will the inside of an etrog look like?
- **Taste!** Make some etrog jelly with your students.



### Etrog Jelly

- 1 Etrog (citron)
- 1 Orange
- Sugar
- Water

Rinse the etrog and orange. Cut them lengthwise and slice them very thinly. Remove the seeds. Soak the fruit overnight. Change the water (and make sure the fruit is fully covered). Place it in a pot and bring it to a boil. For a second time, change the water and bring to a boil again. Pour out the water, and weigh the fruit. Match with an equal amount of sugar. Cook over a low flame for about 45 minutes, or until it takes on a jam-like appearance.

## Sukkot Holiday Resources

Our PJ Library blog has lots of interesting information about Sukkot and using the Lulav and Etrog.  
<http://pjlibrary.org/pj-blog/index.php/archives/5256/shaking-the-lulav-etrog-a-jewish-rain-dance/>

### The holiday of Sukkot is over – now what?

Many people use the etrog to make lemony treats, Havdallah spice boxes or closet fresheners. Here are two websites with fun post-Sukkot crafts and confections.

[http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/433055/jewish/Post-Sukkot-Uses-for-the-Etrog.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/433055/jewish/Post-Sukkot-Uses-for-the-Etrog.htm)

<http://www.joyofkosher.com/recipes/etrog-cake/>