



NETTA AND HER PLANT

Written by Ellie Gellman

Illustrated by Natascia Ugliano

The plant that Netta received on Tu B'shevat is growing is growing – and so is Netta. In fact, soon it will be time for the plant – and Netta – to do new things. Growing bigger is intimidating, but it's also wonderful.

JEWISH CONCEPTS

Tu B'Shevat, sometimes called the Jewish Arbor Day, is also known as the birthday of the trees. It's an opportunity to consider how important the environment is -- and the role we play in it. In Israel, where Netta lives, the holiday of Tu B'Shevat arrives just when the climate is turning warm, on the fifteenth ("tu") day of the month of *Shevat*. This is perfect timing – Tu B'Shevat celebrates the trees just when they are beginning to grow and blossom for the coming year.

According to Jewish law, a tree's fruit is ready for eating when it turns three. Tu B'Shevat helps us mark where the trees are in the maturation process. In this story, Netta, too, is growing and blossoming, just like the trees. At every Tu B'Shevat, Netta is older, taller, and ready for new things, just like her plant.

In fact, *Netta's* name comes from the Hebrew "to plant," and her sister's name, *Avital*, means "dew." Many modern Hebrew names are inspired by nature, weather, and the elements. Names rooted in the earth can signify a deep love and respect for the planet, which is the basis not only of Tu B'Shevat but also of much of Judaism.

For more than 100 years, the Jewish National Fund has helped transform the desert of Israel by planting millions of trees, building dams and reservoirs, developing acres and acres of land, and creating parks, maybe even the one where Netta planted her tree.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Netta loves taking care of her plant. She waters it, sings to it, and replants it when it outgrows its pot. Taking care of a plant can help a child develop a sense of responsibility.

Tu B'Shevat may be too cold to plant a tree where you live, but you can start a seedling indoors. As you and your child nurture it, keep track of its growth. By the time warm weather comes, it may be ready to plant outdoors, just as Netta's plant eventually was.

Keeping a growth chart with your child can be a wonderful reminder of just how quickly they grow up. Children are excited to see how much taller they get every few months! Take that time to talk about all the new things your child can do, too – and all the things that still lie ahead.

Many families have a Tu B'Shevat *seder*, or ceremonial meal. Just as at a Passover *seder*, special foods are eaten in a special order in celebration of the important role trees play in our life. It's traditional to eat Israeli fruits, such as figs, dates, olives, and pomegranates. It's also traditional to eat fruits you haven't tasted before, and to say the *Shehechyanu* (a prayer of gratitude when experiencing something new). Visit pjlibrary.org for more ideas on ways to celebrate Tu B'Shevat with your family.