

אֶתְרוֹג – Etrog – Citrus Medica

Etrog Preserves Infuses the Year with Holiday Lights

After Sukkot, it is a *minhag* (custom) to save the Etrog until Tu B'Shevat and eat it in candied form accompanied by prayers that we will merit a beautiful Etrog the following Sukkot. Some families make jam or liqueur from it, or stick cloves in its skin, for use as *besamim* (good smelling spices) at the havdalah ceremony following Shabbat. Conserving the Etrogim is a way to allow the sweet scent of the Tishrei holidays to linger into the entire year. Just as the fragrance of our Etrog remains long after Sukkot, so do the spiritual highs of the Tishrei Holidays permeate the entire year. Similarly we enjoy the scent of spices during Havdalah in order to allow the light of Shabbat to infuse the coming week with its fragrance. The month of Cheshvan, which begins soon after the end of the holidays, is the perfect time for making Etrog preserves, as the sense of the month of Cheshvan is smell (*Sefer Yetzirah* 5:9). Having no holidays of its own, Cheshvan serves as intended vehicle to allow the scent of the Tishrei Holidays to infuse the entire year. We always save our Etrogs and collect a few from the neighbors and friends, to have enough for our sugarless candied Etrog preserve. Below I will be sharing our recipe for sugarless Etrog jam.



Spiritual Remedy for Birthing Mothers

It is a *segulah* (spiritual remedy) for pregnant women to bite off the pitum of the Etrog on Hoshana Rabbah, and pray for an easy labor (*Likutei Maharich, Sukkot p. 106a*). The reason for this custom is based on the opinion that the forbidden fruit Adam and Chava ate was an Etrog (*Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 15:7). Therefore, the woman bites the pitum in order to show that “just as I have no benefit/pleasure from biting a pitum so too did I have no benefit/pleasure from the sin of eating from the Tree” (*Ta’amei Minhagim p. 521:68*). After Sukkot we make a kind of candied Etrog to serve on the Tu B'Shevat Seder table, together with the other fruits which are blessed by men and women. It is a custom for pregnant woman or women in difficult labor to partake of this Etrog comfiture, for it is a spiritual remedy for easy labor and for a healthy baby (*Kaf HaChaim* 664:600). Etrog may also help against infertility. The wife of a childless couple who came to Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu for blessing was offered the Rebbetzin’s Etrog jelly and conceived within two months! (*Avihem Shel Yisrael p. 193*).

Eating from the Tree of Knowledge Affected Every Tree

Traditionally eating Etrog in holiness is a rectification for the blemish of eating from the Tree of Knowledge. The consequence for women caused by eating from the Tree was difficult pregnancy and birth (*Bereishit* 3:16). Therefore it makes sense that biting off the pitum of the Etrog after Sukkot is a *segulah* for a woman to become pregnant, and eating Etrogim in any form is a *segulah* for both becoming pregnant and for an easy birth. Eating from the Tree of Knowledge affected the entire universe. Even the trees were affected. Hashem had originally commanded them to become עֵץ פְּרִי עֵשֶׂה / *etz pri ose pri* – fruit trees producing fruits (*Bereishit* 1:11), but they instead became עֵץ פְּרִי עֵשֶׂה / *etz ose pri* – trees producing fruits (ibid. 12). Although the creation of the trees is written before eating from the Tree of Knowledge, “there is no former and later in the Torah” (*Babylonian Talmud, Pesachim* 6b). Whatever happened in the Creation story and the Garden of Eden is beyond time.

The trees don't have free choice that they could sin and deliberately chose to become trees producing fruits rather than fruit trees producing fruit. It was the choices of the human beings to eat the forbidden fruit that effected them retroactively.

Unifying Process and Product

Originally, Hashem desired that the taste of the trees should be the same as the taste of the fruits. This signifies that the process and product would be one, rather than what we are accustomed to in the product-oriented-Western-World, where people focus on getting things done to achieve a certain goal, without always experiencing the enjoyment of the process that produces the desired result. Eating from the Tree of Knowledge made a gap in the world between not only Good and Evil but also body and soul, spiritual and physical, process and product etc. Only the Etrog tree performed Hashem's will and became a fruit-tree producing fruits (*Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah* 35a). This alludes to the opinion that the Etrog was also the Tree of Knowledge, as it states, "She saw that the tree was good for food" (*Bereishit* 3:6). Since no other tree was eatable, only the fruits it produced, Rabbi Abba of Acco concluded that the Tree of Knowledge was an Etrog whose tree was eatable (*Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 15:7). The Midrash mentions that not only does the Etrog tree have the same taste as its fruits, its fruits also remain on the same tree from year to year (*Midrash Yalkut Shimoni Vayikra* 23:651). These features both blur the distinction between the process and the product. Although the fruit is the choice product, the tree as well shares its taste. Remaining on the same tree year after year with the possibility of being harvested anytime in the process highlights the importance of the process itself rather than the final fruit product which keeps evolving from year to year. This strongly suggests that the Etrog has the ability to rectify eating from the Tree of Knowledge. I found a Chassidic commentary explaining that the Etrog was the Upper Tree of Knowledge (Rabbi Yitzchak D'man Acco, *Meirat Einayim*).

Versatile Healing Capacities

Since it is through the cause of the blemish that the rectification is enacted, the Etrog has the ability to rectify eating from the Tree of Knowledge together with the three additional possibilities for the identity of the Tree of Knowledge: wheat, grapes and figs (*Babylonian Talmud, Berachot* 40a). Having the ability to rectify the Tree of Knowledge which caused death and disease, it makes sense that the Etrog has abundant healing properties. According to Rambam the Etrog can cure more than 70 medical ailments. Each part of the Etrog has healing properties. A plaster of the crushed seeds placed on a snake or scorpion bite can save from death. Etrog-leaf-tea strengthens a sick person who is weakened. Etrog cream made from the peel works like magic against wrinkles, acne, scratches, and help heal burns.

Medicinal Properties

Etrog juice has been used as a home remedy for centuries. It helps awaken and clean the intestines from too much black bile. This concurs with the following Midrash: "A king suffered greatly from stomach pain. They told him in a dream that he would be healed by eating Etrogs, which the Jews had blessed on for the mitzvah of the Arbah Minim. He ate from them and was healed" (*Midrash Vayikra Rabbah*, 37:2). The Etrog Man in the Shuk Machane Yehudah of Nachlaot offers to cure being hard of hearing, eye irritations and stuttering with a few drops of Etrog juice on the offending body part. He furthermore teaches that drinking Etrog juice strengthens the body, and brings about feelings of satiation and calmness. It will also make a person smell better. "If a pregnant woman eats Etrogim she will have children with a pleasant scent. The wife of Shavor Malka ate Etrogim during her pregnancy and gave birth to a very nice smelling daughter. When Shavor Malka requested that they bring him good smelling spices, they brought his daughter (*Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot* 61a). The Etrog

Man further claims that he has a special Etrog drink for pregnant women that keeps their stomach warm, and gives the child a pleasant smell (*Marpeh Habosem*). Etrog juice may cure infertility, and help prevents/cures morning sickness. It also helps cure hot flashes. Etrog furthermore helps men regain their strength and virility. Rabbi Nachman teaches that looking at the Etrog is healing for pain in the eyes (Rabbi Nachman, *Sefer Hamidot*, part 2). Whoever suffers from emotional problems, depression, lack of will and inability should eat a lot of Etrog. (Rabbi Moshe Cohen Shaouli, *Nature's Wealth, Health and Healing Plants*). Perhaps this is because the Etrog is compared to the heart. According to Rambam Etrog peel improves heart health, and reduces blood pressure. He who wants to stabilize his blood pressure should drink Etrog juice every day.

Sugar free Etrog Jam or Candied Etrog

- 3 Etrogim (2 ½ cups), 2 cups water, 2 cups apple-juice concentrate

1. Slice unpeeled Etrog very thinly, and remove as many seeds as possible. For jam, chop fruit into very small pieces, including the peel. You may use a food processor for this step. For candied Etrog, keep the Etrog wedges thinly sliced according to desired size.
2. To remove bitterness soak the sliced or chopped Etrog for seven days in water, changing the water daily. Keep the soaked Etrog in the refrigerator to avoid spoilage.
3. Drain Etrog, add water and apple-juice concentrate. Bring to a boil and simmer uncovered for about two hours, stirring occasionally. [Be careful here, if you leave it for a minute it can burn on the bottom. If it does burn, do not stir up the burned parts into the jam. Dump the stuff into a clean bowl, wash out your pot, put the jelly back in and continue.] Continue simmering closely supervised, stirring every 5-10 minutes for the last ½ hour or more until most of the liquid has evaporated, and the mixture bubbles and spins a thread.
4. Remove jam from pot and store in closed glass jars in the refrigerator until Tu B'Shevat if you can hold yourself back from finishing it so long!

The Etrog's Prayer

ספר ויקרא פרק כג פסוק מ

וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן פְּרֵי עֵץ הָדָר כַּפֹּת תְּמָרִים וְעֵנָף עֵץ עֵבֶת וְעַרְבֵי נָחַל וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים:

“You shall take for yourselves on the first day, the fruit of the tree hadar, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick leaved trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before Hashem your G-d for seven days” (*Vayikra* 23:40).

The Etrog is called “a fruit of הָדָר/Hadar” – a majestic fruit. The Etrog is indeed a glorious and majestic fruit representing the heart – the main organ of the body. However, the greater and more outstanding we and our deeds are, the more humility is required. אֶתְרוֹג/Etrog is the acronym for the phrase which reads, “Let not the foot of pride overtake me” (*Tehillim* 36:12). אֵל תִּבּוֹאֲנִי רַגְלִי גִאֲוָה. It is as if the Etrog is praying, while so much importance is attributed to me, “Let not the foot of pride overtake me!”

Etrog is furthermore the acronym of אהבה שלימה, תשובה שלימה, רפואה שלימה, גאולה שלימה, Ahava, Teshuva, Refuah, Geulah – Complete love, complete repentance, complete healing, and complete redemption. May our involvement with the holy Etrog bring about all of these complete perfections through the ultimate rectification from the Tree of Knowledge!