

תות-עץ – Mulberries – Morus Nigra

My Self-planted Mulberry Fairy-Tale Tree

I don't remember exactly when, but for sure less than a decade ago, an enormous mulberry tree sprouted forth in our backyard seemingly out of the blue midair. Perhaps one of the many birds, hanging out in our garden, dropped a berry from a neighboring mulberry tree. It must have fallen at the right place in the right time, because with shocking fairy-tale speed it grew to gigantic dimensions. After the three first years of *orlah*, when we may not use the fruit, the tree was bursting with more succulent black berries than we were able to pick. Sadly, many fell to the ground, where they were devoured by ants and other creeping creatures. In vain, I tried to direct my chickens to the mulberry droppings, but for whatever reason, they chose to run the other way and peck away at my veggies in the front garden. A problem arose in my garden. A beautiful almond tree sapling had emerged on its own in our pathway. Since there was no space for the almond tree to grow where it had planted itself, I was pondering to where in my garden, I could move it, but I didn't find any place. When we first moved in, we planted numerous trees much too tight, not having enough foresight and *emunah* (faith) in how much a tree can grow. Some of our trees sadly died of overcrowding, and others are suffering for lack of space to stretch out their branches or from lack of light due to the overshadowing branches of bigger trees. Then, I thought about the two additional mulberry trees in my backyard, planted more than 15 years ago, but remaining small, hardly giving any fruits. Since we have more mulberries than we could possibly process, it seemed most sensible to uproot the extra mulberry trees and plant the almond tree sapling and the white broom tree that needed to be transplanted in their place. The only problem was that the Torah prohibits destroying fruit trees, as trees are compared to people. So, what was I going to do with the extra mulberry trees and how could I allow the almond-tree sapling to waste away in the most unsuitable conditions of the dry hard soil in our pathway?



The Spiritual Danger of Uprooting Fruit Trees

“When you lay siege to a city for many days... do not destroy its trees by swinging an ax against them, because from them you shall eat, and for this reason you should not cut them down. For, is a tree of the field a man, that you are besieging it? Rather, a tree that you know will not produce food you may destroy and cut down...” (*Devarim* 20:19-20).

My Rabbi said I was permitted to uproot the extra mulberry trees because they didn't produce much fruit. Nevertheless, I wanted to save them and transplant them in the school garden. Yet, my plan didn't work out. After the first tree was carefully dug up with lots of dirt attached to its roots, two able-bodied young men were unable to move it. When taking on this project, I was unaware that cutting down a fruit tree entails a personal, spiritual danger. “Rabbi Chanina stated: My son Shivchas died only as punishment for cutting down a fig tree prematurely” (*Babylonian Talmud, Bava Kamma* 91b). On the 28th of Adar (March 15, 2018), my mulberry tree was cut loose from the ground. That very day, my dear father Shlomo ben Leib הכ"מ went into a coma. The tree was still alive, however, the day the gardener came and decided that the tree couldn't be transplanted, was the day that we buried my dear father. I don't want to take on this tremendous guilt trip, but this whole tree uprooting ordeal nailed in the lesson of the holiness of fruit trees and how their lives are intertwined with ours. I'm planning to plant new fruit trees for the elevation of my father's soul, and develop our B'erot school orchard to become a memorial mini park in his memory.

<https://thechesedfund.com/cause/salomon-s-song-garden-midreshet-b-erot-bat-ayin>

Fruit as Medicine – Health Benefits of Mulberries

The time-consuming mulberry picking and preparation is definitely worthwhile when you consider its wealth of health benefits. These have been proven in scientific research as well as in traditional Chinese medicine. Mulberry is an exceptional nutritious-treasure containing fiber, calcium, phosphorus, potassium, magnesium, iron, proteins, vitamin C and B. Most berries have great antioxidant properties due to the anthocyanins in which mulberries are especially rich. They therefore combat cancer, premature aging, neurological diseases and bacterial infections. Mulberries also treat diabetes and improve eyesight. People with dry eyes and those who use their eyes a lot during work may strengthen their eyesight through drinking mulberry juice regularly. Moreover, mulberries are a good source of resveratrol, which enhances immunity, contributes to cancer prevention and fights existing cancers. Resveratrol has shown in several studies to extend the life of mice. Eating mulberries or drinking their juice is excellent for curing chronic diseases of the digestive tract. They nourish and balance body fluid production including internal secretions and gastric juice, and thus improve digestion and treat chronic gastritis. Mulberry is also a good source of nutrients that lower high blood pressure. The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition reports that eating just five ounces of berries a day can lower blood pressure, thereby reducing the risk of blood clots and strokes. Mulberry contains cyanidin 3-glucoside, which epidemiological studies confirm reduces the risk of many degenerative diseases such as chronic arthritis and atherosclerosis. Thus, mulberry combats inflammation. In Turkey, a treatment for constipation is to eat white mulberries on an empty stomach with a glass of water. They also use mulberry molasses as a treatment for colds and flu. The effectiveness of mulberries to treat colds and flu may be due to their high vitamin C content. In addition, mulberries are beneficial for:

- Recuperating after surgery
- Recovering after long-time illness
- Improving women's health after childbirth
- Lowering cholesterol levels
- Reducing blood sugar levels

The mulberry fruit is botanically called a sorosis, because it is formed by the consolidation of many flowers. There are three main species of mulberries: white, red and black. It grows mainly in the subtropical regions of the Middle East, Asia, Africa and the Americas.

Blood-Tonic and Kidney Nourisher in Chinese Medicine

Mulberry fruit is classified in the modern Chinese Materia Medica as a blood tonic. It is a restorative fruit that treats deficiencies. Traditionally, it has been used to nourish the yin and blood, benefit the kidneys, and treat weakness, fatigue, and prematurely gray hair. It also treats urinary incontinence, tinnitus and constipation. Due to the high iron content, people regularly mix mulberry juice as a tonic to counteract anemia, cleanse the blood, increase its production and improve blood circulation. The raw mulberry juice is squeezed out of the mulberry fruit with has a delicate fragrance and taste. Mulberry juice tonifies and cleanses the liver and kidneys, calms the nerves, promotes the metabolism of alcohol, and enhances immunity. Moreover, regular consumption of mulberry juice is helpful in curing dizziness, heart-palpitations and insomnia. In Chinese markets, mulberry is often provided in the form of a paste, which is mixed with hot water to make a tea for enriching the liver and kidneys, to sharpen the hearing and brighten the eyes. Mulberry juice applied directly on the head also promotes healthy growth and blackening of hair.

Mulberry Leaves – The New Superfood

I never knew that mulberry leaves were edible. I'm going to try to pick some of the new tender leaves for my smoothie, while leaving the older ones for the tree's own needs. Mulberry leaves have long been used in Chinese medicine for the prevention and treatment of diabetes. Dried mulberry leaves, especially white mulberry, make an excellent tea. They contain compounds that suppress high blood sugar levels. The Yellow Emperor's Classic devoted to Chinese Medical Practice refers to dry mulberry leaf tea, as 'godly hermit's tea,' or 'a miracle remedy – an immortality medicine.' It was used as nutritional fortification, to cure coughs and paralysis. Scientists in Japan have found that compounds extracted from white mulberry leaves are effective in suppressing the progression of arteriosclerosis and the buildup of cholesterol-rich plaque in our arteries. The leaves contain six times more calcium than green tea and 25 times more than milk. They contain 2.5 times more iron than green tea and 10 times more than spinach. Because of the high source of mineral content, mulberry leaves are a candidate to become a super food material.

National Azerbaijan Tree for Syrup, Liqueur & Shade

Mulberries are popular in the Middle East and especially favored in Azerbaijan where mulberry trees were found in parks and along streets and boulevards since the middle ages. When mulberries are no longer in season, Azerbaijanis still enjoy eating them in the form of mulberry syrup concentrate. To make the syrup, mulberry juice is boiled until it has a honey like consistency. While this syrup makes a tasty sweet, it is also used as a medicine to protect against diseases of the liver, gall bladder, and heart. To treat gallbladder infections, drink 2 tablespoons of the syrup dissolved in half a glass of water, then lie down on the right side. Take this treatment on an empty stomach, half an hour before breakfast. The syrup is used to treat sore throats as well. *Tut araghi*, a potent liqueur made from mulberry juice, is another mulberry product that's very popular-not only in Azerbaijan, but also in Georgia and Armenia. It's one of the national Azerbaijani versions of vodka. Some people believe that small doses of the drink protect against diseases of the stomach and heart. Mulberry trees are not only beneficial for their fruit and leaves but also as a tree that provides a cool shady place to sit during hot summer days, without blocking the view during winters when the tree stands bare.

The Silk Producing Mulberry Tree

From ancient time, especially in China, one of the primary uses of mulberry trees is for raising silkworms, which utilize the leaves as their main food source. The silkworms eat mulberry leaves and spin cocoons.

Hands On

To pick mulberries, a person – often a young boy – climbs the tree and shakes the branches, causing the fruit to drop onto a cloth or plastic sheet below. I personally do not use this method because mulberries are very delicate and need to be handled carefully so that they don't break open. Moreover, in my garden, when the mulberries fall to the ground even on a cloth they inevitable get mixed with ants. Mulberries are very difficult to check for bugs. Therefore, some devout Jews, like my husband, will avoid consuming them altogether or only drink their juice. I soak the fruits three minutes in natural soap water and check if there are bugs in the water. In which case, I repeat the soaking until no bugs appear. The natural sweetness of mulberries is enhanced when dried. Then it can be used as a raisin substitute. You can make dried mulberry tea by brewing 10 grams per cup in water, then straining off the fruit.

Mulberry Leather

I make an amazing mulberry leather in the dehydrator. It is so simple and consists of nothing but mulberries. You can also make this leather in your oven, on the lowest setting, kept a bit open with a wooden spoon.

1. Pick mulberries and soak in natural soap water
2. Rinse vigorously then allow to dry off
3. Process the fruit in the food processor until smooth
4. Spread out thinly on your oven or dehydrator trays
5. Leave overnight to dehydrate
6. Peel off your leather and roll them into rollups
7. Cover with cellophane wrap

If you don't eat up the fruit leather within a month it's best to store it in the refrigerator.

Sugar Free Mulberry Jam

- 1 Kg mulberries
- 2-3 Apple cores (for their pectin)
- A little lemon juice
- Extra chopped apples (optional)
- Vanilla and or cinnamon sticks (optional)

1. Simmer all the ingredients on a low fire in a covered pot for about 1 hour.
 2. Cool, and remove the apple cores.
 3. For a smoother jam, process shortly in blender or food processor.
 4. It is possible to either leave or remove the spice sticks.
 5. Place in a glass jar and keep in the refrigerator
- Don't worry about expiration date, since this jam will be gobbled up in a jiffy.