

in ancient times. The Torah states, "When you enter the land [of Israel] and plant any tree for food, you shall regard its fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden for you, not to be eaten" ([Leviticus 19:23](#)). Only the fruit of older trees could be eaten. This law raised the question of how farmers were to mark the "birthday" of a tree. The rabbis therefore established the 15th of the month of Shevat as a general "birthday" for all trees, regardless of when they were actually planted.

On this day it is customary to partake of the fruit with which the Holy Land is praised ([Deuteronomy 8:8](#)): olives, dates, grapes, figs and nuts in shells. If tasting any of these fruit for the first time this season, remember to recite the *Shehecheyanu* blessing. (A blessing recited on joyous occasions, thanking [G-d](#) for "sustaining us and enabling us to reach this occasion." This blessing is recited before the standard "*Ha'etz*" blessing recited on fruit.)