



## The special mitzvah of waving the four species

### *Citron, Myrtle, Willow and Lulav.*

The Bible says: "And ye shall take you on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm-trees, and boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook, and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days." (Leviticus 23:40)

On Sukkot, we unite all the branches together -- two willows on the left, one palm branch in the center, and three myrtles on the right. We hold this bundle in our right hand, and then lift them together with the Citron. We then shake them all together, three times in each direction: front, right, back, left, up and down. (Sephardic Jews and Hassidim have a different custom for the order.) This good-deed should be performed during the daytime, each of the seven days of Sukkot (except for the Sabbath).

Before waving the four species, we say the following blessing:

English: Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who sanctified us with His mitzvot, and instructed us to raise up the Lulav.

Phonetic Hebrew: Baruch ata Adonoy, Elo-heinu Melech ha'olam, asher kid'shanu bi'mitzvo-sav, vi'tzivanu al ni-tilas lulav.

Hebrew: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל נְטִילַת לֻלָּב.

On the first time, add the following blessing

English: Blessed are You, the Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.

Phonetic Hebrew: Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha-olam, she-he-cheyanu v'kimanu v'higianu laz'man ha-zeh

Hebrew: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁהַחַיָּנוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ  
וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזִמְנֵן הַזֶּה.

In order to fulfill this special good-deed, the four species must meet certain requirements. Since the details

can get technical, it is suggested to buy or have it checked by a Rabbi. (Particularly the Etrog, which can easily be confused with a lemon.) A better idea is to purchase a complete set from a reliable distributor -- like e-esrog.com. Your local Jewish bookstore may have a "Four Species Set" with a rabbinical seal certifying their validity. To be a well-versed consumer, here are some central requirements to look for:

### The Citron - Etrog

- Should preferably be turning yellow rather than green.
- The peel cannot be punctured through in any spot, nor can it lack any of its inner skin.
- The peel cannot be overly soft, cracked, dry or peeled.
- Even a small black dot on the upper part invalidates it.
- The shape should preferably be like a tower - wider at the bottom and narrow at the top.
- If this particular Etrog grew with a protruding stem (called a pitom), then that stem cannot be broken off. (However, if the Etrog grew in the first place without a pitom, it is still kosher.)



### The Myrtle - Haddas

- You will need three myrtle branches.
- A kosher myrtle has a pattern of three leaves coming out from the same point in the branch. This three-leaf pattern must be repeated over at least half the length of the branch.
- Each branch should be at least 11 inches (29 cm.) long.
- The branch cannot be dried out.



### The Willow - Arava

- You will need two willow branches.
- The stem should preferably be red.
- The stem should be at least 11 inches (29 cm.) long.
- The leaves should be oblong, not round in shape.
- The leaves should have a smooth edge, not serrated.



### The Date-Palm - Lulav

- Look at the very top of the branch and make sure that the center-most leaf is not split, but rather is closed (at least half-way down).
- The top cannot be cut off.
- The branch cannot be dried out.
- It should be at least 16 inches (39 cm.) long.
- The straighter the branch, the better.



The 4 species a reflection to oneself

Another way to look at the Lulav is mentioned in "*Sefer Bahir*," a kabbalistic work almost 2,000 years old. It describes the four species as four parts of a human being:

- The Etrog (citron) represents the heart, the seat of our emotions.
- The Hadas (myrtle) has leaves shaped like an eye.
- The Lulav (date palm) represents the spine, from where our actions emanate.
- The Aravah (willow) represents the lips, our speech.

The four species must be taken together as a unit. So too, to achieve happiness, one must use all of his faculties in unison. You cannot say one thing and feel another. We must unify our feelings, our actions, our speech and our outlook. With all of these working together, we are well on the path to self-esteem, tranquility and joy.

### Relationship With God

The four species also represent the Name of God. Aravah (willow), Hadas (myrtle), Lulav (date palm) and Etrog (citron) represent the Yud and Heh and Vav and Heh of the four-letter Name of God.

Again, the key here is unity. As we say everyday in the Shema prayer: "God is One." Whether things may appear to us as good or evil, we must realize that it all comes from God. One must deal with various pleasant or unpleasant circumstances -- ultimately for one's maximal growth, but at the root everything comes from God.

Being aware of this keeps our focus and helps us to deal with the issues of life. When we relate to God's unity, we come closer to achieving joy in the world.

Sukkot is a one-week opportunity to build these relationships and incorporate them into our lives.

### *Quick summary chart*

	Willow - Arava	Myrtle - Haddas	Date palm - Lulav	Citron - Etrog
Number	2	3 (Sefardim may add more)	1	1
Minimum Size	30 cm, 11.8 inches	30 cm, 11.8 inches	40 cm (spine) 15.8 inches	100 gram 3.5 oz
If Unavailable	24.5 cm 9.7 inches	24.5 cm 9.7 inches	32.7 cm (spine) 12.9 inches	57.6 gram 2.1 oz
Characteristics	Elongated, smooth-edged leaves	Leaves cover branch. 3 leaves sprout from same place on branch.	Long double leaves, covering spine, extending beyond spine	Elongated shape, skin not smooth, indented stem
Color	Green leaves, reddish stalk. O.K. if still green	Green leaves, green stalk	Green or greenish yellow	Yellow or light green
General Disqualifications	Stolen. Borrowed (on first day). Dried out. Prohibited - e.g., from temple of idol worship.	Same as previous column.	Same as previous column. Some lenient in times of great need.	Same as previous column. Dried out.

Specific  
Disqualifications

Top cut off.  
Majority of leaves missing.  
Dried out. Leaves round, "serated" edges, stalk never red - indicate wrong species.

Top cut off (if nothing else available, O.K.).  
Leaves don't grow in groups of 3 (if nothing else available, O.K.).  
Dried out leaves.

Split top leaf.  
Leaves spread out, hardened or hanging down.  
Dried out leaves or spine.  
Top cut off.  
Curving to the side.  
Top of spine, bent down.

Missing substance.  
Holes - where some of the peel is missing.  
Split.  
"Pitom" missing (except where it grew without).  
Dark spots on upper sloping part of etrog.  
Dry spots on upper slope.  
Stem missing.  
Spherical shape.