

Adapting this trail for the needs of the handicapped was made possible by the support ofThe Kahanoff Foundation and the Ministry of Tourism through the Israel Government Tourist Corporation.

**Plant names:**

In the guide: The plant numbers correspond to the English, Latin, and Hebrew names listed on the back of the excursion map.

On the ground: 3-digit plant numbers appear on leaf-shaped green signs; plants visible only when in blossom are indicated by the Hebrew letter **ב** on the sign.

There are restrooms and litter baskets along the trail.

**On the way to Station 1:** Follow the green directional signs. About 250 meters along the trail, you’ll pass a parking area on your left. The trail winds through a pine grove planted by the Jewish National Fund in the mid-1960s.

Listen for the whistling sound of the pines in the breeze. The onomatopoeic Hebrew word for this rustling is *rahash*, linguistically related to the biblical word for a coniferous grove, *horesh*. The word horesh appears in the Bible in reference to places bordering the Judean Desert where David hid from King Saul (1 Samuel 23: 15,16,18,19) and the pine groves (*horashim*) where King Jotham ben Uzziah built “fortresses and towers” (II Chronicles 27:4). In ancient Israel — millennia before the JNF planted millions of pine saplings all over the country — pine trees were common mainly to the semi-arid strip between the relatively well-watered western Judean mountains and the Judean Desert.

The word *ya’ar*, forest, appears over 50 times in the Bible, clearly referring in each case to thick vegetation that covered most of Israel’s hills before humans intervened in the botanical landscape.

On the way to Station 1 you will see several plants native to Israel’s forests. Watch for the green signs close to the ground and match them with the plant directory on the back of the trail map.

**STATION 1: “Land of milk and honey”**



“We came to the land to which you sent us; it flows with milk and honey” (Numbers 13: 27). From the Sinai oasis of Kadesh Barnea, Moses sent 12 leaders from the 12 tribes “to scout the land of Canaan...”

(Numbers 13:17). In Israel’s unsettled hills, the scouts found lush vegetation in the wild forest land and its thick undergrowth. These promised pasture for the Israelites’ sheep and goats, and flowers humming with bees. Perhaps the scouts saw wild honey like that Jonathan ate in the forest (1 Samuel 14:25-26) or that Samson found in the lion’s skeleton (Judges 14:8). Contrasted to the sparse vegetation and water of the Sinai Desert, this was indeed a land “flowing with milk and honey” (Numbers 13:27).

**STATION 2: The silent winepress**

“In the vineyards no shouting or cheering will be heard. No more will the treader tread wine in the presses.” (Isaiah 16:10)

When the Israelites entered the land in the time of Joshua, they cleared the forests and built terraces to expand the arable land and prevent erosion: “...the hill country shall be yours, for though it is a forest you shall clear it, and its produce shall be yours...” (Joshua 17:18). It took generations of labor to turn the wild “land of milk and honey” into a cultivated grain fields, pomegranate and fig orchards, olive groves, and vineyards.

The ancient winepress is proof that grapes were once grown here. Abandoned some 1500 years ago, this forsaken winepress illustrates the words of the prophecies of Hosea (“I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees...I will make them a forest” [2:14]) and Isaiah (“Every place where there were a thousand grapevines...shall be covered with briars and thorns” [7:23]). Agriculture will be destroyed, said the prophets, and the people will revert to eating wild goats’ milk and bee honey — “curds and honey shall everyone eat who is left in the [desolated] land” in the words of Isaiah (7:22).

**STATION 3: What is the balm of Gilead?**

In Genesis 43:11, Jacob sends his sons to Egypt with “choice products”: gifts including the fragrant substances *tzori* (balm), *nekhot* (gum) and *lot* (ladanum). These translations, though familiar, have no pretence to botanical accuracy.

The secrecy that surrounded spices and perfumes, especially those used in the Temple incense, makes it hard to identify these plants. Tzori was a component of the incense (Jerusalem Talmud, Yoma 4,5), one of the precious spices that the “Ishmaelites coming from Gilead” took to Egypt (Genesis 37:25) and a famous medicinal product mentioned by Jeremiah (8:22) — hence the well-known English name, “balm of Gilead”.

Growing here are candidates for *tzori*. Gum terebinth or lentisk (129), planted in profusion in front of you to the right of the path, is one. But some see lentisk as *lot* [ladanum] or as *nekhot* [gum], because it is chewed as a breath freshener.

The Balanites (140), on the right just after the path crosses the road, is another candidate for *tzori*. The Balanites stands leafless most of the year, producing new branches and leaves towards the end of summer. *Tzori* may have been produced from its fruit.

**STATION 4: The “choice products”**

When “the famine in the land [of Canaan] was severe” (Genesis 43:1), Jacob “heard that there is grain in Egypt” and told his sons: “go down and procure grain for us there, that we may live and not die” (Genesis 42:2), also instructing them to bring gifts to the governor of Egypt (not knowing it was his son, Joseph).

“Take some of the choice products of the land in your baggage, and carry them down as a gift to the man — some balm and some honey, gum, ladanum, pistachio nuts, and almonds” (Genesis 43:11).

Jacob sent the gifts during a time of famine, following two consecutive years of drought. Clearly these “choice products” can be raised even in relatively dry conditions. The almond (154), for instance, can live on far less moisture than other fruit trees. The same is true of the Balanites and pistachio trees (166), which you will meet presently.

The perfume filling the air emanates from the fragrant rockrose (143), another candidate for ladanum. The sheen on its leaves comes from the fragrant, sticky substance they exude. The fragrant rockrose does not grow wild in Israel today, although it is very common in Spain and in other countries of the northern Mediterranean Basin. Pink and white varieties of the rockrose (142 and 143), found in the hilly regions of Israel, are also considered sources of ladanum by some scholars.



**STATION 5: Pistachio nuts**

Pistachio trees (166) belong to the terebinth family. Today, most pistachio nuts in the Middle East come from Iran and Turkey. But Mishnaic rulings concerning the pistachio and terebinth verify that pistachios were cultivated in ancient Israel. The pistachio terebinth can, in fact, survive on less than 8 inches of rain a year (200 mm) and still produce fruit — certainly a very “choice product!”

**STATION 6: “...a land of streams”**

Have a seat in the shade of the jujube (*atat*) tree (108). Underneath the large flat rock in front of you drips an artificial rivulet that waters the dense growth of reeds (157) and cattails (156) clear indicators of water.

This small area demonstrates the method of irrigation that was feasible only near the streams of Israel’s mountainous regions, as Moses told the Israelites in the Sinai Desert: “For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of streams, of springs and underground waters flowing out of valleys and hills” (Deuteronomy 8:7). But Moses adds: “For the land that you are entering to inherit is **not** like the land of Egypt...is a land of hills and valleys, watered by the rains of heaven” (Deuteronomy 11:10-11).

Almost all of Israel is watered exclusively “by the rains of heaven.” Springs and artesian wells supply water only for limited areas like vegetable gardens and rarely for small orchards, like the olive and fig trees planted here. The main crops of ancient Israel depended on the amount and distribution of the winter rainfall.

**On the way to Station 7:**

The shape of the fig tree & the growth of Jerusalem:

“And Israel and Judah dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree” (1 Kings 5:5). The low branches of the fig tree (110) spreading out from the short trunk gave rise to a prophetic rabbinic homily, a midarsh, that has become reality in our day: “Just as this fig tree is short below and broad above, thus it will be with Jerusalem in the future: she will spread out on all sides and her exiles will rest beneath her” (Shir Hashirim Rabba 7). Jerusalem has a short “trunk” — the City of David, the lowest spot in the Jerusalem hills. The “branches” of the city’s neighborhoods (Ramat, Gilo, Neve Yaakov, Pisgat Ze’ev, Har Nof, Bayit V’gan, Kiryat Yovel) have “spread out on all sides” and filled with immigrants from around the world, the “exiles” who have come home to “rest beneath her”.



**STATION 7: Fig & Pomegranate Shelter**

Seated in the shade of the shelter overlooking the “Pool of the Date Palms,” your view is framed by pomegranates (132) in front of you, fig trees (110) on either side.

Figs ripen from before Shavuot until Sukkot, and sometimes even later. This lengthy harvest season is a hardship on today’s farmers, who rarely grow figs in Israel commercially because there is no efficient way to harvest them profitably. In biblical and Talmudic times, before modern calculations of cost-effectiveness, figs were of great economic importance because of their high sugar content. In addition to fresh figs, various forms of dried figs and fig honey, easily stored for year-round use, were popular. Figs were enjoyed as they ripened and even likened to study of the Torah:

“Why is the Torah compared to a fig tree? Because most trees (olives, grapes, dates, pomegranates) have their fruit picked at one time, but the fig tree is picked gradually. And so it is with the Torah: one learns a little today and much on the morrow, for one cannot learn it in one or two years” (Bamidbar Rabba 12).

Pomegranates ripen at the end of summer. If the birds didn’t get them first, you will find fruit in mid- to late September, around Rosh Hashanah, when pomegranates are traditionally eaten. According to folklore, the perfect pomegranate contains 613 seeds, the number of commandments in the Bible. Someone who is “full as a pomegranate” (Hagiga 27a, Brakhot 57a) is filled with good deeds.

The pomegranate, both the bell-shaped flower and the fruit, has been a favorite decorative motif from ancient times until today. The robe of the High Priest that was decorated with “a bell and a pomegranate, a bell and a pomegranate, all around the hem of the robe” (Exodus 39:26); pomegranate motifs decorated the Temple (1 Kings 7:42). Pomegranate shapes traditionally topped the Torah scroll staves, and to this day these Torah crowns are called *rimonim*,” pomegranates.

Return to the paved trail and continue walking some 20 meters until you get to the benches in the shade of a pine tree on your left.

**STATION 8:**

“...a land of wheat and barley, of grapevines and figs and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey...” (Deuteronomy 8:8). Overlooking the “Fields of the Seven Varieties,” surrounded by olive trees and wheat and barley fields, this is a fitting place to figure out the words of the Talmud:

“blossomed. The southern wind is damaging to wheat when it has reached a third of its ripening and is beneficial to olives when they have blossomed. Said Rabbi Yosef: And your sign is the table [that stands in the Temple] in the north [side] and the menorah in the south.” (Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra 147a)

This “shorthand” deals with the precarious weather that prevails in Israel between Passover and Shavuot (the seven weeks of the omer in April-May), when farmers anxiously count off the days that determine the success of the crops. The last rains, brought by the “northern wind,” are vital for the still-soft stalks of grain when they have “reached a third of its ripening.” But if the olive trees are already in flower, that same northern wind and the accompanying rain, can wash off the exposed pollen or beat the flowers to the ground (“shed his blossoms like an olive tree” [Job 15:33]), resulting in a very poor yield months later in the late fall. On the other hand, the hot “southern wind” is good for the olive trees because it hastens their blossoming and is crucial to their pollination. But this same southern wind, with its intense heat, can scorch the grain if it comes before the kernels have filled with starch (while only at “a third of its ripening”), and destroy the crop. The hope for the right ecological balance was represented in the Temple by placing “the table in the north and the menorah in the south” (Exodus 26:35). The table, for the shewbread representing wheat and barley, faced the direction of the northern wind. The menorah, lit with olive oil, faced south. Together, they symbolized, the pleas to the Creator that each wind come at the right time.

These symbols, placed in the Tabernacle in the Sinai Desert and later in the Temple in Jerusalem, mirror the battle for belief in One God, responsible for all creation, and against the local Canaanite worship of warring deities controlling the winds, rains, and fertility.

**STATION 9: Olive oil press**

Olive oil was a key staple, used in food preparation, anointing, healing, and, most important, for lighting. The Bible speaks of olive oil for lighting the menorah, the seven-branched candelabrum in the Tabernacle and the Temple, but not for domestic lighting. But the large number of oil lamps discovered in archaeological excavations all over Israel, including Neot Kedumim, testify that olive oil was widely used for lighting in the home as well.

Olive oil was used to anoint prophets, kings, priests, and even the Tabernacle and its vessels. The act of anointing with oil is called *meshikha*; messiah — the Hebrew *mashiakh* — means “the anointed one”.

This olive press was bought from a neighboring Arab village. The crushing wheel and basin date to Roman times. The olives are crushed by the stone wheel in the crushing basin and the resulting mash is scooped into the round, flat, woven baskets, which are stacked on the platform below the massive wooden beam. The beam presses out the oil, which runs into the chiseled circular trough and from there into the small catchment basin. Water is added to the basin so that the oil floats to the top and any sediment and dirt sink to the bottom. The relatively modern iron screw press works on the same principle as the beam press. The gears enable greater pressure to be exerted on the baskets containing the olive mash.

A small family size olive press, called *bodeda*, was used to make small, non-commercial quantities of olive oil, especially in the sabbatical year, when agricultural produce could not be sold.



**STATION 10: Threshing floor**

The threshing, winnowing, and grinding implements you see here, similar to those used in the biblical, Mishnaic and Talmudic periods, are used to process the wheat and barley.

Domesticated wheat developed from a wild species whose birthplace is Israel. In 1906, Prof. Aaron Aaronson discovered, growing wild in northern Israel, a kind of wheat whose characteristics and growth pattern are similar to today’s common domesticated wheat. It was given the name *em habita*, “mother wheat.” A few years later, Dr. Ephraim Hareuveni found the same wild wheat on the western slopes of Jerusalem. Wheat, rich in carbohydrates, was the main food in ancient Israel as in other Mediterranean countries. It provided 50% of a person’s daily caloric intake.

The Talmud even suggests that wheat was the Tree of Knowledge! In keeping with homiletic exaggeration, in some midrashim herbaceous plants are prophesied to grow to impossible heights: “Wheat shall grow as tall as a date palm...” (Ktubot, 111b). So, if wheat can be the height of a tree, Rabbi Yehuda explains why it could be the Tree of Knowledge: “A child does not know how to say ’mother’ and ’father’ until he has tasted wheat.” (Sanhedrin 70a-b) A child who has tasted bread (wheat) is presumably no longer a nursing infant and therefore has reached an age of some knowledge and understanding. In this way, wheat becomes a symbol for knowledge itself.

**On the way to Station 11: The beauty of the pomegranates**



The striking radiance of the open pomegranate fruit exposing the deep red seeds, found its way into the poetry of the Song of Songs: “Your parted lips behind your veil are like a pomegranate split open” (4:3, 6:7). and even to the description of Rabbi Yohanan, the handsomest of men “Whoever desires to see Rabbi Yohanan’s beauty, let him take a shiny silver goblet and fill it with the seeds of the red pomegranate, encircle its brim with a chaplet of red roses and set it between the sun and the shade. Its lustrous glow is akin to Rabbi Yohanan’s beauty” (Baba Metsia 84a).

**Station 11: Grapevine arbor**

If you happen to be sitting here when the grapevines are in bloom, during the same season between Passover and Shavuot that is so critical for the wheat and olives, you will detect the delicate perfume described by the shepherd in the Song of Songs, “The blossoming grapevines (*semadar*) give their fragrance” (2:13). “Semadar,” grape flower, is a popular girls name in Israel.

Grapes (111), the most frequently mentioned crop in the Bible, were grown in almost every region of Israel. An important food, grapes were a major source of calories, sugar and of iron, preserved as raisins or as wine. The benediction over wine praises the grape: “Blessed art Thou O Lord our God, Creator of the fruit of the vine”.

The Talmud mentions 60 different kinds of wine and generally takes a positive view of it if drunk in moderation: Wine provides both nourishment and joy and “gladdens the heart” as in Psalm 104 (Brakhot 35b); wine promotes health (Baba Batra 58b) and opens the heart to reasoning (Baba Batra 12b).

**The grapevine and the community of Israel**

The Babylonian Talmud (Hulin 92a) compares the grapevine to the community of Israel. The leaves are the “common people”: the leaves produce the basic needs of the entire vine, just as the common people do for the community. “The shoots are the merchants,” distributing the produce of the leaves [the common people] to the entire grapevine [community]. “The ignorant the tendrils of the grapevine”: They help the grapevine grow and spread. But the ultimate goal is to produce “clusters of fine grapes — who are the scholars and wise men of the community”.

### Why is the date palm one of the “seven varieties?”

Nutritious and easily dried, dates provide food on long desert journeys. Their high sugar content ferments and furnishes the base for an alcoholic beverage, unless the process is stopped by proper sun-drying.

The list of the seven varieties in Deuteronomy 8:8 mentions “honey”, not dates. In the Bible, honey (*dash*) can be either bee honey or date honey (a syrup made from ripe dates). The honey Jacob sent to Egypt as one of the choice products (Station 4) was no doubt bee honey. In Jacob’s time, the hill country of Israel was largely an uncultivated “land flowering with milk and honey,” which Moses’ scouts were to see centuries later (Station 1).

According to the Jerusalem Talmud (Bikkurim 1,3), the honey of the seven varieties is date honey. Bee honey, which is not endangered by shifting winds and temperatures, would have no place in a list of problematic plant products. But dates, like wheat, barley, grapevines, figs, pomegranates and olives, are subject to the capricious weather during the omer period between Pesach and Shavuot.



This erratic weather was pivotal to the Israelites’ temptation to worship the local deities. The chief gods of the Canaanite pantheon were weather and fertility deities who were believed to control opposing forces of nature — the same forces that governed the success or failure of each of the seven varieties. It is not coincidental that immediately after the description of the land of Israel in Deuteronomy 8:7-10, which highlights the seven varieties, appears the warning: “Take heed lest you forget the Lord your God and fail to keep His commandments” (8:11). Grain (wheat and barley), wine (grapes), and oil (olives) — the four most important crops of the seven varieties — frequently appear together with the warning against forgetting the God of Israel and worshipping other gods (Deuteronomy 11:16), as in the recitation of the Shema, in the phylacteries (tefillin), and in the mezuzah put up on the doorposts of Jewish homes.

### The world as a wheel

“The Pool of the Date Palms” was dug here at the juncture of two wadis to catch and store run-off winter rainwater. The water wheel (*antilya*) illustrates one of the methods of drawing water from a lower to a higher level. To operate it, the worker stands inside the wheel and treads on the slats, causing the wheel to rotate. As the wheel turns, the clay jugs attached to its outer circumference dip into the pond, fill with water, and then empty into the adjacent trough leading to the grapevines and pomegranates. The system is efficient: A well-operated wheel can move at least 150 liters per minute (almost 2,000 gallons per hour).

Used for irrigation in various parts of the Middle East since at least the seventh century BCE (and here and there still today), the antilya appears in rabbinic literature as an apt figure for the cyclical vicissitudes of life a “wheel of fortune.” A midrash on the verse “God is the judge; He lowers one [person] and raises another” (Psalm 75:8) says: “What is the world like? It is like the wheel in the garden with its clay jugs. The lower ones go up full, and the upper ones come down empty. Thus not everyone who is rich today will be rich tomorrow, and not everyone who is poor today will be poor tomorrow” (Shmot Rabba 31:14).

Because the water wheel is turned by treading, it may be the method Moses refers to when he says: “The land which you are entering is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come, where, after sowing your seed, you irrigated it by foot...” (Deuteronomy 11:10).



### On the way to Station 12- “Irrigating by foot” — Method B

In the date palm grove, you can see another method of “irrigating by foot.” Water from the “Pool of the Date Palms” is channeled into the conduit leading to the date palms. As water fills the ditches around the date palms further away from the pool, you can plug the small channels leading to each tree simply by dragging your heel across the muddy channel. This forces the water to flow into the ditches around the trees closer to the pool. Making these little dams “by foot” controls the amount of water that flows into the circular ditch around each tree. This simple system works well in Israel in small groves, such as this, or in vegetable gardens. But in Egypt, with the annual inundations of the Nile River and the flat topography of the Nile Delta, this system could be used to send water from a central channel into the long furrows of an entire grain field, and open and close the channels to each furrow. But Israel is “not like the land of Egypt” — “...the land that you are entering to inherit,” says Moses, “is a land of hills and valleys...” (Deuteronomy 11:10-11) where you will be able to irrigate by foot only in very limited areas.

### STATION 12: Sukkot

“On the 15th day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the yield of your land...you shall live in booths seven days... in order that future generations may know that I made the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt...” (Leviticus 23:39,42-43).



In biblical Israel, by the “seventh month” (Tishrei) or mid-September to early October, the last harvests have been brought indoors to protect them from the upcoming first rains, and the farmers return home from their temporary summer dwellings in the fields, vineyards, and orchards. But this season is different in the Sinai Desert. There, the nomadic shepherds of the desert pack away their tents and move to more permanent date palm sukkot (booths) around oases where date palms flourish. They harvest the ripe dates, spread them in the sun to dry, and make honey from the ripest fruit. They split the fronds (the giant leaves) into strips and weave baskets, trays, mats, and saddlebags. The webbing that supports the base of each frond is pulled apart into fibers and twisted into thin rope, or pounded until it becomes like fine cloth for saddle blankets and seating mats. Even the hard pits are ground and used to feed old camels that have lost their teeth and can no longer chew the pits to extract the protein, minerals, cellulose, and sugar.

In Israel, there is no longer any agricultural reason to stay in temporary booths at this time of year. The agricultural year is over — no need to be out in a booth in the fields or vineyards — and a new cycle begins. The book of Leviticus gives the specific reason for sitting in booths on Sukkot: history. The sukkot recall the booths in which the Israelites lived after the Exodus from Egypt.

The Israelites were also commanded to celebrate Sukkot with the “four species.” “And you shall take on the first day a fruit of a goodly tree, date palm fronds, and a bough of a leafy tree, and willows of the brook...” (Leviticus 23:40).

This text leaves much room for debating what exactly these four plants are. You will meet these Talmudic deliberations at the following stations.

### From frond to lulav

Get up close to one of the small date palms (155) and notice the details of its structure. (Be careful of the very sharp leaf tips and thorns on the fronds.) Each frond is actually a giant leaf with a central spine from which leaflets emanate. In the heart (*lev*) of the date palm there are several embryonic fronds in various stage of development. Each is called a *lulav* because it grows from the *lev* of the palm. Today, when Jews bring the *lulav* to synagogue on Sukkot, they are carrying a date palm frond, only in a compact form.

### STATION 13: Willows of the brook

Three different trees are planted on the banks of the “Pool of the Willows.” The willow (*arava*, 115) has long, thin leaves. The Euphrates poplar (*tzafzafat ha-prat*, 114) has leaves of three different shapes: some long like its neighbor, others short and round, and still others resembling eucalyptus leaves. The mountain poplar (*tzafzafa*, 116) with white bark and round leaves, stands a few meters away.

Although the willow would seem to be the least problematic identification of the four species, the Sages found it necessary to discuss the issue in detail. The Gemara describes the elongated, smooth-edged leaves and reddish bark of the willow, — and specifies that it is “a tree that grows by streams” — and the round, serrated leaves and white bark of the poplar. The poplar is not a willow, so why does the Gemara bother with detailed botanical comparisons? The answer lies in Hebrew name changes between “willow” and “poplar.”

Rav Hisda says that the names “willow” and “poplar” were switched some time after the destruction of the Second Temple (Sukka 34a, 36a).

To make sure people used the right tree despite the confusion of names, the Gemara provided exact descriptions of the tree itself. But the Gemara goes on to say something that seems to contradict the guidelines given earlier: “If the leaves resemble a sickle [round], it is acceptable” (Sukka 33b-34a, commentary). Apparently, there is a tree with round leaves, like the poplar, that is nevertheless acceptable for use on Sukkot. Abbaye explains that the commentary is referring to the hilfagila tree and that this tree can be used on Sukkot. The hilfagila has both kinds of leaves: round and elongated and, like the true willow, is completely dependent on a constant source of water. Its modern name, Euphrates poplar (*Populus euphratica*, 114), attests to its presence on the banks of the Euphrates River — “by the rivers of Babylon.” It is on this tree — “the willow there” that “we hung up our harps” when “we remembered Zion” (Psalm 137:1-2).

Before walking on to Station 14, notice the tall shrubs growing to your left. Called “Abraham’s bush” (179), they blossom with blue flower clusters in June-July. Found wherever they can utilize a little underground water, they are common in stream beds that are dry most of the year. The Samaritans living on Mount Grizim consider it to be the “willow of the brook” and decorate their sukkot with it.

The dirt path continues into a thicket of myrtles (145), oleander (181) and plane trees (180). For those using electric carts or strollers, stay on the paved path to detour this area until you reach Station 14.

### Station 14: “Branch of a leafy tree”

As you enter the thicket of myrtle bushes (145), rub the leaves between your hands and smell the lovely fragrance that the essential oil cells release.

What was the “branch of a leafy tree”? From the Talmudic discussions that appear on the plaque, it is clear that the identification of the “leafy tree” as myrtle was reached only after considering a number of candidates that all belong to the same natural landscape as the myrtle: plane tree (180), oleander (181), and even olive tree (109).

### Station 15: Fruit of a glorious tree

The explanatory plaque continues the debates concerning the identity of the four species. Here too, we followed the discussions of the Sages and planted all the candidates mentioned in the Gemara. For instance, no one would question the glorious fruit of the pomegranate (132), but the tree sheds its leaves towards the end of summer and is bare and unattractive until the following early spring. On the other hand, the carob tree (158) is green and fresh year round, but its dry fruit is hardly “glorious.”

In contrast to the pomegranate and the carob, the citron — *etrog* — (187) produces green leaves and fragrant fruit all year. Unique to the etrog among all fruit trees, the stigma (the broad tip of the pistil, part of the fruit’s female organ) does not usually drop off after fertilization. This stigma is the *pitam* or “nipple” without which the etrog is not



acceptable for use on Sukkot. The year-round fertility of the etrog and its unusual *pitam*, made it the symbol of fertility, expressing the hope for fertility and abundance in the new agricultural year.

Although the etrog was eaten as a fruit in ancient times, it is too bitter for modern tastes used to an abundance of sweeter citrus varieties. But delicious marmalade can be made from the etrog, as well as from the stock onto which it is frequently grafted, the bitter orange (198). It is difficult to grow the etrog in Israel because it needs a great deal of water and special care — not a tree to be planted in difficult times.

### STATION 16: The four species as storytellers

After all the discussions on the identifications of the four species, it’s time to think about what they symbolize. Maimonides (Rambam) in his treatise Guide for the Perplexed (part 3, chapter 43) implies that the four species represent the historical transition from the desert to the beginning of agriculture in the land of Israel. His concept goes hand in hand with the Bible’s method of linking remembrance of the nation’s historical events with the agricultural cycles of the land of Israel.

When we bind together the Four Species we are bringing a kind of “show and tell” of the Jewish people’s major historical events: Date palm fronds: a reminder of that chapter in history when the Israelites sat in booths roofed with date palm fronds in the oases of the Sinai Desert. Willows of the brook: the encampment on the east bank of the Jordan River in the shade of the willows before entering the Promised Land. The branch of a leafy tree: representative of the thickets and forests — “the land flowing with milk and honey” the Israelites found when they entered the land and that they had to clear before they could build terraces and plant fruit trees. Fruit of a glorious tree: the zenith of agricultural success.

Not only do the four species represent the early history of the Jewish people, their individual characteristics also echo the nation’s prayers for the new agricultural year: The etrog, symbol of fertility, expresses the plea for a bountiful harvest in the coming year. The three branches of the other plants represent the necessary conditions for this success: The most elementary condition — that “each man...sit under his grapevine and fig tree with no one to disturb him” (Micah 4:4) is to vanquish the enemies who rise up to destroy the nation “in each

generation.” The lulav, symbol of victory, represents the peace that follows defeat of the foe. The willows of the brook, so utterly dependent on water, echo the prayer, “Please God, save us!” from the dangers of drought. (This plea, “save us” *hosha’ana* in Hebrew was the source for the nickname for the willow branches *hosha’anut* as they are frequently called. The English word “hosanna” is a corruption of the Hebrew *hosha’ana*.) Compared to the willow branches, which start to wilt immediately after being cut, myrtle branches remain upright, fresh, and fragrant even without water. This characteristic may explain why the myrtle is the symbol of success (“He who sees a myrtle in his dream, his property will prosper. If he has no property, he will receive an inheritance from somewhere else” [Brakhot 57a].) The heartfelt prayers for peace, rainfall, success, and bountiful harvests are bound together in the four species of Sukkot. Held together, they are symbols of the unity of the land of Israel, the people of Israel, and the traditions of Israel.

“The four species are the nation of Israel. The etrog is both aromatic and tasty — like those who combine the study of Torah with the practice of good deeds. The lulav has taste (of the dates) but no fragrance — those with learning who do not perform good deeds. The myrtle has aroma but no taste — those who do good deeds but have no learning. The willow has neither aroma nor taste — like those who are both ignorant and do not perform good deeds. What does the Lord do since He does not want Israel to perish? He binds all four species together so that those with taste and aroma — learning and good deeds — redeem the others. Thus, bound together, Israel endures forever” (Vayikra Rabba 30).

To conclude the story of Sukkot, we recommend you visit the exhibit of various sukkot that starts a few meters along the trail. The exhibit contains dozens of different sukkot as described in the Mishna in the Tractate Sukka. The paved trail will bring you back to the gift shop and the parking lot.



### SELF-GUIDED TOUR

## TRAIL C (GREEN)

**Distance:** about 3 km  
Accessible to strollers and wheelchairs

Trail Themes: “milk and honey”, the choice products, the seven varieties, the four species of Sukkot



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Much of the material in this guide is condensed from the book *Nature in Our Biblical Heritage* by Nogah Hareuveni, founder of Neot Kedumim. These and other books are on sale in the entrance gift shop at a special discount price.



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