

TREES, PLANTS AND FLOWERS ON SHABBOS

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Question: What are the Shabbos restrictions in regard to trees?

Discussion: It is Biblically prohibited to tear a branch or a leaf from a tree on Shabbos—Reaping. To protect us from inadvertently doing so, the Rabbis erected numerous "fences," precautionary measures, which restrict our access to trees. It is, therefore, rabbinically forbidden on Shabbos and Yom Tov to:

- Shake a tree. One may touch a tree if it will not shake[1].
- Climb, sit, or lean heavily [e.g., to tie one's shoes] on a tree[2]. Sitting on a dead tree stump is permitted by some poskim[3] and prohibited by others[4].
- Swing from a branch or from an object directly connected to a tree. Thus a swing or a hammock which is connected to a tree may not be used on Shabbos[5]. Even a swing which is connected to a chain and the chain, in turn, is connected to a ring which is attached to the tree is still forbidden to be used[6]. If, however, poles are connected to two trees and a swing or hammock is attached to the poles, they may be used, provided that the trees are sturdy and will not move or bend.
- To place or hang an object [e.g., a jacket, a sefer] on a tree.
- To remove an object from a tree. Even before Shabbos, it is prohibited to place [or leave] items on a tree that are usually used on Shabbos, since one could easily forget and remove them from the tree on Shabbos[7].
- To smell a growing, edible fruit while it is attached to a tree[8]. It is even forbidden to eat—on Shabbos—a fruit that has fallen off the tree on Shabbos. It is permitted, however, to eat it immediately after Shabbos[9].
- Ride an animal on Shabbos. This is forbidden since it is easy for a rider to forget and pull a branch off a tree while riding[10]. As an extension of this edict, the Rabbis declared all animals to be muktzeh[11].

All trees—whether fruit bearing or barren, live or dead—are included in these rabbinical decrees[12]. But the restrictions apply only to the part of the tree which is higher than ten inches from the ground[13]. Trees and bushes which do not grow to a height of ten inches are not restricted in any way[14].

Question: What are the Shabbos restrictions in regard to plants and flowerpots?

Discussion: In practical halachic terms all potted plants—both perforated or not[15], both indoors and outdoors[16] —are considered to be "nourished" from the ground and "connected" to it[17].

Consequently, "uprooting" and moving any potted plant from one "connected" place to another, e.g., from the floor to the table, from the table to the porch, or from one side of the yard to another, may be a possible violation of the Labors of Reaping and/or Sowing and should be entirely avoided. Moving a potted plant within the same "connection" location without "uprooting" it, e.g., dragging a plant from one part of the table to another or from one part of the yard to another, is permitted by some poskim but questioned by others[18], and it is appropriate to be stringent in this matter, whenever possible[19]. It is permissible, however, to smell, touch and even bend the stem or the leaves, provided that they are soft and flexible and would not break upon contact[20].

It is strictly forbidden to move a plant or a flowerpot from a shady area to a sunny area so that exposure to the sun's rays will aid its growth. It is also prohibited to open a window or to pull up a shade with the specific intention of allowing the sun or air to aid a plant's growth. Conversely, if sunlight or fresh air is detrimental to a plant, it would be prohibited to shut them out, since shutting them out promotes the plant's growth[21].

Question: What are the Shabbos restrictions in regard to flowers?

Discussion: Flowers, while still connected to the ground, may be smelled and touched, provided that their stems are soft and do not normally become brittle[22].

Flowers in a vase may be moved on Shabbos[23]. They may not, however, be moved from a shady area to a sunny area to promote blossoming. If the buds have not fully bloomed, the vase may be moved but just slightly, since the movement of the water hastens the opening of the buds[24].

One may remove flowers from a vase full of water, as long as they have not sprouted roots in the water[25]. Once removed, they may not be put back in the water if that will cause further blossoming.

Water may not be added to a flower vase on Shabbos[26] On Yom Tov, however, a small amount of water may be added but not changed[27].

Flowers should be placed in water before Shabbos. In case they were not, they may not be placed in water on Shabbos if the buds have not blossomed fully. If the buds are completely opened, however, some poskim permit placing them in water on Shabbos while others do not[28].

One may not gather flowers or create an arrangement and place it in a vase on Shabbos, even if the vase contains no water[29].

Question: What are the Shabbos restrictions in regard to grass?

Discussion: Touching, moving, walking, running, or lying on grass is permissible[30]. Some poskim prohibit running in high grass if it would definitely result in some grass being uprooted[31], while

other poskim are not concerned about this issue[32].

Grass which was uprooted on Shabbos and gets stuck on one's shoes is considered muktzeh, since it was attached to the earth when Shabbos began. One may remove it only in an indirect manner[33].

1. *Rama, O.C. 336:13.*

2. O.C. 336:1; 336:13 and Be'ur Halachah, s.v. u'mutar.

3. Aruch ha-Shulchan 336:18.

4. Ohr l'Tziyon 2:47-29. Mishnah Berurah's position on this matter is not clear.

5. O.C. 336:13.

6. Rav M. Feinstein (oral ruling quoted in Sefer Hilchos Shabbos, vol. 1, pg. 62).

7. Mishnah Berurah 336:12 based on O.C. 277:4 and 514:6. [See explanation by Rav S.Z. Auerbach, quoted in Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 26, note 55. See also a more lenient opinion in Tehilah l'David 277:7.]

8. O.C. 336:10.

9. O.C. 322:3.

10. O.C. 305:18.

11. O.C. 308:39. See The Daily Halachah Discussion, pg. 115, for more information on this issue.

12. Mishnah Berurah 336:1. There are some poskim who are lenient in the case of a tree which has completely dried out; see Mishnah Berurah and Aruch ha-Shulchan 336:13.

13. Mishnah Berurah 336:21.

14. O.C. 336:2. However, if the trees or bushes which are less than ten inches high are fruit-bearing, some poskim prohibit those as well; Mishnah Berurah 336:19.

15. O.C. 336:8. Even a non-perforated pot is nourished "a bit" from the ground; Mishnah Berurah 336:43. [Possibly, this is only so with wood or ceramic pots; metal or glass non-perforated pots do not allow for nourishment from the ground; Chazon Ish, Orlah 32; Bris Olam, pg. 31. Contemporary poskim disagree whether plastic is like wood or like glass; Orchos Shabbos 18:19.]

16. See Shalmei Yehudah, pg. 73 and Shevet ha-Levi 6:167; 7:184-1. Some poskim hold that this does not apply to a home's upper floors; see Shulchan Shelomo 336:8 and Bris Olam, pg. 31.

17. An additional concern, which applies even to non-perforated pots, are the leaves which protrude over the side of the pot; see Chayei Adam 12:2.

18. See the various views in Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 336:38, Minchas Shabbos 80:194, Tehilah l'David 336:6, Bris Olam, pg. 32, Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 26, note 6 and Orchos Shabbos 19:141.
19. Rav M. Feinstein (quoted in Sefer Hilchos Shabbos, pg. 64); Rav S.Z. Auerbach and Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Shalmei Yehudah, pg. 73).
20. Mishnah Berurah 336:48.
21. Entire paragraph is based on the rulings of the Chazon Ish, Shevi'is 22:1; Shvisas ha-Shabbos, Zore'a 10; Har Tzvi, O.C. 211; Minchas Shelomo 1:10-8; 2:26-1; Shevet ha-Levi 4:36.
22. Mishnah Berurah 336:48.
23. Rav M. Feinstein, quoted in Sefer Hilchos Shabbos, pg. 64.
24. Rav Y.S. Elyashiv, quoted in Shalmei Yehudah, pg. 73; Bris Olam, pg. 32.
25. Rav S.Z. Auerbach, quoted in Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 26:26.
26. Mishnah Berurah 336:54.
27. O.C. 654:1 and Aruch ha-Shulchan 654:2; Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 26:26.
28. See Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 336:48; Shulchan Shelomo 336:12; Yechaveh Da'as 2:53; Chut Shani, Shabbos, vol. 1, 10-3.
29. Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:73.
30. O.C. 336:3; 312:6.
31. Mishnah Berurah 336:25 and Beiur Halachah, s.v. mutar.
32. Aruch ha-Shulchan 336:21. See Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 26, note 69.
33. Mishnah Berurah 336:24.

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