



TORAH VEHA'ARETZ

INSTITUTE

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Orlah and Bay Laurel

Question: I'm growing bay laurel in my garden and want to use the bay leaves as spices. Do I need to first wait three years?

Answer: Bay laurel, *Laurus nobilis*, is an aromatic perennial evergreen that grows as a bush or tree and is used as an herb and for ornamental purposes. Laurel wreaths expressed victory and glory in antiquity. Its dried leaves are called bay leaves and the essential oil produced from its leaves is used for medicinal purposes. The Gemara (*Gittin* 69b) refers to these leaves as *atrafa de'arah*, mentioned as an antidote to intestinal worms when steeped in wine.

In the past we wrote about trees whose leaves, and not fruit, are eaten and discussed the dispute about whether they are considered fruit trees (and thus subject to *orlah* laws). We cited Rabbi Yaakov Ariel's opinion that it is proper to be stringent.

In Israel, however, bay leaves are generally not eaten; they are used as herbs and removed before eating. For this reason, Rabbi Dov Lior (*HaTorah*

VeHa'aretz V, 5760) rules with regard to lemon verbena and rose petals that these plants are not considered fruit trees and are thus exempt from *orlah*; bay laurel is similar to lemon verbena. Note that Rabbi Mordechai Elisha is stringent about perennials used as herbs and maintains that one should wait for three years.

Even if a particular individual eats bay leaves, this does not change its basic definition; we follow the majority practice (even the leaf-eater need not wait for three years). Should it one day become generally accepted to eat bay leaves, *orlah* laws would apply.

In conclusion: Bay leaves are not subject to *orlah* laws and can be used immediately.

See also Chapter 1 of *Orlah for the Backyard* (translated from *Hilchot Ha'aretz*), available on our website: <https://www.toraland.org.il/en/beit-midrash/halachic-guides/hilchot-haaretz/hilchot-orlah/orlah-chapter-1-general-laws-of-orlah/> ■

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