



Shemita: Do Leaves Have Shemita Sanctity?

Question

During the normal gardening season, I collect fallen pine needles, leaves, twigs and branches from the wooded areas and walkways around my community. I use the pine needles for mulch, which I place on top of my raised vegetable beds. I shred fallen leaves and store them in a composter bin or plastic bags for six months to two years; they then become leaf mold, which I use as a soil amendment. I turn branches and twigs into woodchips (with a wood chipper) and place them on pathways between the raised beds.

May I continue collecting these items, provided I only store them during *shemita*? May I continue applying woodchips to the pathways during *shemita*, as I am not growing food there?

Answer

Shemita sanctity applies only to crops intended for human food or animal fodder

and certain specific needs (ex. herbs, cosmetics, and paint). Wood for heating is not sacred. For most fruit trees, their leaves, branches, and needles are not earmarked for any particular use—so they do not have *shemita* sanctity (seeds and peels may be sacred, though). This is similar to *orlah*, where the fruit is forbidden but other tree parts (leaves, branches, flowers) may be benefited from throughout the first three years.

For this reason, needles, leaves, and branches are not sacred and may be used for any purpose, including compost. Moreover, since non-agricultural activities are permitted during *shemita*, you may place woodchips on your garden pathways. It is possible to create compost during the *shemita* year, but it should not be used as fertilizer during *shemita*. Thus, the soil should be adequately fertilized prior to *shemita*.

Yishar ko'ach—continue recycling and making Israel clean and beautiful!

A book on the laws of *shemita* will come out soon in English, published by Torah VeHa'aretz Institute. ■



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