



# Flowers During *Shemittah*

## Types of flowers

The *halachah* regarding flowers during *shemittah* depends on the characteristics of the flower. Authorities distinguish between types of flowers and their *shemittah* status. Flowers that are grown for eating or smelling, such as sunflowers or carnations, have different halachic guidelines than flowers that are only grown for decorative use.

## *Kedushat Shevi'it*

Fruits and vegetables that have reached a certain stage of growth during *shemittah* have a special holiness (see *Sefer Hashemittah* 7:1), called *kedushat shevi'it*. According to some opinions, there is a positive mitzvah to consume such produce (see *Megilat Esther* on *Ramban Shechichat Asin* 3). The holiness of the produce has numerous halachic implications. For example, produce that has *kedushat shevi'it* may be eaten only in *Eretz Yisrael*, and only by Jews (in most cases). One may not do business with such produce, nor may one actively ruin it.

*Poskim* debate whether flowers grown

during *shemittah* have *kedushat shevi'it*, leading to numerous halachic questions. Would it be permitted to sell flowers from one's garden? Could a *kallah* use flowers for a bouquet? The *Mishnah* (*Shevi'it* 7:6) explicitly lists certain flowers that have *kedushat shevi'it*. The *Chazon Ish* (14:9) explains that the flowers mentioned in the *Mishnah* are edible and meant for human consumption. This implies that non-edible flowers do not have the holiness of *shemittah*. The *Talmud Yerushalmi* (*Shevi'it* 7:1) discusses the question of herbs and scented flowers, but leaves the issue unresolved. Rav Shmuel Vosner (*Responsa Shevet Halevi* 2:202) distinguishes between three categories of flowers. The first group is of flowers that are meant for eating. These have *kedushat shevi'it*. The second classification is of flowers that are normally used for their pleasant scent. These are also *kedushat shevi'it*. Lastly, flowers that have neither fragrance nor flavor do not have *kedushat shevi'it*. Rav Eliezer Waldenberg (*Tzitz Eliezer* 6:33) agrees with Rav Vosner regarding the first and third categories, but maintains that flowers with a nice scent do not have *kedushat shevi'it*.

The consensus among *poskim* is that flowers that are used for their fragrance or are grown for eating have *kedushat shevi'it*, and therefore should not be sold for receptions or *smachot* (see *Mishpetei Eretz* 14:2).



However, flowers that have a pleasant scent but are actually marketed for their nice appearance do not have *kedushat shevi'it* (*Chut Shani* p.246-247; *Halichot Hashevi'it* 17:22). When they are not grown for consumption and have no fragrance, flowers do not have *kedushat shevi'it* (*Sefer Hashemita* 7:4, *Minchat Shlomo* 51:11).

### **Shemita labor for flowers**

*Poskim* discuss how one should tend to flowers in one's garden. In general, during *shemita* the *halacha* holds that any labor to maintain the plant or to prevent damage is permitted. Labor which is meant to improve the plant or its fruit is prohibited. However, watering plants is permissible with certain limitations. Regarding flowers, even though their loss is minimal, one may still water flowers in the garden (*Responsa Hamabit* 2:64), but less frequently if possible. One should consult a competent halachic authority regarding the issue of how often one's flowers may be watered (The topic of watering flowers in one's garden will be discussed in further detail in a future article).

Flowers may be picked from trees. Since the removal of flowers may sometimes benefit the tree or the fruits, when picking the flowers, one should not remove the entire stem, but rather cut the flower from somewhere along its stem (*Halichot*

*Hashemita* 10:8).

One may place flowers in a vase full of water, even if they continue to grow slightly. However, this should be done only indoors, in a walled and roofed structure (*Derech Emuna* 4:17).

### **In summary:**

- The laws of *shemita* also apply to flowers.
- Flowers grown for consumption or for their pleasant scent have *kedushat shevi'it* and should not be used for decoration.
- Flowers that are merely ornamental, even if they have a nice scent, do not have *kedushat shevi'it* and may be used in a regular fashion.
- One may water flowers in one's garden during *shemita*, although minimally.
- Flowers may be picked or cut from trees during *shemita*, although one should cut them slightly higher on the stem.
- One may place cut flowers in a vase of water as long as this is done indoors. ■

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