

Q&A from the Bais HaVaad Halacha Hotline

On the Origin of Species

September 29, 2022

Q I cultivate *aravos* and other shrubs indoors in planters. Are the *aravos* kosher for *arba'ah minim*, and are the branches of those shrubs usable as *schach* in a sukkah?

A The Chayei Adam (152:3) is unsure about using *arba'ah minim* grown in pots. He considers the possibility that such plants, since they don't grow in the natural way, may not be considered *esrogim*, *hadasim*, etc. He infers this from the fact that trees grown in pots are not subject to *orlah* in certain circumstances. But he is uncertain about this inference, because other reasons can be given for the inapplicability of *orlah* that wouldn't impugn the plants' *arba'ah minim* eligibility (see Nishmas Adam).



The Aruch Hashulchan (O.C. 645:21) disagrees and proves that such plants are perfectly valid, but the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (136:2) sides with Chayei Adam and says to refrain from using them.

In practice, if *aravos* from the ground are available, they are preferable.

One of the Mishnah's requirements for *schach* is that it be something that grows from the earth (Sukkah 1:4). Although this may imply that plants grown in pots don't qualify, the Eglei Tal (Dash, 4:8) writes that they do. It is only required that the species normally grows from the ground, not that the actual item in question grew from the ground.

Planters usually have holes for seepage. A vessel with a hole, whether on its bottom or on its side, is considered an extension of the ground beneath it, and anything that grows in it is reckoned to have grown from the ground, because it draws nourishment from it. This doesn't apply if a sheet of metal or plastic is placed beneath the planter, as it interrupts the flow of nourishment. (A stone or concrete patio, though, is not considered an interruption. See a fascinating account in Sheivet Halevi 6:167.)

If the planter is placed on a wood-plank porch a few feet above the ground, it is considered *mechubar lakarka* (connected to the ground), provided that the hole is above a space between the planks. Chazal teach that a plant's nourishment is drawn from the ground even through air.

When branches extend beyond the vessel and hang over the ground, they are considered *mechubar lakarka* regardless of the situation of the planter; the branches themselves draw nourishment from the ground beneath them. But only those branches benefit; the main plant is still dependent on the planter's situation (details gleaned from Derech Emunah Hilchos *Trumos* 1:25).