

Q&A from the Bais HaVaad Halacha Hotline

Going Green

June 11, 2024

Q I purchased flowers and other plants in honor of Shavuos. May I transfer them from one vase to another on Yom Tov?



A Plants that were designated for decorative use before Shabbos or Yom Tov are not *muktzeh* and may be moved as needed (O.C. 108:23).

The Rama (O.C. 336:11) addresses a different concern: “It is permitted to place branches in water on Shabbos, provided they don’t have flowers, which open from the moisture.” Any act that stimulates development of a plant is a *toldah* of the *melacha* of *zorei’a* (planting) and forbidden on Shabbos and Yom Tov.

According to many *Acharonim*, a branch without flowers may only be placed into water on Shabbos if it had been removed from that very water earlier the same day. Others allow placing it in any water, but that opinion should only be relied on *bedieved* (Mishnah Brurah *ibid.* 54). So neither flowers nor other plants may be transferred to another container on Yom Tov unless the new one is dry.

Removing flowers from water is permitted, as it is not comparable to picking them from the ground—which violates the *melacha* of *kotzeir* (harvesting)—because they are not alive and growing in the water, only staying fresh (Shmiras Shabbos Kehilchasah 26:26). If the plant grew roots in the water, it may not be removed on Shabbos or Yom Tov (*ibid.*).

It stands to reason that a branch whose flowers are already fully open may be returned to water, but the Shmiras Shabbos Kehilchasah (*ibid.* footnote 98) is unsure about this. The Chut Shani (10:3) allows it, even if the flowers have only begun to open and water will open them further.

If you need to add to the water in the vase, you may do so on Yom Tov (Shmiras Shabbos Kehilchasah *ibid.*) but not on Shabbos (Mishnah Brurah *ibid.* 54).