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A Tu B'Shvat Toast



Celebrate Tu B'Shvat with a glass of wine outdoors if you can! (Courtesy Vitkin Winery)

Celebrate Tu B'Shvat with Israeli wines


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JOSHUA LONDON (/AUTHORS/JOSHUA-LONDON) | January 21, 2019

There are a variety of popular traditions and customs for celebrating Tu B'Shvat, such as planting trees and partaking of fruits and nuts native to Israel.

Even though the day's importance is firmly rooted in millennia-old rabbinic, rather than explicitly biblical foundations, it has grown into something of a secular holiday. Indeed, in place of its original Mishnaic-period focus on Jewish agricultural rules and tithes related to fruit-bearing trees, Tu B'Shvat has more recently been adopted in modern-day Israel as essentially the Israeli Arbor Day, a day for ecological and sustainability awareness.

While most folks reflexively think in terms of the Jewish National Fund's 'plant a tree in Israel' campaign of yesteryear, consider instead planting a grapevine in an Israeli winery. As I've noted before, the Wine on the Vine (<http://wineonthevine.org>) program allows folks to simultaneously support both the Israeli wine industry and some targeted Israeli charities.

Another popular custom is the Tu B'Shvat seder. Patterned after the Passover seder, though nominally rooted in Chassidic and Kabbalistic thought, a contemporary seder typically involves feasting on fruits, nuts, and wines—at least four cups, just like at the Passover Seder.

Whether one prefers planting vines or trees, hosting a seder, or otherwise promoting ecological and sustainability awareness, I strongly recommend imbibing Israeli wine too, even if only to maintain a little bit of symbolic verisimilitude. Here are eight options to consider:

Golan Heights Winery, Yarden Rosé, Brut, 2011 (\$40): A delightful blend of 70% Chardonnay and 30% Pinot Noir, this lightly pinkish beauty offers aromas of citrus, strawberries, stone fruits, and brioche, all draped in flowers. The bubbles are nicely sharp and concentrated, and the acidity is zippy and zingy.

Vitkin, Grenache Blanc, Israel, 2016 (\$40): Made of 90% Upper Galilee Grenache Blanc and 10% Judean Hills Roussanne, this impressive, elegant, yet deep and floral beauty has notes of citrus, almonds, under-ripe stone fruit, and a little spice. Finish is lingering, with nice tart fruit and a little citrus pith.

Covenant Israel, Blue C, Viognier, Israel, 2017 (\$28): a lovely balanced, medium-bodied, oily, aromatic, and fruity wine with notes of peach, clementine, apricot, vanilla, honeysuckle, and stone fruits; a nice saline undercurrent adds some lovely depth too.

Dalton, Reserve, Sauvignon Blanc, Galilee, Israel, 2017 (\$20): A delicious, dry, balanced, classic example of Sauvignon Blanc with all its grassy, citrusy, tropical fruit loveliness doing its thing, and with a distinct and most inviting salinity that kicks it up a notch.

Galil Mountain, Alon, Upper Galilee, Israel, 2014 (\$20): This is an aromatic and tasty blend of 64% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Syrah, 12% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc, and 4% Petit Verdot, offering ripe sweet red and dark berry and stone fruits, some herbal notes, a touch of eucalyptus, rounded acidity, and a little spice. The tannins are still a bit heavy, but they ease up as it breathes in the glass.

Kishor Vineyard, Kishor, GSM, 2016 (\$28): This is a delicious light-to-medium bodied Israeli blend exhibiting a rich and herbal bouquet of wild dark fruits and a lovely, clean palate of cherry, raspberry, black currant, a little spice, and dollops of dark chocolate; there is also some very subtle but much welcome smoke. Well-balanced with good acidity, nicely integrated tannins, and a pleasing, refreshing, flesh-craving finish. Fabulous now, and should remain so over the next 2-3 years.

Golan Heights Winery, Gilgal, Pinot Noir, 2016 (\$19): Light-bodied, enjoyable, and nicely balanced with good acidity, this offers notes of blackberry, blackcurrant, black cherry, and a savory, meaty quality, all with a lovely herbal finish. Note: be mindful of the vintage, the seemingly still widely available 2014 is not nearly as good.

Covenant Israel, Blue C, Adom, 2016 (\$40): This is a delicious, balanced, aromatic, fruity, easy drinking blend of Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, and also a smidgen of Viognier (not mentioned on the label). The white wine grapes seem to highlight the red fruit here. There are almost sweet tannins, red and blue fruit notes and some lovely baking spice hints in the backdrop.