

Preparing for a Passover Seder



For many of us, the Passover Seder is the most traditional of all of our holiday experiences. Usually at this time of year, we recite the familiar words of the haggadah, feast on traditional foods, and celebrate with our loved ones. This year presents a challenge. We will likely be unable to buy or make our favorite Passover foods. We may not feel like saying words which commemorate our Exodus from slavery at a time when we feel trapped in our own homes. Worst of all, we're experiencing the pain of missing family and friends whom we cannot see in person.

The word seder means "order" in Hebrew, and right now everything may feel very much out of order. There is a lot of uncertainty surrounding many aspects of our lives, and we feel worried about what the future may hold. If you choose to have a Passover seder this year, it will undoubtedly look different than seders you have hosted or attended in the past. That's OK. We encourage you to do what you can, and not feel guilty about what you leave out. Perhaps this year each of us can find new meaning in this ancient ritual, and find comfort in the fact that Jews all over the world will be celebrating Passover too, wherever they are.

Whether you're planning to lead your own seder at home, or want to be prepared to participate in CBI's virtual community seder, we've created this guide to help. You'll find a list of what you'll need for a seder, with some ideas for alternatives, and following the list are some instructions and recipes.

What goes on a seder plate? What if I can't get those things this year?

You'll want to designate a special plate which will contain the following items, to be used during the seder.

Karpas – A **vegetable to represent spring**. Most often people use parsley, but if you can't get any this year, you can use celery, cilantro, scallions or some other green vegetable.

Charoset - This **mix of chopped fruits, wine or honey, nuts and spices** may remind us of the mortar that the Israelite slaves used to construct buildings for Pharaoh. The ingredients also remind us of the fruits mentioned in the Song of Songs, the book of the Bible that describes the rebirth of nature the springtime and which is traditionally read on Pesach.

This is the perfect year to experiment! Create your own combination of your favorite fruits and nuts, or improvise with what you have on hand. You can even use dried fruits instead of fresh. You can chop it all by hand, or let your food processor do the hard work. Some *charoset* recipes can be found below.

Maror - This **bitter herb** reminds us of the bitterness of slavery. Today, most Jews use horseradish. You can use prepared horseradish or you might be able to find a real horseradish root at the grocery store. But you'll only need a little bit!

Originally *maror* was probably a bitter lettuce, such as romaine, or a root, such as chicory. Have you ever gnawed on the very bottom part of a lettuce? Pretty bitter!

Hazeret - Some, but not all, seder plates have a spot for a second **bitter herb**.

Many Jews use horseradish for *maror* and Romaine lettuce or another bitter green for *hazeret*. Others use the same vegetable for both parts of the seder, and do not include *hazeret* on the seder plate at all.

Zeroa – Traditionally a **roasted lamb shank bone**. The *zeroa* is not eaten during the seder, but serves as a visual reminder of the sacrifice that the Israelites offered immediately before leaving Egypt and that Jews continued to offer until the destruction of the Temple.

You could also substitute a chicken bone. A good idea for vegetarians is a roasted beet, both because the red of the beet resembles the blood of the sacrifice and because the Talmud mentions beets as one of the vegetables sometimes dipped during the seder.

Beitzah – A **roasted egg** that symbolizes the special “*hagigah*” sacrifice, which would be offered on every holiday (including Passover) when the Temple stood. The roundness of the egg also represents the cycle of life, reminding us that even in the most difficult times, there is always hope for a new beginning. Instructions for (safely!) roasting an egg are below.

What else should I have for my seder?

Matzah – 3 pieces, wrapped or covered in a cloth

Salt water – a bowl of salt water in which to dip the karpas

Candles – We traditionally begin the seder by lighting holiday candles.

Wine and/or juice – Throughout the course of the seder, we drink four cups.

Elijah’s Cup – Each participant pours in some wine or juice from their own cup.

Miriam’s Cup – Each participant pours in some water from their own glass.

Hand-washing pitcher and bowl – Have this ready if you plan to ritually wash hands during the seder. This year we will definitely pay attention to this!

Haggadot – Have enough printed copies for the people you’re physically with, and/or send them digitally if you’re celebrating remotely. There are many different haggadot available online. If you’re joining the CBI Virtual Seder on the second night, the Haggadah will be provided as a PDF.

Pillow – The seder is based on the ancient **symposium**, a shared meal in the Greco-Roman world where guests would discourse over food on a topic of interest. Our Passover seder focuses on the question of freedom, in the past and also the present. In wealthy homes it was customary to lean to the left while taking food from the table with one’s right hand. We retain this custom at the seder for certain of the required foods, so many families have the tradition of placing pillows on each chair.



How Do You...?

Roast an Egg – Trying to roast a raw egg will make it explode, so always hard boil it first. (If you want to eat hard-boiled eggs – dipped in salt water – as part of your seder, go ahead and boil those at the same time.) Roast an egg by placing it directly on the rack of a preheated 350 degree oven or toaster oven. It’s ready when it has brown markings and a few cracks.

Roast a Shank Bone – Clean as much meat as possible off the bone. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Place the shank bone in a roasting pan, and roast for 40-60 minutes. Remove the shank bone from the oven and let it cool. Wrap it up completely and store it in the refrigerator until you’re ready to place it on your seder plate.

Make your own Matzah - If you want to try to make matzah, here’s a video tutorial (from reformjudaism.org), but keep in mind that matzah is not strictly kosher for Passover unless kosher-for-Passover flour is used:

<https://bit.ly/3bCHzL4>



Charoset Recipes - *some ideas to inspire you*

Ashekenazi Charoset

1 tablespoon sugar or honey, or to taste
2-3 tablespoons sweet red wine
2 medium-sized tart apples
1/2 cup walnuts or almonds, chopped
1/2-1 teaspoon cinnamon

Yemenite Charoset

15 pitted dates, chopped
15 dried figs, chopped
2 tablespoons sesame seeds (optional)
1 teaspoon ground ginger
dash of coriander
red wine to taste
1 small chili pepper or pinch of cayenne pepper (optional)

Turkish Charoset

1/2 cup finely chopped pitted dates
1/2 cup finely chopped figs
1/2 cup finely chopped dried apricots
1/2 cup finely chopped walnuts or almonds
1 apple, peeled, cored, and grated

Greek Charoset

1/2 cup black currants, finely chopped
1/2 cup raisins, finely chopped
1/2 cup almonds or pine nuts, finely chopped
1/2 cup dates, finely chopped
2 tablespoons honey (optional)
sweet red wine to taste

Need a seder consult? Send an e-mail to Rabbi Tom or Rabbi Rachel and they'll help you figure out how to do this!