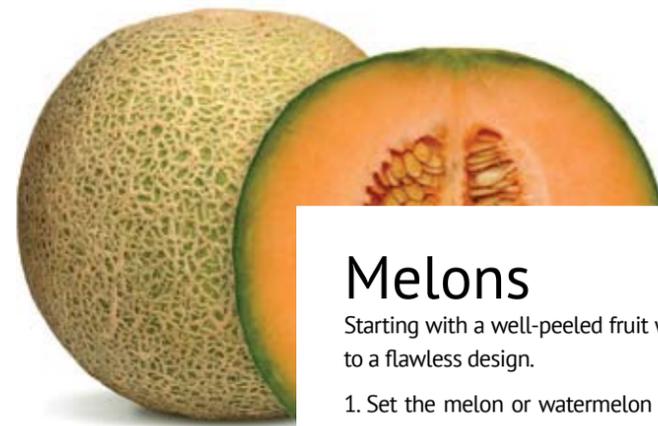


# frUITopia



Not your standard fare of dried fruits and nuts, these stunning arrangements of assorted produce are a fun alternative to carob and dried apricot. They are easy to create in your own kitchen in honor of Tu B'Shvat



## Melons

Starting with a well-peeled fruit will contribute to a flawless design.

1. Set the melon or watermelon on its side on top of the cutting board and slice away each end.
2. Stand the melon upright on one of the flat ends. This creates a steady base. Place one hand on the top of the melon for stability and use the other to slice away the rind in 1-inch (2½-cm) vertical strips, holding the knife at a 60 degree angle from the fruit. You are making a long cut down. Repeat this movement around the cantaloupe until all the rind is removed.



3. Slice in half. For honeydew or cantaloupe, scoop out the seeds. For simple chunks, lay fruit on board. Slice 1-inch (2½-cm) slices, then cut 1-inch (2½-cm) cubes across. For watermelon, slice sections thinner before creating cubes.



## V-Cut

Using a 3.5–5-inch (9–12.5-cm) blade paring knife, you can prepare a V-cut cactus fruit, kiwi, or blood orange to decorate your platters. Here's what you need to do:

1. Hold fruit vertically in front of you, positioning your paring knife to the left at a 60 degree angle. Make a deep cut into the direct center of the fruit. Remove the knife and turn it equidistant from

the left toward the right, making a V shape. Continue this movement all around the fruit, until you reach the point where you started from.

2. Carefully separate the top and bottom of the fruit, creating a flower. Using a melon baller, scoop out a bit of the center of the fruit and fill with pomegranate arils, blueberries, or chopped strawberries.

## tip!

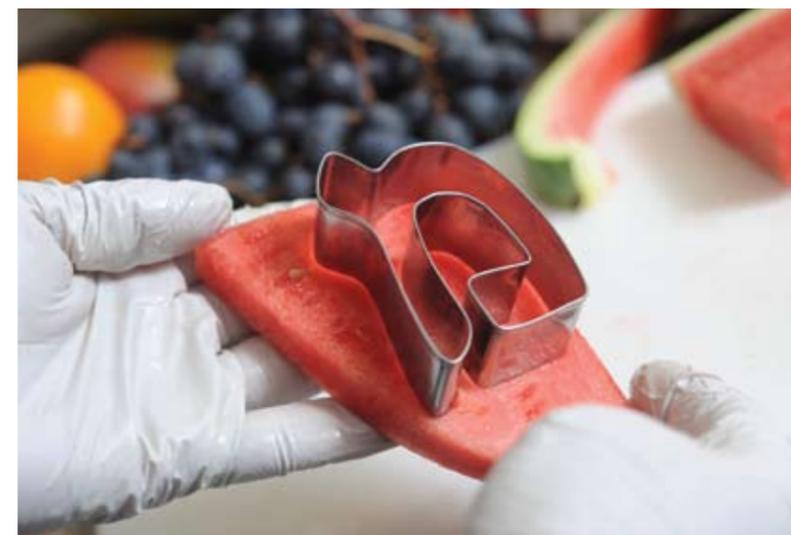
Nothing is less appetizing than the head of a pineapple. If you knew the trip that pineapple took to your table, you would only eat the parts that were safely under the skin. There's no telling what's under those leaves.



## Cutters

Cookie cutters are an easy way to accent any platter. Use a watermelon that is very firm or a slightly underripe melon to ensure that the letters or designs don't break.

Use a melon slice that is ½–¾ of an inch thick. Thinner than this and the letters will break. Thicker letters may end up looking odd, but always err on the side of too thick. You can always shave the fruit down afterward with a paring knife.



## Pineapples

When peeled, lay pineapple flat-side up on cutting board. Cut in half downwards. Using a long chef's knife, cut through the core by carving out a V shape from the center. While full of fiber, this core is often hard to digest.



Placing a towel underneath your cutting board will not only catch all the juices, but will also keep the board more sturdy.



## Mangoes

Don't peel the mango when preparing for a fruit platter. It'll make the fruit less slippery to work with and the red skin adds a contrast in color.

1. Hold the mango, making a cut in the stem at the top. You will hit the pit, which is approximately 1 inch (2½ cm) thick.
2. Estimating about ¼ inch (2/3 cm) to the right, cut through again. This should enable you to cut a good section of the mango, bypassing the pit. If you hit the pit, move the knife slightly to the right until you're able to slice all the way through.
3. Your pitted fruit can now be turned into a rose or hedgehog.



## tip!

When preparing a bowl of chunked fruit, never mix in watermelon. The juice causes the other fruits to spoil more quickly. If you are gifted with a platter that includes watermelon, eat it first.

## Mango or Kiwi Hedgehogs

You will need:

- sharp paring knife (3.5–4 inch blade is what we use)
- mango, pitted and halved as above, or 2 kiwis, sliced down the middle

1. With the fruit's flat side facing you, make a slice into the fruit, being careful not to cut into the peel. Begin about ⅛ of an inch from the furthest edge of the fruit toward the center, slicing halfway deep into the fruit, straight down till almost the bottom of the fruit.
2. Repeat this movement ½ inch (1¼ cm) away from the first slice (depending on the size of the fruit), 6–8 times.
3. Turn fruit horizontally and make crisscross cuts the same way, until it resembles a checkerboard.
4. With your thumbs at the end and your index fingers in the middle of the skin, gently push your fruit inside out until the crisscross becomes squares, still attached to the skin.



## Melon or Mango Rose

This is a beautiful addition to your fruit platter. Set up the other fruit first, leaving space in the middle of the platter to place the rose. If you have trouble making the delicate center of the rose, leave it empty and fill the petals with blueberries.

You will need:

- sharp chef's knife
- cutting board
- cantaloupe or honeydew, peeled (see above), or mango, pitted
- platter



1. Place your fruit flat-side down on the cutting board.
2. Make slices 1/8–1/6 of an inch thick. Begin by placing the smallest pieces of fruit down on the platter, on an angle, overlapping each additional piece in a circular pattern till you have a layered circle of fruit.
3. Build the rose vertically, adding another layer of fruit, positioning the slices halfway

- along the ones beneath them, like bricks of a building. Depending on the size you want, add one or two more layers.
4. Now create the center of the rose: Taking the longest pieces of fruit, fold four pieces into a teardrop shape and place the point of each teardrop facing the center of the rose, until you have a clover-shaped middle. Roll one long piece in a circle and stick in the center of the clover.
5. Fill out the gaps on the edge of the clover by adding other teardrop-rolled slices.
6. Fill out the other petals of the rose by adding extra pieces of melon on the outer circumference of the rose.

For an extra challenge, try this using a kiwi.



You don't want to crowd too much fruit into a platter because the delicate fruit underneath each layer can get mushy.



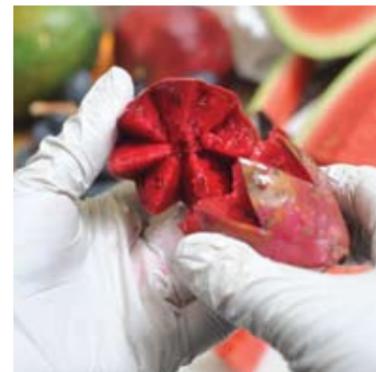
## Ombre Platter

*Ombre (pronounced ohm-bray) style refers to a design having colors or tones that shade into each other. Now you can serve your fruit the ombre way!*

You will need:

- solid-colored platter (I love the contrast these colorful fruits make on white)
- 3 Moro blood oranges
- 1 large ruby red grapefruit
- 2 Cara Cara blush oranges
- 2 navel oranges
- ½ a cactus pear with V-cut edges
- 2 Tbsp pomegranate arils

1. Peel citrus fruits as directed with melons above, taking extra care to remove all the white pith. Cut off bottom of cactus stem to allow it to sit securely, stem-side down, on a plate in the center of the platter. Using a small scooper, hollow out a bit of the cactus fruit and fill with pomegranate arils.
2. After peeling citrus, turn fruit on its side and slice into ¼-½-inch rounds. Surround the cactus pear with blood orange slices, and then add a second layer.
3. Add a layer of grapefruit slices, two layers of Cara Cara oranges, and one layer of navel oranges in concentric circles.



### tip!

When choosing melon keep in mind that quality improves with size, but have your grocer find a melon that is ripe enough to use the same day, or hard enough to let it ripen until you need it.

### tip!

Platter designs can be created by color — or lack of it, as in monochrome. Some monochrome options include: deep red family hues, such as red grapes, blueberries, cactus pears, pomegranates, unpeeled lychee nuts, and strawberries; and lighter pastels, such as cantaloupe, golden honeydew, pineapple, kumquats, citrus, and Cape gooseberries.

## the cherry tree

“WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR FRUIT FROM?” is one of the questions I get asked again and again, in our home-based business selling fruit platters. Every so often, I jokingly answer, “We grow it in our backyard.”

One year, the joke was on me.

We moved into our house almost 15 years ago. When our daughter was born, we considered building out into our backyard to give us an extra room. When the contractor inspected the property, though, he came upon something that the original engineer had missed when he'd inspected the house.

A huge tree grew in the back, near our kitchen window. (No, that wasn't the surprise.) The news was that this worker suspected it was a cherry tree. Even though fruit trees bring *brachah*, removing them when needed is a challenge. We were unsure of this tree's true identity, though. We had lived in the house through all four seasons and come spring, the tree carpeted the ground with beautiful pink blossoms. But there was never a cherry. Was it a cherry blossom tree or a cherry tree? The contractor insisted it was a cherry tree.

The challenge of not being able to expand due to this humongous tree

was one thing. Okay, gone was our dream of another bedroom. But there was another problem. The contractor informed us that as our tree grew, its roots would grow into the foundation of our home, potentially causing water damage, ripped cement, and other not very exciting scenarios.

So began a new saga in the Frishman household. We asked anyone we met who had even a slightly green thumb what they knew about cherry trees. We called numerous tree experts. No one could verify if it was a cherry tree. Even if it had stopped growing cherries, it still would have retained the status of a fruit tree. And the prohibition of destroying a fruit tree is clear.

Our investigation veered from horticulture experts to rabbinical experts. Can we destroy the tree? After all, it might potentially destroy our home's foundations. Most of the responses were that we should avoid harming the tree. Some *rabbanim* cited the *heter* of transplanting it somewhere else. No gardener could promise that a tree that size would survive transplantation.

The more research we did the more people told us to tread carefully. We were regaled with stories, all scary, of tragic things that happened to those who messed with their fruit trees.

I can't pinpoint when it was, but one fine fall day I gave up. I made a conscious decision that we would take no part in tree-icide.

Spring found me sweeping cherry blossoms from my porch. I looked up and noticed something hanging from my Mystery Tree.

Near all the beautiful white blossoms hung a sweet, black, red-tinged cherry.

*The sun must be causing heatstroke, I thought. I squinted further and noticed at least ten such cherries hanging from my tree. The same tree that had grown nothing in the previous two years.*

Thinking that maybe I had missed the fruit-giving seasons before, my next-door neighbor, kind Mr. Jeremiah Brown, dispelled my theory.

We really have very little to do with the Browns. Their grandchildren come once in a while so we hear some movement in their backyard. Other than getting their mail by accident and an occasional friendly hello, no more than a handful of words had been exchanged with him since we moved in.

“Missus,” (to this very day I don't think he knows my last name), “in my 20 years of living here I have *never* seen one cherry grow from that tree!”

That one year, the tree gave us cherries.

A gift for our gift of life? Who knows? Was this a message that we did the right thing and didn't have to worry about damage? Who knows?

An expert arborist who got back to us shortly after this incident asked me to describe my tree (it became “my tree” instead of “the tree” after the cherry-giving incident).

“Lady, it sounds like your tree has reached full capacity. I wouldn't worry about the roots growing any deeper into your home. Keep an eye on it, but just enjoy nature's gift in the meantime.”

We did what the man told us. I didn't use those cherries for our business's fruit platters. Our family ate those cherries, savoring the divine taste of validation bite after bite. ■

*Eliahu and Chaia Frishman own Fruit Platters and More, based in Far Rockaway, New York. Many thanks to Ketzy's for the loan of the platters.*

