

Hosting a Green Shabbat Dinner



Rest means cessation from work, leaving the world as it is without human intervention, since work means transforming what is given, what exists. On Shabbat, like God resting, we are invited to stop changing the world around us. Shabbat rest is not just required because God wants it. It is not merely beneficial to humans. The world needs its rest (Leviticus 26:34-35).

Whether Shabbat is celebrated as a secular, spiritual, or religious practice, hosting a Green Shabbat dinner or marking the time can create an investment in friends and community, an interruption of the fantasy of infinite growth, a divestment from fossil fuels, a moment of rewilding. Observing a weekly Shabbat, a weekly Earth Day, as it were, offers an effective action that one can take now to help heal our environment.

Use these thought-starters as a jumping-off point to create your own unique Friday night rituals for welcoming rest at a Green Shabbat.

Light

The practice of candle lighting ushers in Shabbat, creating a separation between the work week and this period of rest. One lights the Shabbat candles at sundown, creating an opportunity to exit the scheduling demands of our human-made work-week, and to enter a period of time that is governed by the planet's rotation.

Wine

The ritual of blessing the wine is known as Kiddush, which means sanctification. Wine is used to symbolize and induce transformation. Just as wine alters our consciousness, Shabbat is intended to enable us to attain a fresh perspective and state of mind, at one with the cosmos and the divinity that makes it possible and constitutes its very essence.

Bread

The traditional Shabbat challah symbolizes the transformation of sunlight and water into plant growth, of grains into flour, of flour into bread, and of food into our own bodily existence. How many miracles and how much hard work went into making all of this possible?

Gratitude

How wonderful that we are able to eat, commune with friends, sing together, and temporarily transcend the toil that the world demands from us.



There are many ways to enjoy Friday night dinners and Shabbat rituals. That's why we asked five OneTable hosts to share their unique practices, and inspiration. Check out the video series and related resources to see how other hosts light candles, sanctify wine, and bless bread.

Activity Ideas

One of Shabbat's main motivations traditionally has been to commemorate and celebrate the creation of the world. Beyond self-maintenance and self-care, make your shabbats green—a ritualized, recurring time for individual and communal reflection on how we are undoing creation and a time for reviving our passion, energy and commitment for the work of environmental change needed during the rest of the week.

Consider these activity ideas for your next Green Shabbat.

- Hold prayer services or a meditation circle outdoors, in a local garden or park. Set your intention for or about the planet and collective rest.
- Take a group walk outdoors, somewhere close enough that you need not get into a car, or play games that teach suitable lessons (e.g. Outdoor Scavenger Hunt, Bug Bingo).
- Connect with a tree or plant, indoors or out. See [Inside Out](#) for spiritual exercises you can use in outdoors experiences. (Offered by the Center for Spirituality in Nature.)
- Make your personal and communal meals as sustainable as possible. See Hazon's [Green Kiddush Guide](#) for ideas to reduce consumption of meat, order sustainable produce, and have a meal of foraged foods.
- Find inspiration in [Earth Prayers: 365 Prayers, Poems, and Invocations from Around the World](#) and [Liturgies from Below: Praying with People at the Ends of the World](#).
- Invite elders from within or beyond your community to share stories about the local landscape, ecosystems, and history.

Reflection

The traditional Jewish framework of the kinds of activity forbidden on Shabbat make an excellent guideline for us today for environmental reasons, whether or not one believes in God or cares for organized religion. Reflect on how you might limit these actions for the sake of the environment.

The Mishnah, Judaism's earliest extant legal code, edited by Rabbi Judah Hanasi (circa 200 CE), forbade: sowing, ploughing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, sorting grain, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, shearing wool, cleaning it, beating it, dyeing it, spinning, weaving, making two loops, weaving two threads, separating two threads, tying, untying, sewing two stitches, tearing in order to sew two stitches; hunting a deer, slaughtering it, skinning it, salting it, curing its hide, scraping it, cutting it up, writing down two letters, erasing in order to write two letters; building, taking down; extinguishing a fire, kindling a fire, striking with a hammer, carrying [something] from one domain to another.



Meditations + Readings

Use these readings alongside the Shabbat rituals or as inspiration to start a conversation.

“As we below are sanctifying the day [Shabbat], the Tree of Life [Tif’eret] rouses. Its leaves rustle as a breeze comes forth from the World-to-Come [Binah]. The branches of the Tree sway and waft forth the scent of the World-to-Come. The Tree of Life is further aroused and at the moment, brings forth holy souls which it gives to the world. Souls exit and they enter, each rousing the other. They exit and they enter, and the Tree of Life is filled with joy. All of us below are wreathed with crowns, which are these holy souls. Now the cosmos is joyous, and at rest.”

- Adapted from the Zohar (3:173a)

“Happy is the one who regales her spirit on Shabbat! During the six days of the week this soul delights in the supernal abundance [the shef’a] of the Ancient of Ancients. On the Sabbath, after [the soul] descends and bathes in the Garden of Eden at dusk, it takes delight in the bodily enjoyments afforded by the [festive Sabbath] meals.” - Adapted from the Zohar 2:204b

“It is good to grace [the Shabbat table] with plenty and show great joy at the festive meal on Sabbath night, so as to point to the Beloved [Shekhinah, in some sense the world itself], the Glory of the Night who is filled with all good and who is encompassed by supernal Eden. To [partake of] this mystery, it is recommended to sample all the foods prepared for Shabbat, [further] alluding to the Beloved who is encompassed by All.” - Adapted from Meir ibn Gabbai [Spanish, Turkish], “Sod ha-Shabbat,” in Tola’at Ya’akov [1507], Sec. 11)



Inspired by ancient Jewish wisdom, OneTable is a national non-profit that empowers folks (21-39ish) to find, share, and enjoy Shabbat dinners, making the most of their Friday nights. Host a Shabbat dinner with OneTable any Friday night and you'll get ideas + support to make it magical!

The Green Sabbath Project works to spark a movement of observance of a weekly day of rest -- Shabbat or a weekly Earth Day -- on which impact on the environment is minimized as much as possible. Learn more and check out additional resources from the Green Sabbath Project.

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