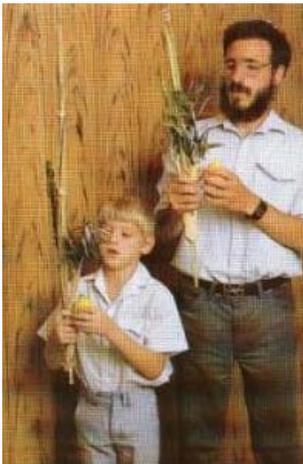


# What to Look For in Choosing the Arba Minim

Jewish law provides exacting minimum requirements for each of the four species which make up the Arba Minim. Jewish tradition also encourages us to acquire an Esrog with additional attributes which qualify it to be called “*Pri Etz Hadar*”- a beautiful fruit. The laws and traditions regarding the selection of the Arba Minim are complex, and the traditions vary in the Ashkenazic, Sephardic and Chassidic communities. The answers below generally follow the Ashkenazic (Eastern European) traditions. For further guidance, please consult your rabbi.

## General Advice for Buying a Lulav and Esrog:

Those who buy their Arba Minim from recognized, reputable sources, such as **The Esrog Headquarters**, need not worry about most of the possible disqualifications or problems listed below. The policy of The Esrog Headquarters is to immediately remove any Esrog with disqualifying defects during the grading process. The higher priced Esrogim are selected for their adherence to the highest “ideal” standards, while even low-priced standard grade Esrogim are guaranteed to meet all minimum standards for use. Esrogim identified as having any potentially significant defects are segregated from the rest, and are sold only as part of the lowest-priced *Chinuch* sets, which are intended for practice or educational use only. All of the Lulavim, Hadassim and Aravos sold by **The Esrog Headquarters** are also under



rabbinical supervision guaranteeing that they meet or exceed the minimum requirements of Jewish law.

Therefore, when buying from **The Esrog Headquarters**, the only inspection generally required is to check for possible damage during shipping. Thankfully, due



to the use of modern packaging materials and expedited shipping services, damage to Arba Minim during transport is much less likely than it was in previous years. However, if you do notice significant damage caused during shipment of Arba Minim bought from **The Esrog Headquarters**, please contact its Customer Service department immediately.

## Beware of Arba Minim Street Bargains:

By contrast, one should be particularly cautious when buying Arba Minim from cut-rate street vendors who pop up in some large Jewish communities during the days immediately before Sukkos. They are often selling Esrogim which have already been “picked over” or rejected by discriminating buyers at a more established Esrog outlet or local store, due to less-than-obvious defects. As a result, many of these street Esrogim, upon careful inspection, turn out to be of inferior value, and some may not even be kosher for use. They are therefore often not the “bargain” they may seem to be. *Caveat emptor!*

## How Much Extra Should One Be Willing to Spend for a More Beautiful Lulav and Esrog?

The mitzvah of Lulav and Esrog is unique inasmuch as it is the only one in which the Torah specifically calls for the use of a “beautiful” fruit.



The quality of the Esrog determines how much of a premium a set of Arba Minim will sell for, since each Esrog is usually accompanied by a standard grade of Lulav, Hadassim and Aravos. The talmudic sages teach (*Baba Kamma 9*) that a person should be willing to spend at least one-third more than the standard market price in order to acquire the most beautiful available Esrog. There

are also many stories from Jewish tradition describing how pious Jews have gone to great lengths and paid much higher premiums to acquire the best Esrog available.

### What Are the Minimum Qualifications for an Esrog to Be Kosher?

1. It must bear a rabbinical certification, attesting that the Esrog is a pure citron, and is not the result of a grafting onto another species of tree, or the offspring of a hybrid of more than one species.
2. It must be complete - meaning that no piece of the fruit may be missing. That includes an unbroken skin, the presence of an intact *Pitom* at the top and a stem (*Ukatz*) on the bottom. The only exception is the kind of Esrog which naturally falls off as it grows to maturity. Such Esrogim are kosher to use without a *Pitom*.
3. While the Esrog is naturally all green while growing on the tree, when it is used, at least some part of the Esrog must be yellow, and any discolored areas should be relatively small.
4. The Esrog must exceed the minimum size, which is defined as the volume of two medium chicken eggs, or a weight of at least 3.5 ounces.
5. The Esrog must be elongated, and not totally round.
6. There should be no permanent black spots or

holes on the Esrog's surface, particularly on the sloping portion towards the top (*Chotam*).

7. The Esrog's skin should not be entirely smooth.
8. There are a number of reliably kosher Esrog orchards in Israel under rabbinic supervision, to make sure that their Esrogim are not the result of



grafts, (*Murkov*) and that other relevant considerations of Jewish law, such as *Orlah*, have been taken care of.

9. Some Chassidic groups have the tradition of using

Esrogim grown from in the Calabria section of southern Italy, called *Yanover* Esrogim. Many of these Esrogim are grown to be kosher without a *Pitom*. As a result, they are less likely to be disqualified due to damage during shipment and use.

10. An Esrog that develops a surface discoloration due to rot or spoilage, called a *Chazazis*, is disqualified for use. However, such cases are rare today.

11. The more common types of discoloration of an Esrog develop naturally during the growing process and usually do not disqualify it for use. These include a brown mark that appears on the surface after the fruit is bruised, caused by the acidic action of its juice. Beige scar tissue naturally appears on the surface of the Esrog after it is damaged by being brushed by a leaf. These beige areas on surface of the Esrog are known as *bletlach* (a single mark of this nature is called a *blet*). Another common minor defect is the natural scar tissue that forms to cover the small hole in the skin of the Esrog caused by a thorn puncture. Such defects typically do not disqualify the Esrog for use, but they do detract from the beauty of an Esrog, diminishing its value.

12. Defects in an Esrog are of no concern unless they are readily visible to the unaided eye when it is held at arm's length.



13. A black spot on the surface of an Esrog can be a source of more serious concern, particularly if it appears on the upper sloping portion (the *Chotam*). If such a black spot is loosely attached to the surface, and can be scraped off (very gently!) from the Esrog without damaging the underlying skin, it is not a problem. But if it cannot be easily removed, the Esrog should be taken to an expert for careful inspection to determine if it is still usable.

14. Any discolorations that cover much of the surface are more likely to disqualify the Esrog. Once again, such defects are considered to be more serious if they appear on the upper slope (the *Chotam*).



15. The laws used to evaluate Esrog defects are very complex, so if you find what you suspect is a potentially disqualifying defect in an Esrog, search out a rabbi with experience in judging Esrogim and ask his opinion. As a general rule, if you are shopping to buy any Esrog, do not consider any Esrog about which you have a serious question. If you have already bought your Esrog from a reliable source, and an expert tells you that it is not kosher, immediately contact the vendor you bought the Esrog from.

16. The laws regarding the usability of an Esrog with a defect are far more lenient after the first day of Sukkos. Even a defect as serious as the loss of a Pitom does not disqualify an Esrog for use after the first day of Sukkos.

### What Are the Attributes of the Ideal Esrog?

1. An ideal Esrog should be shaped like a tower, with a wide base, vertical lower sides and a gently sloping top, and it should be symmetrical on all sides.

2. An ideal Esrog should have a bumpy surface.

3. The ideal Esrog may still be partially green, but it's surface should be free of all other discolorations, scars and holes, especially on the upper slope, known as the *Chotam*.



4. The ideal Esrog should be straight, meaning that the *Ukatz* at the bottom points straight up through the axis of the fruit, and in line with the *Pitom* at the top.

5. The ideal Esrog will have a flower-like protrusion at the top of the *Pitom*, called the *Shoshanta*, and its stem (*Ukatz*) sunk into the bottom

6. Optionally, the ideal Esrog may have an indentation running around its circumference, about half way up, known as a *gartel* (belt).

7. The ideal Esrog will be aesthetically pleasing to the eye - a subjective evaluation.



### What Are the Minimum Qualifications for a Lulav to be Kosher?

1. The length of the Lulav is determined by the *Shidra* (backbone), the central portion from which the leaves branch off. It is measured from the start of the bottom-most leaf on the Lulav to the point where the topmost leaves branch off. The minimum acceptable *Shidra* length is 13 inches.

2. The Lulav must not show signs of turning white due to dryness.

3. The Lulav must not be bent to either side, or forward.

4. Most of the leaves of the Lulav must not be cut off at the top.

5. Each leaf of the lulav is actually a double-leaf, with the two leaves joined at the back. The center leaf, called the *teyomes*, leading into the top of the backbone, must not be split along its entire length, and if partially split, the two leaves of the *teyomes* must not look separated at the top tip.

6. When the Lulav is held upright, its leaves should point upward and cluster together, without sagging down

7. The *Shulchan Aruch*, which is the prime authority for most of the Sephardic community, declares a Lulav to be unfit only if most of its leaves are affected by a given problem. However, the *Rema*, the prime authority for the Ashkenazic community, is much stricter, and will disqualify a Lulav with a critical defect only to the central *teyomes* leaf.





## What Are the Attributes of the Ideal Hadassim?

1. All of the leaves on the branch are *Meshulash* (grown in circles of three)
2. All of the leaves should be green and about the size of a thumbnail
3. The top of the leaves from each lower ring of three should overlap the bottom of the next ring of three
4. The stem is red in color
5. There should be no berries or offshoot branches



8. Most of the defects which disqualify a Lulav only apply to the first day of Sukkos. The disqualified Lulav can usually be used for the rest of Sukkos.

## What Are the Attributes of the Ideal Lulav?

1. The ideal Lulav should be green and fresh
2. The ideal Lulav should be perfectly straight
3. The leaves of the ideal Lulav should be tightly bunched and separate only when shaken
4. The central *teyomes* double-leaf should be perfectly straight and completely unsplit



## What Are the Minimum Qualifications for Hadassim to be Kosher?

1. The majority of the length of each myrtle branch must have a circle of three leaves coming out at the same level of the branch (*Meshulash*)
2. The branches must be a minimum of 10 inches long
3. The stem of the branches must be red or green
4. The leaves must be greenish in color and not dried out
5. A majority of the leaves must still be attached to the stem
6. There should not be a lot of berries attached to the branch

## What Are the Minimum Qualifications for Aravos to Be Kosher?

1. The majority of the leaves must still be attached to the stem
2. The branches must be a minimum of 10 inches long
3. The leaves must be oblong and the edges must be either smooth or only slightly serrated
4. The leaves must be greenish in color and not dried out
5. Make sure that the Aravos are legally owned by the seller, and that they have not been picked without the permission of the property owner from areas where willows grow wild.



## What Are the Attributes of the Ideal Aravos?



1. All of the leaves are still attached to the stem.
2. Each leaf is complete, green, and not dried out.
2. The stem is red in color.
3. The leaves are long and narrow with edges that are entirely smooth.
4. The Aravos were grown at the edge of a body of water.

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