

# 10 Tips for a Healthy & Sustainable Rosh Hashanah

This article was adapted to the Southern African context using resources written by [Hazon](#)



The holiday of Rosh Hashanah is the perfect time to open up to new possibilities and be grateful for everything you have. It's a time to let the blasts of the shofar shake you awake to the world around you. And more than anything, Rosh Hashanah offers the opportunity for *tshuva* (returning/repentance) – to return to our best, most full versions of ourselves. As we turn inward, we have the chance to ask, “*what impact do our actions have on our friends and family, our communities, and on the earth?*”

In celebration of this time of turning and returning, we have compiled a list of healthy, sustainable resources that will help you welcome Rosh Hashanah with mindfulness, sustainability, and joy.

1. **Blend the traditional with the local.** People crave familiar foods at holiday times. But it's all too easy to fall into a culinary rut — and besides, those old standbys don't always lend themselves to good health or sustainability. This year, add a dash of innovation to traditional Jewish holiday dishes by incorporating local flavors into your favorite family recipes.
2. **Efficient cooking** - Have you ever used a solar oven? Cooking with the sun might not be an option in the Western Cape, but further north, the winter sun is powerful enough to cook any festive meal. A solar oven uses no power, no waste CO2 and leaves you more time to tend to other preparations. Don't own a solar oven? Turn this into a fun project and build your own! There are many [websites](#) and [YouTube](#) videos with instructions on how to make your own cheap & efficient solar oven. Another great way of conserving energy is using a hotbox or wonderbag. Bring your food to the boil and then put it in your hotbox or wrap it up in blankets. The food is slow-cooked in 2-3 hours and tastier than ever!



A wonderbag is energy-efficient and you don't need to mind the stove!

3. **Rethink chicken soup.** Chicken soup is an iconic Jewish comfort food, but you may want to skip it if you're trying to cut back on your meat consumption. Treat your guests instead to a seasonal, vegetable-based soup. If you really need that tureen of soup on your table, look for kosher organic chicken — and consider making the soup the only meat in your meal.
4. **Food for thought.** There's an old Jewish saying that if three people have eaten together at one table and not discussed words of the Torah, the meal was essentially wasted. This year, ask your guests to

bring a favorite song, poem, scene from a play, or other text based around a particular Rosh Hashanah theme. Need examples? Try “returning,” “scarcity and abundance,” or “mindful eating.” At dinner, ask your guests to share what they brought, then let the conversation flow.

5. **Seasonal indigenous centerpieces.** Instead of fresh-cut flowers that will wilt after a few days, create a sustainable of indigenous flowers & foliage that will impress your guests. Alternatively use fruit to decorate your table. At the end of your dinner, invite your guests to take home the fruit or potted plants as gifts. (or save them for Sukkoth)
6. **Lighting.** Set a great mood by switching of your electrical lights and lighting candles. Avoid the petroleum fumes and use beeswax & soy candles. Alternatively, try this [creative way of making your own candles with citrus fruit and cooking oil](#)



Homemade citrus candle

7. **Sustainable Gifts For Your Loved Ones.** Many families exchange small gifts during big holidays such as Rosh Hashanah and Passover, and what better way to spread the sustainability bug than giving away a local, sustainably designed gift? Eco-friendly gifts can also easily be ordered online (See [Faithful to Nature](#) for some ideas). Whether its a beautiful [wonderbag](#), indigenous plant, organic tea or a handmade soap, your sustainable gifts will surely be the talk of the table.
8. **Get There Sustainably.** In addition to eating sustainably and gifting sustainably, try to make your journey to your holiday feast as green as possible.
9. **Get outside!** Rosh Hashanah celebrations have the tendency to fall into the rhythm of pray, eat, sleep, pray, eat, sleep...eat. This year, change up that rhythm by finding some time to get outside into the crisp spring sunlight. Go for an early morning walk before synagogue, meditate outside in the afternoon, take a walk on the beach (if you're lucky enough to live by one!), or bring your kids to the park after lunch to sing holiday songs. Whatever way you get there, don't wait until Tashlich to get outside.
10. **Cast away cleanup.** *Tashlich* is one of the most beautiful moments of Rosh Hashanah where we head towards a flowing body of water and toss in bread to symbolically cast away our sins. As part of your Rosh Hashanah preparation, take a day in the week leading up to the holiday (and bring your friends and kids) to “clean up” the river or watershed where you will perform the tashlich ritual. Collect any garbage or bottles lying about and walk around to get a lay of the land. When you come back the next week, note if you feel a different connection to the space.

**And a final thought: Commit To “Green” Your Synagogue** - New year, new beginnings. If not yours, whose? If not now, when? Contact SAFCEI if you would like more information on eco-congregations and watch out for new exciting greening ideas in our monthly newsletters!

**L'Shanah Tovah Tikatevu**