

## Interfaith Connections During Sukkot



Making decorations for our *sukkah*

Once again, we're in the midst of the Jewish High Holy Days. Rosh Hashanah happened last week, Yom Kippur starts tomorrow at sundown, and Sukkot begins next weekend. Kid-friendly lessons, crafts, and activities are abundant for all three holidays, but Sukkot provides unique opportunities for making connections with other faith traditions. And since Sukkot lasts 8 days, there's plenty of time for multifaith exploration!

Sukkot, sometimes called the Festival of Booths, is often associated with the *sukkah*, a makeshift temporary shelter built for the holiday period.

Observant Jews eat, sleep, and pray in the *sukkah* to commemorate the 40 years the Israelites spend wandering in the desert after their escape from Egyptian slavery and before reaching the Promised Land.

But Sukkot is also a harvest festival, which is why it is also sometimes called the Festival of Ingathering. The fall marks the end of the harvest year in Israel, and that aspect of Sukkot continues to be honored throughout the world with the ritual shaking of the lulav and etrog. An etrog is a citrus fruit, native to Israel, that is somewhat like a lemon. The lulav is actually made up of a palm branch, two willow branches, and three myrtle branches braided together. After reciting the special blessing, the lulav and etrog are waved in all directions.

Web sites offering great kid-friendly suggestions for this joyful holiday abound on the web. Here are a few of them.

[Jewish Holidays – Sukkot](#)

[Learn about Sukkot and Enjoy the Beauty of Nature](#)

[100 Sukkot Videos](#)

Here at Faith Seeker Kids, we're in the business of interfaith education. Since many traditions have some version of a fall harvest festival, Sukkot can easily serve as a starting point for cross-faith education. A few of those holidays, celebrated around the world, are outlined below with links to various resources for kids.

### **Onam – Hindu**

From the Hindu/Indian tradition, we have Onam, a rice harvest festival celebrated at the end of August/beginning of September by the people of Kerala, a region in southwest India. This festival lasts for ten days and includes singing, dancing, and feasting. They also hold various games, races, competitions, and contests.

[Onam for Kids](#)

[Onam Celebration Ideas/Activities for Kids](#)

### **Lamas/Lughnasad – Neo-Pagan**

From the Neo-Pagan tradition, we have Lammas and Lughnasad. Both are celebrated on August 1, which marks the half-way point between the summer solstice and the fall equinox (in the northern hemisphere), and both come to us from the British Isles. However, their historical foundations and traditions are different.

#### *Lammas*

Lammas, with roots in the southern part of the British Isles, is a first-fruits holiday largely focused on wheat and bread. It marks the time of year when grains are just beginning to ripen, which provides an opportunity to offer gratitude and praise. However, with plenty of still time left for crops to be ruined by storms or drought, it also serves as an occasion to pray for the continued success of the growing season.

Eating a harvest meal consisting of fruits and vegetables that are currently ripening in your area of the world, baking bread, making wheat/corn dollies, or crafting with grains and berries are all great, kid-friendly Lammas activities.

#### *Lughnasad*

Lughnasad has its roots in the northern part of the British Isles (Ireland and Scotland). This holiday centers on the god, Lugh. The legends surrounding Lugh are quite elaborate, and even Neo-Pagans disagree amongst themselves about what Lugh represents. However, he is often credited with founding the Tailteann Games in honor of his foster mother, Tailtiu. The Games included competitions in various categories, including physical activities (running, jumping, swimming, spear-throwing, wrestling, singing, dancing, and sword-fighting), mental feats (problem-solving and storytelling), and crafting (weaving, jewelry-making, armouring, and goldsmithing).

So, if you're looking for ways to make your Sukkot celebration a bit more interfaith, try your hand at medieval-type games like spear-throwing or shooting a slingshot. Or, modernize your version of the Games with relay races, egg tosses, or Frisbee games.

Here are few web sites offering more detailed stories and suggestions.

[Kids Activities for Lughnasad/Lammas](#)

[Lughnasad/Lammas Crafts and Activities](#)

### **Mid-Autumn Festival – Asia**

The mid-autumn festival, celebrated by some Asians, is more secular. However, many celebrations follow typical harvest themes – rice and wheat offerings, prayers of thanksgiving, dragon dance performances, and prayers for good fortune. Burning incense, carrying lanterns, and eating mooncakes are also common activities during festival time. All these activities provide additional ideas for helping your kids appreciate the bounty of the earth.

[Mid-Autumn Festival from Kid World Citizen](#)  
[Moon Festival for Kids](#)

### **Christianity**

There are also a couple of Christian-centered holidays that multi-faith families can link to Sukkot. One of the most interesting ones is the Harvest Festival in the UK. Its origins come from Lammas/Lughnasad, but the date of celebration is determined by the full moon closest to the fall equinox, which is exactly when the mid-autumn festival is celebrated in China and Vietnam. To honor the harvest, UK children come to church bearing offerings of fruits, vegetables, and freshly-baked bread. They offer songs and prayers of thanks-giving and donate food to those in need.

[Harvest Festival from Activity Village UK](#)

Many Orthodox churches also celebrate first-fruits with the Blessing of the Grapes, which takes place in August. Traditionally, the ceremony involved offerings of figs, pomegranates, olives, honey, and grain. But over the years, the ritual became more focused on grapes. The tradition is particularly strong among Armenian communities in the US, and several festivals were held last August in CA to give thanks for grapes that were able to grow despite the ongoing drought.

[Fresno Grape Blessing and Armenian Festival](#)

Want to honor the Orthodox Blessing of the Grapes? Compare different varieties of grapes, and then check out our Pinterest page for various [kid-friendly grape crafts](#).

Finally, according to the Gospel of John, found in the New Testament of the Christian Bible, Jesus, who was a Jewish rabbi, celebrated Sukkot. If you don't believe it, look up John 7:10-24, which is subtitled, "Jesus at the Festival of Booths."

### **Conclusion**

Sukkot is a fun, family-oriented holiday in the Jewish tradition. It's also a great way to bring other cultures and other faith traditions into the mix. Chag Sameach!