

Clearing out the Old to Make Room for the New: A Passover Tradition

1 hour

5-8 year-olds

Context, Locations, and Previous Implementation

This program has been implemented as part of a 9-week series called Fantastic Farmers that meets for one hour per week at Newton Community Farm. The farm is a non-profit community farm located next door to the JCC that strives to benefit the community by providing locally grown produce through a CSA, educating the public about sustainable agriculture, and preserving Newton's last working farm as a historic site and valuable open space.

The 9-week series was marketed and described to participants as follows:

Explore how plants grow with our neighbors at Newton Community Farm. We will investigate seeds, parts of plants, soil, worms, compost, and baby chicks, while learning about Passover, Shavuot, and our Jewish obligation to care for the earth.

The goals of the overall 9-week series include:

- Get to know the farm, learn age-appropriate farming skills/information
- Have fun, make friends
- Follow the Jewish calendar (Passover, Omer, Shavuot)
- Eco-teachings that relate to Jewish values (do not waste, take care of animals, guard the earth etc.)

General 9-week course structure: 1 week of farm introduction, 1 week of Passover exploration, 6 weeks of counting the Omer, 1 week of Shavuot exploration, with associated farm activities during each week.

Program Overview & Guiding Questions

This specific program is about cleaning out spaces in anticipation of spring planting, especially as it relates to the coming of Pesach. Participants will visit some of the same spots on the farm from the previous week to notice changes, explore different seeds, talk about Pesach, connect to caring for the earth, clean out the learning garden, and seed peas in the greenhouse.

Guiding Questions:

- 1) How has the farm changed since last week?
- 2) How is Passover related to Jews and farming?
- 3) How do we get ready to plant on the farm?
- 4) What are the steps for planting seeds?

Goals:

- 1) Learn: what seeds look like, how to plant seeds, how Passover is related to spring
 - 2) Feel: comfortable, excited, observant, inquisitive, and happy
 - 3) Take Home: ask me sticker; seeded pea with written intention
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Materials needed:

Greens to feed chickens

Seeds in magnifying glasses

Magnifying glasses and bean seeds

Program about Passover and spring

Buckets to fill with materials cleaned out of learning garden

Seeding supplies - pots, potting soil, seeds, watering can

Pencils, paper with 'kavanah' pre-written in English and Hebrew, tape

Session Plan:

- Introduction (5 minutes): Meet at the entrance to the farm
 - Sit on the 'magic wall' and look at the farm
 - Ask participants: What do you see?
 - Remind participants of each others' names and about how to be a farm superhero (listening ears, seeing eyes, gentle pointy fingers, walking feet)
- Exploring the Farm (10 minutes): As we walk around the farm, allow participants to feel comfortable and take the lead at times. Encourage them to notice differences since last week, pointing out specific items if they do not see them. Ask them to share (out loud) what they notice.
 - Farm tasks: Visit and feed the chickens and turn the compost
 - Reflection activities: observe at the baby chicks, and anything else that catches the eyes of the participants
- Seeds (10 minutes): inside the barn, sitting around the craft table
 - Hand each student a seed in a magnifying glass (carrot, beet, bean, cucumber, and broccoli); ask participants to notice something about their seed and share it with the group; instructor identifies each seed if the students aren't able to
 - Hand out bean seeds and magnifying glasses; guide participants through peeling off the seed coats of the beans, splitting the seed open, and observing the tiny plant on the inside, all while using their magnifying glasses to take a closer look
 - Ask participants: What do you notice? What do you wonder? What does it

remind you of?

- Passover's Connections to Spring (5 minutes): *inside the barn, sitting around the craft table*
 - Ask: What holiday is coming up next? What do you know about it? Help the participants fill in the gaps in their knowledge, but allow them to take the lead in telling the story and sharing how they celebrate
 - Ask: Why do we celebrate Passover in the spring?
 - After getting a few responses, explain:
 - The month of Nisan, and the celebration of Passover, marks the beginning of the spring harvest and is a time of awakening in the natural world - the days are getting longer, the temperature is rising, and there is more activity outdoors - which we just saw as we looked at our seeds
 - Passover is also the barley harvest, so we clean out all the wheat from last year's harvest to make room for this year's upcoming plants
 - ACTUALLY Passover is the first of THREE Jewish harvest festivals!
 - Ask: How do we make room for this year's plants around this farm? Why can't plants do this themselves? Why do we need to help them?

- Cleaning Out Learning Garden (15 minutes): *at learning garden*
 - Look at the garden together, and involve participants in deciding what needs to be cleared out of the learning garden
 - Pull plants from last year out of the ground, break them up, and put them into bins
 - As a group, take the bins over to the compost
 - Ask: why do we compost?
 - guide the conversation to talking about sustainability; there is no such thing as garbage in nature
 - if we threw away the things we took out of the garden, we wouldn't be able to reuse the nutrients that are in them
 - since we are using the soil, we take care of it by adding good things back to it, and compost is one way to do that from season to season
 - As Jews, we are actually obligated to take care of the earth!
 - Connect back to Passover and springtime - we are clearing out the old to make room for the new, and caring for the earth along the way

- Seeding Peas (10 minutes): *inside the greenhouse*
 - Ask participants to gather around the potting soil bins and talk about the needs of seeds
 - Ask participants to help scoop dirt from the potting soil bins into the pots
 - Individually, have participants use their pointer finger to make a small hole in the middle of each pot and put the seed in; then cover it over with dirt; repeat until all of the pots have seeds in them

- o Ask participants to think (silently) about a wish (intention, kavanah) that they have for their seeds as they begin to grow; write the wish on a small piece of paper and tape it to the side of the pot; if they choose to share, they can share with the group
- Wrap-up (5 minutes): *inside the greenhouse, then headed to pick-up location*
 - o Do a short reflection - ask the participants what they learned, what they expect to see next week, what they want to look for at home, etc.
 - o Write and give out 'Ask Me' stickers to participants - write 'Ask me why Passover is in the springtime'

Reflection (for participants):

- What is different about this week compared to last week?
 - o Chicks are bigger and less huddled, farm is greener, greenhouse starts are bigger, new row cover is on, etc.
- How is Passover connected to spring?
 - o What in our lives are we cleaning out for Passover?
 - o What are we cleaning out in our garden/farm?
- What is an intention for our new seed?
 - o Judaism teaches us to set kavanot or intentions when we do something
 - o Seeds are in need of water, sunlight, space to grow, and a good home - we can wish for these things for our seeds

Anticipated Outcomes:

Learn:

- About how different seeds look and about how to seed peas
- About the connection between spring and Passover (and how that relates to OUR garden)
- How to clear out a garden to prepare it for planting
- About compost and the cycles of the seasons

Feel:

- Excited to return to the farm and do more activities
- Excited to see the changes that have taken place on the farm since the last time they were there

Take Home:

- Potted pea with a wish/kavanah for the seeds
- 'Ask me' sticker with 'Ask me why Passover is in the springtime' written on it so they can share content with parents and family members

Background Information and Resources:

Alumot Curriculum, Pesach and Its Connection to the Natural World, page 52

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