

Building Your Own Sukkah

God's Word declares that we should make a *sukkah* to properly celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. Where and how should we do this? Just what IS a "sukkah" or "booth"? How sturdy should it be made? How big? With what materials? And WHY should we do this? Here, in this article, we present some useful and valuable tips on creating your own personal "booth," "tabernacle" or "sukkah" for God's Feast of Sukkot, to help you worship and celebrate it with the joy and exhilaration that God wants!

William F. Dankenbring

Many of God's people have never built a sukka, or "booth," for the Feast of Tabernacles, because they did not understand how important this is in God's sight!

Yet God commands:

"Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath. *And ye shall take on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall REJOICE before the LORD your God seven days.* And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year. It shall be a *STATUTE FOR EVER* in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. *Ye shall DWELL IN BOOTHS SEVEN DAYS;* all that are Israelite born shall **dwelt in booths:** *That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD thy God"* (Lev.23:39-43).

Notice that this commandment to celebrate the Feast of Sukkot, and to "dwell" in temporary "booths" -- fragile huts built for use during the Festival -- was "A STATUTE FOR EVER in your generations"!

How, then, can we do this?

In the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, we read, "They kept also the Feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number according to the custom, as the duty of every day required" (Ezra 3:4).

This observance occurred after the return of many Jews from Babylon back to Jerusalem and the land of Israel. Ezra, a righteous scribe of God, gathered the people and read to them from the law of God (Nehemiah 8:1-8) on the first day of Tishri, or the Feast of Trumpets (Nehemiah 8:2). On the next day, as the people were gathered to learn more of the laws of God,

"they found written in the law which the LORD had commanded by

Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month: And that they should proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, *Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written.* So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the *roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street* of the gate of Ephraim. And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, *and sat under the booths:* for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according to the manner" (Neh.8:14-18).

Here is clear instruction in the Bible on how we should build our sukkot (booths). It should be big enough for our self, our family, and to entertain guests, if possible.

The "where" is also shown here. Most of us can make one in our own back yard. Some people who have flat roofs, can make one on their roof. In some cases, we can make one in a park, or camping ground. Once made, we should spend some time in it -- "dwell" in it -- during the Feast of Tabernacles. Having built a *sukkah* in one's back yard, and fellowshiping and entertaining friends and family in and around it, with beverages, wine, fruit juice, snacks, and food, is a most enjoyable pastime during the Feast of Tabernacles.

Sukkah Insights

Writes Rabbi Irving Greenberg:

"Building can involve the whole family. Over the years people have shown great imagination in both construction and decoration of the sukkah. For those less handy, there are reasonable and attractive pre-fabricated models with easy directions for putting them together. Many prefabs come complete with bamboo stick s'chach [this is the name for the roof materials that cover the top of the sukkah hut itself]. If there is no forest in your area, evergreen or perishable s'chach can be purchased from a nursery or landscape contractor. An evergreen roof will add welcome fragrance to the sukkah. When gathering s'chach from local forest or riverbank areas, one must be sure not to destroy public property and not to take s'chach belonging to a private person without permission. Jewish law rules that a mitzvah is not validly performed if goods used in its performance are stolen" (*The Jewish Way*, p.104).

Sukkah building can be great fun, and should involve the entire family! If your church or local fellowship group can make a sukkah for your group, that would be wonderful! It is a experience you will never forget -- a true spiritual "high" can be experienced when we obey God's simplest commandments!

More insight into the basic rules of sukkah building are provided by Leslie Koppelman Ross in the book, *Celebrate! The Complete Jewish Holiday Handbook*:

"Although there are regulations regarding the minimum size, maximum height, and acceptable dimensions for its walls, the element that makes a *sukkah* more than an agricultural shed is its 'roof': a canopy made from stalks or branches arranged to provide more shade than sunlight and allow you to see the stars through it. In other words, it is something that originally grew from the earth through which we can look up and see heaven. In fact, the word *sukkah* is derived from the word for the roof -- *s'khakh*, meaning 'covering' -- indicating the most important element of the structure. It's a reminder that during the Israelites' forty years of wandering, God 'covered' all their needs. . . .

"It is a *mitzvah* for every Jew to participate in building and decorating a *sukkah*. (A *sukkah* decorating party for the immediate family, or for an extended group including friends, is a great way to get into the spirit of the holiday" (p.221).

Mitch and Zhava Glaser in their book *The Fall Feasts of Israel* tell us sukkot building was a highlight of the Feast of Tabernacles. They point out:

"The building of a booth is one of the most exciting parts of the celebration of Sukkot, especially for the children. Older youths are assigned the heavy labor of gathering the materials and sawing, nailing, and constructing the frame of the booth, while the adults supervise. They need to insure that the booth will be high enough for a tall man to comfortably stand and wide enough for the family table with room for guests to sit in comfort. The *sukkah* is built outdoors, in the yard, or possibly even on the roof if no yard space is available" (page 187).

Building the Sukkah

How can you make a *sukkah* for your own home? Here's the answer! Just *do it!* Don't worry about whether it is "perfect" or not. We should do the best we can, and realize that God does not expect everyone's *sukkah* to be the same. There is allowance for much creativity, diversity, and imagination.

Here's what you need to do. First, draw out a schematic diagram or "blueprint," as it were, of what you want your *sukkah* to look like. As you practice and gain experience, you will become better at it. Estimate the number of boards or plastic (PVC) pipes (the stronger kind, about ¾" or 1" in diameter, or larger if you wish), or wood planks or other structural materials, you will need for construction. This is for the basic FRAMEWORK of the *sukkah*.

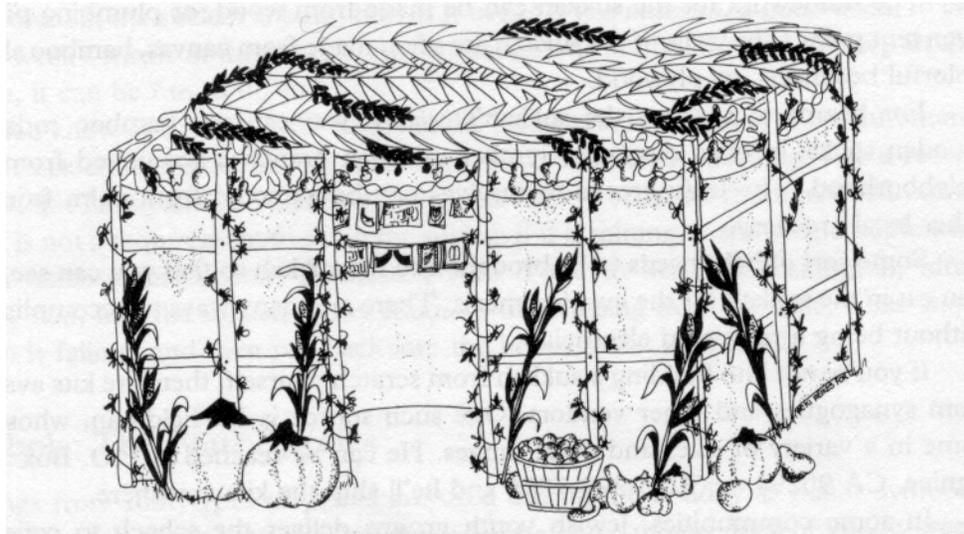
Then assemble them as your plans indicate . I would suggest a *sukkah* about seven ft eight feet high, maybe 5-8 feet wide and 7-12 feet long, for a couple or small family. One entrance (open doorway) would be sufficient. Nail your boards together to make the framework (or stick your PVC pipes together, using the appropriate connecting pieces (elbows, angles, four-way crosses, as needed). (The *sukkah* can also be attached to the outside of a house, garage, or other building, saving you the need to construct one of the walls.)

One of the best materials you can use nowadays for a *sukkah*, in many locations, is PVC plastic pipe. Solid ¾" or 1" inch is good, with proper fittings, which can be obtained at a local plumbing store, Home Depot, or similar store. Once you put the framework together, using enough PVC to make three and one half sides (leaving room for an entrance in one side), you can cover the walls with white sheets, drapes, rugs, tapestries, and then decorate them with balloons, crafts, pictures drawn of the harvest season, and any number of ideas.

Once you have put the framework of the sukkah where you want it, you will need to “cover” the walls. You can use bed sheets to do this, or carpets, or other decorative “wall” items; it can be flexible, of course. You can attach bed sheets with safety pins or other fasteners.

The Roof of the Sukkah

The “roof” of the sukkah, of course, is of great importance. You should have enough wooden slats or thin boards laid across the top of the sukkah to give support for the foliage, leaves, tree branches, and boughs, that you will need to use to create the “roof” – made of vegetation. Banana leaves, palm leaves, or broad leaves of various plants can help make a good “roof”! Remember, the roof should allow the nighttime sky to shine through so you can see the stars – about one third of the “roof” should be “open” enough so you can see through the branches and leaves. Gather together enough building materials, rope, twine, safety pins, branches from trees, palm trees, banana trees, and leafy plants from your own back yard, or from other locations (with all necessary permissions obtained, of course).



The sukkah-booth for the Feast of Tabernacles need to be festive, fun, and decorated.

Decorating the Sukkah

The “walls,” once put around the sukkah, can then be DECORATED with all kinds of imaginative decorations! This should, if possible, be a FAMILY project (or several families together!) Children can draw pictures of Biblical themes, fruit, harvest produce, or pictures of the Holy Land collected from magazines (or hand drawn art), can all be attached to the sukkah’s walls (the sheets or whatever you use). What a “trip” it is decorating your sukkah!

Mitch and Zhava Glaser tell us:

“Once the sukkah is erected, it is time for the smaller children to join the project. They are excited to do their part of fulfilling the tradition of beautifying the sukkah. For if there is one thing the Jewish people agree on regarding the festival of Sukkah, It is that the mere building of the sukkah booth is never considered enough. The

Sukkah must be made as beautiful as it can be. . . .

“. . . it is customary in many nations to suspend from the roof the seven species of the land of Israel mentioned in Deuteronomy 8:8 – wheat, barley, vines, figs, pomegranates, olives, and honey – in gratitude for the Lord’s bounty” (page 188-189, *The Fall Festivals*).

Leslie Koppelman Ross adds:

"You can use just about any materials to make the walls: cinder blocks, scrap lumber, old doors, bamboo shades, canvass or nylon sheeting attached to a frame of wood or metal piping [as I said earlier, try PVC pipe -- it is easy to use!] with nails or grommets and rope.

"Beams can be placed across the top to support the *s'khakh*. In Israel, authorities trim the palm trees in time for the holiday and leave the branches in piles on the streets for people to take home. In this country, parks departments often oblige with the by-products of fall pruning. If you cannot obtain leafy branches, bamboo, straw, reeds, and thin boards may be used.

"Our enjoyment of the *mitzvah* is enhanced when we consider its aesthetics, so it is appropriate to make the *sukkah* as beautiful as possible. Gourds, fruits, birds made from hollowed egg shells, cranberry garlands, popcorn strands and paper chains, pictures and wall tapestries, along with representations of the seven species that grow in Israel (wheat, barley, grape, fig, date, pomegranate, olive), are all traditional. . . .

"Pre-fab *sukkot* are available through Jewish book stores and sometimes synagogues. . . ." (p.220-221).

“Dwelling” in the Sukkah

Once your sukkah is created, you will need to tend to the inside. You may place a small table inside, a few chairs, depending on room, and then place a dish of fruits, apples, oranges, pumpkins, grapes, raisins, and cookies, for entertaining guests and friends, on the table. Remember, one of the purposes of constructing the sukkah is to “dwell” in it – spend time in it – entertaining friends and neighbors, showing forth hospitality. It is to be a sort of “hospitality hut,” where you welcome family members, church members, friends and strangers, as Abraham did.

You may also put your sleeping bag in the sukkah, for sleeping at night (don’t forget a ground cloth to keep moisture from making your sleeping bag wet from the dew at night). For families experienced in camping out, spending an overnight in the sukkah together is a real treat! And it can be for novices in the camping experience, as well.

It is a real blessing to spend private time also in your sukkah, studying the Bible, meditating on Scriptures, and special time in deep, profound, earnest, thankful, and devotional prayer.

Blessing of the Sukkah

When you enter the sukkah the first time each day, you should recite the "Blessing of the

Sukkah," which goes like this:

"Baruch Attah Adonai, Melek Ha Olam,
Asher Kidshanu B'Mitzvotav,
V'tzivanu Leisheiv Basukkah.

*"Blessed Are You, O Lord, King of the Universe,
Who Has Sanctified Us by His Commandments,
and Commanded Us to Dwell in the Sukkah."*

After we recite the "blessing" of the Sukkah -- and then enter the Sukkah and begin to commune with God, our Father, in a special way, and with Yeshua our Messiah, it would be good to reflect on the tremendous and deep meaning of the wonderful Feast of Tabernacles, which God has given to us as a precious spiritual gift – and bless and thank Him for its wonderful meaning and teaching qualities – and the divine peace and faith and shelter which it portrays. It is good to bless God as we sit in peace, and happiness, in our sukkah, under God's divine protection, and in His divine Presence.

Entertaining in the Sukkah

According to tradition, the sukkah commemorates the booth Abraham built when he greeted and entertained the three heavenly visitors (Gen.18; Numbers Rabbah 14). Jewish sources also tell us:

“The children of Israel were divinely protected in the wilderness by the shelter of the tabernacles solely because the Patriarch Abraham had given shelter to three strangers beneath the tree on his property” (Genesis Rabbah 48:10).

Thus the sukkah goes back to Abraham, father of the faithful. Hospitality was his outstanding trait. From this concept, Jewish tradition suggests that each night, during Sukkot, “heavenly guests” visit the sukkah or booth, with Abraham being the first guest, the next night, Isaac, the third night Jacob, then Moses, Aaron, Joseph, and finally, King David.

Of course, these men are really dead and in their graves, waiting for the resurrection (see Acts 2:29-32; Heb.11:39-40). However, these were seven of the greatest saints of God, and their lives are valuable study guides for all of us! They were noted for outstanding spiritual qualities, and it would be good to meditate on them, and the lessons their lives afford for us, during our days spent in the sukkah!

This coming Feast of Tabernacles, I hope you will really enjoy your "sukkah" experience, as you spend seven days in unique and wonderful fellowship with Almighty God, and His Son, Jesus Christ -- Yeshua the Messiah, and with others in the faith of Yeshua, as you are able!



Sukkah built by South African brethren at Feast of Tabernacles 1999.

The Feast of Booths in the Millennium

The day is soon coming when the entire world --all nations -- will observe the Feast of Tabernacles, or booths, as God commanded. They will come up to Jerusalem, and make fragile, flimsy booths, and dwell in them for seven days, during the Feast. The prophet Zechariah foretells that after the return of the Messiah, to put down all rebellion around the world, and to inaugurate the Kingdom of God on the earth, a startling thing will happen. Notice!

"And every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, AND TO KEEP THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES OR BOOTHS. And it shall be, that whoso of the families of the earth shall not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, upon them there shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt do not go up to Jerusalem and present themselves, upon them there shall be no *rain*, but there shall be the plague with which the Lord will smite the nations that go not up to KEEP THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES. This shall be the consequent punishment of the sin of Egypt, and the consequent punishment of the sin of all the nations that do not go up to *keep the feast of Tabernacles*" (Zech.14:16-19, *Amplified Bible*).

Obviously, as the prophet points out, the Feast of Tabernacles will be a TEST -- a test upon ALL NATIONS – when the Messiah returns! But is it also a TEST for God's people, *NOW*? Consider this well!

Michael Strassfeld, in *The Jewish Holidays: A Guide and Commentary*, tells us about the

Messianic character of this Festival. He declares:

"An important and underlying theme of Sukkot is its *messianic and universalist character*. Coming at the end of the agricultural year and the end of the pilgrimage cycle, Sukkot marks the *end of a passage of time*. It thereby anticipates the MESSIANIC END OF DAYS for all people. During Sukkot a total of seventy sacrifices were brought into the temple, corresponding to the tradition's count of the number of nations in the world

"This vision of universal brotherhood is reflected in the sukkah, whose door and roof are open to all. The sukkah, in turn, evokes a vision of God's sukkah as a house of prayer for all nations. In that future, God will spread a *sukkah shalom* -- a sheltering cover made of peace and harmony. Even as we remember the desert period of old, having reached the end of time, we *eagerly await the redemption*, the crossing over into the promised land" (p.146-147).

But as the prophecy of Zechariah, shows, the passage from this age of strife and wickedness into the new world of peace and utopia will not be an easy one. At first, the nations will not be willing to come up to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Tabernacles, and to dwell in *sukkot*, worshipping the King, the Lord of hosts. They will rebel. Some, like Egypt, will be hard to convince. God will have to use the threat of drought, and even plagues, to bring some of the nations to their senses!

For the nations of the world, the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles will be a divine *test!*

But is God *now* beginning to give this "test" to His end-time people, today? As the apostle Peter wrote: "For the time is come when judgment must *begin* at the house of God: and if it first *begin at us*, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (I Pet.4:17-18).

A New TEST Upon God's People!

The "Feast of Booths" is commanded to be observed by ***BUILDING OR CONSTRUCTING BOOTHS -- JUST AS THE "NAME" OF THE FEAST IMPLIES!*** Those nations who will not do this, during the Millennial reign of the Messiah, will suffer PUNISHMENT! No rain will fall, drought, and consequent famine, will erupt! And if that doesn't bring them around, then disease epidemics, and the *plague!*

For those who desire to obey and please God, building a sukkah is very important during the Feast of Tabernacles. Observant Israeli soldiers even built one during the Yom Kippur War in the Golan Heights, the scene of horrendous battles with the Syrian army.

How important is sukkah building and Sukkot observance to God?

The ENTIRE WORLD will be enjoined to observe this Festival of God properly during the Reign of the Messiah!



Israeli soldiers build sukkah with old box crates in Golan Heights during Yom Kippur War.

Says Avraham Yaakov Finkel, in *The Essence of the Holy Days*,

"Sukkot is a TEST of man's attachment to God, and the nations will observe Sukkot to prove their newfound loyalty to Him"
(emphasis mine, p.89).

Will you observe Sukkot *properly* this coming year, as God intended, and as He commanded? Will YOU dwell in your "temporary dwelling" -- your make-shift, rickety, fragile, homemade BOOTH that you have constructed wherever you keep the Feast? Whether in a camp ground, park, or festival gathering -- or in your own back yard, or balcony, or roof-top?

If you have never done it, it is a real JOY – and a wondrous family experience as well!

Isn't it time therefore that we *really, with all our heart, began to OBEY God and follow His instructions and commands?*

Isn't it time we get our bearings straight, and begin to "live by *EVERY* word of God"? (Matt.4:4; Luke 4:4; Deut.8:3).

Isn't it time we perform and obey God's Law, in its entirety, with JOY unbounded and running over?

Isn't it time we celebrate His Festival in the manner in which HE commands, with tremendous JOY, and total commitment, and 100% obedience?

Says Leslie Koppelman Ross, further:

"For joy reflects a feeling of optimism about the future, and no matter what the immediate situation, a Jew [that is, a true Jew, or true believer in the Messiah -- see Romans 2:26-29] believes in the promise of redemption: 'I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah, and though he may tarry, daily I will wait for his coming' (Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of Faith).

"It is an attitude that, along with the teachings of Torah, sustained the Jewish people. The rabbis said that *in the world to come, we will be REWARDED FOR THE JOY we felt in performing mitzvot [the commandments], rather than for the actual observance of the commandments.* In other words, indication of *motivation is seen as more important* than going through the motions" (p.218).

So let's put on a real "happy face" -- and at the Feast of Tabernacles, serve and worship God with JOY bubbling over and irrepressible and exploding forth in dazzling radiance and brilliance! Let's *REJOICE* during this Feast, as we have never rejoiced before, as we BUILD OUR BOOTHS, and celebrate the Feast, in sheer ecstatic worship of the One True God!

Says Ross:

"Since the *sukkah* is a memorial to God's protection, it is meant to enhance the joy of the festival. If you do not feel joy, you cannot appropriately fulfill the *mitzvah* of dwelling in the *sukkah*" p.226).

So let's serve our God with GREAT delirious JOY and REJOICING at the Feast this year! Let's REJOICE in the "season of our joy" inside our own wonderful SUKKKAH!

Let's radiate cheerfulness, joyfulness, and sublime happiness, and be thankful for every one of God's wonderful divine commandments -- including the commandment to build and dwell in a "sukkah" during the Feast of Tabernacles -- just as its name says!

As Jesus Christ declared, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law, until all is accomplished" (Matthew 5:17-18). "Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (vs.19).

How much we have missed out on true, vital spiritual understanding, in the years gone by, because we did not literally fulfill this plain Scriptural commandment! It is as if we had only come "part way" out of sin -- but still remained with one foot in the world! We have sinned, as Malachi says: "But ye are departed out of the [true] way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law . . . as ye have not kept my ways, but have been PARTIAL in the law" (Malachi 2:8-9).

Praise God for this deeper and awesome understanding of the meaning and significance of His holy Feast of Tabernacles! Praise God for revealing to us the wonderful TRUTH about the "sukkah"! Thank God for His mercy and loving-kindness!

