

Six Excuses To Celebrate Jewishly This Summer

It's a Barren Season for Jewish Holidays — Until Now!

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Sadly, between Shavuot (May 15) and Rosh Hashanah (September 5) there is a shortage of Jewish holidays. Sure, there's Tisha B'Av (July 15), a day to recall the destruction of the First and Second Temples and other Jewish tragedies. But who wants to throw a party on a fast day? Tu B'Av, the Israeli equivalent of Valentine's Day, comes soon after (July 21). But outside of Israel, it's a minor festival. And what if you're single?



We Jews like having a holiday every few weeks or so. It gives us an excuse to get together, shmooze and overeat. (And while we love the Fourth of July, kosher hotdogs do not a Jewish holiday make.) In the name of anthropological research, we dug into the vault and uncovered a few unknown holidays observed by Jewish suburbanites around the country.

Won't you join us in celebrating this summer? We will whip up an apple cake and set the table for 10.

Rosh To Barbecue

This festival celebrates the first evening you light the barbecue and decide it's warm enough to eat dinner on the deck. Preparations for this holiday include scraping last year's schmutz off the grill, sending someone to get the propane tank filled and stocking up on paper plates. Guests may come, bringing offerings of pasta salad and fruit pie. Although a menorah is not necessary, it is customary to kindle the citronella lights. This year, the holiday ritual of "swatting the mosquitoes" is being replaced by the "dodging of the cicadas." On the Jewish calendar, 5773 is the year of return in their 17-year cycle.

In your siddur on Rosh To Barbecue, read the alternative section, in red.



Pulke Day

The day when you pull on your bathing suit for the first time. It's a hot day and you've been invited to a friend's backyard pool, but your thighs are still large and white and dimpled as a pulke, or chicken thigh.

(Even when your thighs are nice and tan, they will continue to be large and dimpled.) This little-known day of mourning — it's nothing compared with Tisha B'Av — is primarily celebrated by women ages 35-65. Some choose to fast on this day, but that won't help.

Yom Lo Kinder

This freedom festival is celebrated mainly by parents of children ages 6 to 16 on the day they drop the kids off at summer camp. While the children's holiday attire is informal, minhag, or Jewish custom, says that every article of clothing must be labeled with the name of the child. The most common prayers include the "Don't get sick so I have to come and fetch you" and the "Stop being homesick; you're not missing anything." There is no special siddur; prayers are spontaneous. Emotions run high as parents are relieved, guilty, happy and sad to entrust their precious offspring into the care of inexperienced counselors. When the parents return home to an empty house, the ritual four cups of wine (good stuff, not Manischewitz) are often part of their celebratory meal.



Kine-a-Schnorrer

Celebrated only by Jews fortunate enough to have a backyard swimming pool, this holiday ushers in the summer season, when uninvited guests — the "summer ushpizin" — drop by just for a little swim. Those who observe this holiday year after year are familiar with the protocol: Guests swim, then ask for a little nosh, then you have to serve iced tea and offer them a dry towel. Before you know it, you have 10 loads of laundry to do. The Kine-a-Schnorrer holiday gives rise to the well-known expression "Make a fence around the pool."

Schlepping Sand

An obscure pilgrimage festival celebrated by Jews near beaches. This is the day when Jewish families load up the car with bikes, coolers and beach towels and journey to the sea. Although no temple sacrifice is necessary, parents do sacrifice sanity, money and personal space by sharing a rental house with the whole mishpokhe, or extended family. At the conclusion of the Schlepping Sand festival — after loads of sand are accidentally schlepped back home in crusty towels and unwashed beach toys — children begin the solemn "counting of the school supplies," marking time until the first day of school. Traditional holiday foods include salt water taffy, Good Humor popsicles and squished tuna fish sandwiches. "Yes, they're still good. I packed them this morning."



Simchat Squash

This Festival of First Fruits From the Backyard Garden is celebrated mostly by suburban Jews as they gather in the bounty of their 3-by-5 plots. Offerings include black-spotted tomatoes, misshapen carrots, scraggly string beans and a plethora of zucchini. Customs include Googling zucchini recipes and recalling the legend in which God tells the Israelites, "Just eat it. It's good for you." Festive foods pay homage to the summer squash and include zucchini muffins, zucchini pancakes, zucchini bread and zucchini kugel. City-dwelling Jewish hipsters don't celebrate this holiday; they belong to food co-ops and community supported agriculture programs.