

What Are the Minimum Qualifications for Hadassim to be Kosher?

1. The majority of the length of each myrtle branch must have a circle of three leaves coming out at the same level of the branch (Meshulash)
2. The branches must be a minimum of 10 inches long
3. The stem of the branches must be red or green
4. The leaves must be greenish in color and not dried out
5. A majority of the leaves must still be attached to the stem
6. There should not be a lot of berries attached to the branch

What Are the Minimum Qualifications for Aravos to Be Kosher?

1. The majority of the leaves must still be attached to the stem
2. The branches must be a minimum of 10 inches long
3. The leaves must be oblong and the edges must be either smooth or only slightly serrated
4. The leaves must be greenish in color and not dried out
5. Make sure that the Aravos are legally owned by the seller, and that they have not been picked without the permission of the property owner from areas where willows grow wild.

What Are the Minimum Qualifications for a Lulav to be Kosher?

1. The length of the Lulav is determined by the Shidra (backbone), the central portion from which the leaves branch off. It is measured from the start of the bottom-most leaf on the Lulav to the point where the topmost leaves branch off. The minimum acceptable Shidra length is 13 inches.
2. The Lulav must not show signs of turning white due to dryness.
3. The Lulav must not be bent to either side, or forward.
4. Most of the leaves of the Lulav must not be cut off at the top.
5. Each leaf of the lulav is actually a double-leaf, with the two leaves joined at the back. The center leaf, called the teyomes, leading into the top of the backbone, must not be split along its entire length, and if partially split, the two leaves of the teyomes must not look separated at the top tip.
6. When the Lulav is held upright, its leaves should point upward and cluster together, without sagging down
7. The Shulchan Aruch, which is the prime authority for most of the Sephardic community, declares a Lulav to be unfit only if most of its leaves are affected by a given problem. However, the Rema, the prime authority for the Ashkenazic community, is much stricter, and will disqualify a Lulav with a critical defect only to the central teyomes leaf.

What Are the Minimum Qualifications for an Esrog to Be Kosher?

1. It must bear a rabbinical certification, attesting that the Esrog is a pure citron, and is not the result of a grafting onto another species of tree, or the offspring of a hybrid of more than one species.
2. It must be complete - meaning that no piece of the fruit may be missing. That includes an unbroken skin, the presence of an intact Pitom at the top and a stem (Ukatz) on the bottom. The only exception is the kind of Esrog which the naturally falls off as it grows to maturity. Such Esrogim are kosher to use without a Pitom.
3. While the Esrog is naturally all green while growing on the tree, when it is used, at least some part of the Esrog must be yellow, and any discolored areas should be relatively small.
4. The Esrog must exceed the minimum size, which is defined as the volume of two medium chicken eggs, or a weight of at least 3.5 ounces.
5. The Esrog must be elongated, and not totally round.
6. There should be no permanent black spots or holes on the Esrog's surface, particularly on the sloping portion towards the top (Chotam).
7. The Esrog's skin should not be entirely smooth.
8. There are a number of reliably kosher Esrog orchards in Israel under rabbinic supervision, to make sure that their Esrogim are not the result of grafts, (Murkov) and that other relevant considerations of Jewish law, such as Orlah, have been taken care of.
9. Some Chassidic groups have the tradition of using Esrogim grown from in the Calabria section of southern Italy, called Yanover Esrogim. Many of these Esrogim are grown to be kosher without a Pitom. As a result, they are less likely to be disqualified due to damage during shipment and use.
10. An Esrog that develops a surface discoloration due to rot or spoilage, called a Chazazis, is disqualified for use. However, such cases are rare today.
11. The more common types of discoloration of an Esrog develop naturally during the growing process and usually do not disqualify it for use. These include a brown mark that appears on the surface after the fruit is bruised, caused by the acidic action of its juice. Beige scar tissue naturally appears on the surface of the Esrog after it is damaged by being brushed by a leaf. These beige areas on surface of the Esrog are known as bletlach (a single mark of this nature is called a blet). Another common minor defect is the natural scar tissue that forms to cover the small hole in the skin of the Esrog caused by a thorn puncture. Such defects typically do not disqualify the Esrog for use, but they do detract from the beauty of an Esrog, diminishing its value.
12. Defects in an Esrog are of no concern unless they are readily visible to the unaided eye when it is held at arm's length.
13. A black spot on the surface of an Esrog can be a source of more serious concern, particularly if it appears on the upper sloping portion (the Chotam). If such a black spot is loosely attached to the surface, and can be scraped off (very gently!) from the Esrog without damaging the underlying skin, it is not a problem. But if it cannot be easily removed, the Esrog should be taken to an expert for careful inspection to determine if it is still usable.
14. Any discolorations that cover much of the surface are more likely to disqualify the Esrog. Once again, such defects are considered to be more serious if they appear on the upper slope (the Chotam).
15. The laws used to evaluate Esrog defects are very complex, so if you find what you suspect is a potentially disqualifying defect in an Esrog, search out a rabbi with experience in judging Esrogim and ask his opinion. As a general rule, if you are shopping to buy any Esrog, do not consider any Esrog about which you have a serious question. If you have already bought your Esrog from a reliable source, and an expert tells you that it is not kosher, immediately contact the vendor you bought the Esrog from.
16. The laws regarding the usability of an Esrog with a defect are far more lenient after the first day of Sukkos. Even a defect as serious as the loss of a Pitom does not disqualify an Esrog for use after the first day of Sukkos.