

Passover Seder Plate

Ingredients and placement

The Seder plate (Hebrew: *ke'arah* קַעֲרָה) is the focal point of the proceedings on the first (two) night(s) of Passover. Whether it is an ornate silver dish or a humble napkin, it bears the ceremonial foods around which the Seder is based. Here is the order: matzah, the *zeroa* (shankbone), egg, bitter herbs, *charoset* paste and *karpas* vegetable.

Preparing these items requires some time. It is best to prepare all the Seder foods before the onset of the holiday, in order to avoid halachic questions.

The special foods we eat on Passover are also food for thought. Every symbolic food on the Seder plate abounds in meaning and allusion. Here you will learn the descriptions of each of the foods, the reason why it is included, the method of preparing it, and its role in the Seder meal.

The 6 Symbolic Foods

- [Matzah](#)
- [Zeroa \(Shankbone\)](#)
- [Beitzah \(Egg\)](#)
- [Maror and Chazeret \(Bitter Herbs\)](#)
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[Matzah](#)

Three matzot are placed on top of each other on a plate or napkin, and then

covered. (Some also have the custom to separate the matzot from each other with interleaved plates, napkins or the like.)

We have three matzot, so that we can break one (as a slave would), and still have two whole matzot over which to recite the Hamotzi blessing (as required on Shabbat and holidays). The matzot are symbolic of

the three groups of Jews: Priests, Levites

and Israelites. They also commemorate the three measures of fine flour that Abraham told Sarah to bake into matzah when they were visited by the three angels (Genesis 18:6).



Art by Sefira Lightstone

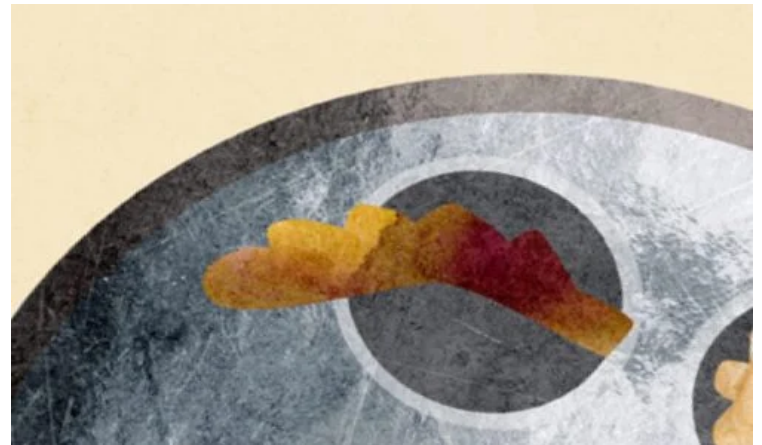
It is ideal to use handmade *shmurah* matzah, which has been zealously guarded against moisture from the moment of harvest. You can purchase shmurah matzah here.

On a cloth or plate placed above the three matzot, we place the following items:

Zeroa (Shankbone)

A piece of roasted meat represents the lamb that was the special paschal sacrifice on the eve of the exodus from Egypt, and annually on the afternoon before Passover in the Holy Temple.

Some use a forearm of a lamb. Called the *zeroa*, it alludes to the verse which states, “I will redeem you with an outstretched arm (*zeroa*).”



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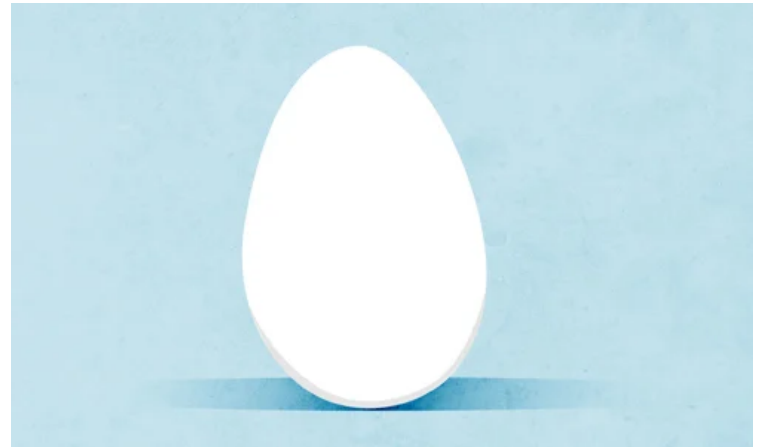
Since we don't want to appear to offer the paschal sacrifice in the absence of the Holy Temple, others take care to use something that is relatively dissimilar to the actual offering. Accordingly, many communities have the custom to use a roasted chicken neck or the like.

Preparation: Roast the neck on all sides over an open fire on the stove. Afterwards, some have the custom to remove the majority of the meat of the neck (but not all of it).

Role in the Seder: The *zeroa* is not eaten at the Seder. After the meal it can be refrigerated, and used again on the Seder plate the following night.

Beitzah (Egg)

A hard-boiled egg represents the pre-holiday offering (*chagigah*) that was brought in the days of the Holy Temple. The meat of this animal constituted the main part of the Passover meal. The Aramaic word for “egg” is *bei’ah*, which is similar to the Aramaic word for “desire,” expressing that this was the night when G-d desired to redeem us.



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Preparation: Boil one egg per Seder plate, and possibly more for use during the meal.

Role in the Seder: Place one egg on the plate. As soon as the actual meal is about to begin, remove the egg from the Seder plate and use during the meal.

A popular custom is to eat these eggs together with the saltwater which was set on the table.

Maror and Chazeret (Bitter Herbs)

Bitter herbs (*maror*) remind us of the bitterness of the slavery of our forefathers in Egypt. Fresh grated horseradish, and romaine lettuce (or endives), are the most common choices.

The leaves of romaine lettuce are not bitter; but the stem, when left to grow in the ground, turns hard and bitter. So it was with our enslavement in Egypt. At first the deceitful approach of Pharaoh was soft and sensible, and the work was done voluntarily and even for pay. Gradually it evolved into forced and cruel labor.

Preparation: Peel the raw horseradish roots, rinse and dry well.

Next, grate the horseradish with a hand grater or food processor. (This must be done before the holiday begins.) Whoever will be grating the horseradish may begin to shed copious tears or cough a lot. Shielding the mouth and nose with a cloth may help. No beets or other condiments should be added to the horseradish.



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Romaine lettuce is often very sandy. Wash each of the leaves separately, checking very carefully for insects. Take care that they do not soak for 24 hours. (Those who are particular not to eat matzah that becomes moist should pat the lettuce gently with a towel and let it sit until completely dry, so that there will be no moisture to come in contact with the matzah.)

Depending on how much romaine lettuce is needed, it can take several hours to prepare. This task should be completed before candle-lighting time on the first night. Prepare enough leaves for both nights, and store in the refrigerator.

Romaine is preferred over horseradish, and many have the custom to use both kinds together. Place a few cleaned, dried leaves of romaine lettuce on the Seder plate, topped with the horseradish. Since this will be used twice, it actually takes two spots on the Seder plate. The top pile (in the center of the plate) is called *maror* (bitter herbs), while the pile that sits beneath it is referred to as *chazeret* (lettuce).

Role in the Seder: After the recital of most of the Haggadah comes the ritual handwashing. Then matzah is eaten, followed by some *maror* (taken from the *maror* pile), followed in turn by a sandwich of matzah and *maror* (this time taken from the *chazeret* pile).

Charoset (Paste)

A mixture of apples, pears, nuts and wine, which resembles the mortar and brick made by the Jews when they toiled for Pharaoh.

Preparation: Shell nuts and peel apples and pears, and chop finely. Mix together and add a small amount of wine.

Role in the Seder: This is used as a type of relish, into which the *maror* is dipped (and then shaken off) before eating.



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Karpas (Vegetable)

Many have the custom to use parsley, called *karpas* in Hebrew. This vegetable alludes to the backbreaking work of the Jews as slaves, as the Hebrew letters of *karpas* can be arranged to spell the word *perech* plus the letter samech. *Perech* means backbreaking work, and samech is numerically equivalent to 60, referring to 60 myriads, equaling 600,000, which was the number of Jewish males over 20 years of age who were enslaved in Egypt.



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Preparation: Prepare your vegetable, an onion or (boiled) potato in many Eastern European traditions. Cut off a slice and place on Seder plate. On the table, next to the Seder plate, place a small bowl of saltwater.

Role in the Seder: After recital of kiddush, the family goes to the sink and ritually washes their hands, but without saying the usual blessing.

Everyone then takes a very small piece of the vegetable and dips it in saltwater. After the appropriate blessing is said, the *karpas* is eaten. Care should be taken that each person eats less than 17 grams (about ½ ounce).

Your Finished Seder Plate:

Now that you've gotten your Seder plate down pat, here are some other Seder essentials for you:

- [Browse a selection of seder plates](#)
- [Print \(or study\) the Haggadah](#)
- [Read the Passover story in short](#)
- [Review the Seder service in a nutshell](#)



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Or watch this inspirational video to get you into the freedom-filled Passover spirit:

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