

The Money Tree

...and Other Incredible Stories Involving Trees, Shrubs and Plants

There are so many kinds of trees and plants growing across the planet that we often take them for granted. However, a small percentage of them are so unique and perplexing that they deserve special attention. These include trees with coins literally sprouting from them; a single tree that spans two acres; a spike-armed tree whose fruit explodes, sending sharp seeds 100 feet at 150 MPH; plants that consume insects, birds and rodents; a large shrub with a sting that has been known to kill dogs, horses and even humans, and more....



Trees are beautiful. Whereas city life, busy highways and polluted air create stress, tension and a feeling of claustrophobia, trees and picturesque landscaping promote a feeling of expansiveness, tranquility and happiness. Even hardcore city dwellers realize this and often seek out greener pastures in the summer.

Trees not only add to the rich tapestry of our experience, but are extremely beneficial for the human race, purifying the air and reducing the heat, providing oxygen, sustenance and the material to build our homes. Still, because of their abundance, people tend to take them for granted.

It would be worthwhile to study any of the more than 100,000 families of trees, shrubs and plants in the world just to better



Drawing from 140 years ago showing a shul decorated with trees in honor of Shavuot.



A contemporary Beis Medrash decorated with trees and flowers for Shavuot.

appreciate the blessing Hashem has giving us. Nevertheless, some of them are so unique and perplexing they deserve special attention. Here is a small sampling of a few of the most noteworthy and wondrous.

Bamboo Invades North America

For many years, bamboo has been the *schach* of choice for the discerning *sukkah*-builder, thanks to its straight simplicity and ability to last.

While we may find bamboo extremely convenient, in some parts of North America bamboo had become an extreme nuisance. It invades private yards and spreads from one location to another with startling rapidity. In the process, it causes thousands of dollars in damages. This is mostly concentrated in several states along the east coast of the United States, primarily Virginia, Maryland, New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.

Many might wonder: "Bamboo? A problem? They look like such innocent plants!" To understand this we need to take a closer look.

Bamboo belongs to the family of grasses. There are many types of bamboo, with some growing six feet in diameter and 40 to 75 feet in height! Bamboo is used for a variety of purposes, including furniture, home décor and even cutlery. Young bamboo shoots can be eaten. In some parts of the world floors are built with bamboo. The versatile plant may also be used for scaffolding.

There are two general categories of bamboo. One is known in English as "clumping bamboo." As its name indicates, this type grows in thick clusters, with a single trunk branching off into many branches. The type that is creating problems belongs to the second category, called "running bamboo." It "runs" as its roots spread beneath the ground, always expanding before finally sprouting above the ground.

Bamboo is truly an invasive plant. It is native to Asia, not America. It is not clear exactly when bamboo was introduced to North America, though it is estimated to



A bamboo forest in Taiwan.

have arrived in the late 1800s. Bamboo is believed to have been imported by plant collectors or gardeners. Eventually, other Americans began planting bamboo for its beauty or to create a natural barrier that provides privacy. (Some types of bamboo are hardy enough to thrive right through the winter.)

However, "running bamboo" can spread quickly and turn into an epidemic. The only means of controlling its spread and containing the roots is by building a frame of four walls two feet deep in the ground. People who are not aware of this when they plant the bamboo find it very difficult to reverse the process.

Residents pay thousands of dollars to get rid of bamboo run amok, since it requires a tractor to dig out the roots from several feet beneath the surface. The roots must be burned before they are tossed away or they will just spread somewhere else.

One village that is struggling with the problem is Colonia, New Jersey. Josh Velez, who bought a home in 2011, did not realize that there was a bamboo outbreak in the area. Within a short time his yard was invaded and inundated by bamboo—many of the poles reaching 35 feet. It was so bad that it became impossible just to enter the yard.



Josh Velez is fighting a losing battle against the running bamboo that invaded his property. Bottom: Mr. Velez with a bamboo root that invaded his yard.