

# Pesaḥ Guide 2011 Rabbinical Assembly

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*Pesaḥ Guide 5771*

## RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY PESAḤ GUIDE

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The Torah prohibits the ownership of hametz (leaven) during the festival of Pesaḥ. Because of this restriction, Pesaḥ is the Jewish festival that requires the most preparation. This Rabbinical Assembly Pesaḥ Guide provides a brief outline of the policies and procedures relevant to preparing a home for Pesaḥ.

With significant changes in the nature and manufacture of kitchen products and foodstuffs, new policies are required to maintain a kosher-for-Pesaḥ kitchen. As well, there are many significant differences of opinion among rabbis regarding the laws of Pesaḥ. This guide is intended to help families maintain a *Pesahdik* home in accordance with the principles of Conservative Judaism and its understanding of Jewish Law.

### KASHERING OF KITCHEN APPLIANCES AND UTENSILS:

It is customary (and easiest) to remove the utensils and dishes that are used during the year, replacing them with either new utensils or utensils reserved for exclusive use on Pesaḥ. This is clearly not feasible for major kitchen appliances and may not even be possible for dishes and utensils. There is a process for kashering a variety of utensils and appliances.

The general principle used in kashering is that the way the utensil absorbs food is the way it can be purged of that food. This principle operates on the basis of the quality or intensity of how the particular item absorbs food. Kitchen items used for cold food can be kashered by rinsing, since no substance has been absorbed by the dish or glass.

Items used on a stove absorb the food and thus need a stronger level of action, namely expelling the food into boiling water through a process called *hag'alah*. The most intense form of kashering applies to items used directly on a fire or in an oven and these utensils require a process of kashering called *libbun*, which burns away absorbed food.

Specific items are covered below.

a. To kasher metal pots, silverware, and utensils, thoroughly clean the item with soap and water. Then, following a strict 24-hour waiting period during which the item is not used, immerse the item in water that has been heated to a rolling boil *hag'alah*. For pots and pans, clean handles thoroughly. If the handle can be removed, one must remove it for a more thorough cleaning. To effect *hag'alah*, the item must be completely exposed to the boiling water. Pots and pans are either immersed in a larger pot of boiling water (for large items, this may be done one section at a time), or filled

with water brought to a rolling boil, after which a heated stone is dropped into the pot, causing the water to overflow to cover the sides of the pot. In the case of silverware, every part of each piece must be exposed to the boiling water. Following this *hag'alah* process, each utensil is rinsed in cold water.

b. Heavy-duty plastic items, including dishes, cutlery or serving pieces, provided they can withstand very hot water and do not permanently stain, may be kashered by *hag'alah*. If there is some doubt as to whether a particular item can be kashered, consult your rabbi or religious authority.

c. Purely metal utensils used in fire must first be thoroughly scrubbed and cleaned and then must be subjected to direct fire *libbun*. To accomplish this, place the item in a self-cleaning oven and run it through the self-cleaning cycle, or use a blowtorch. The use of a blowtorch is a complicated and potentially dangerous procedure and may result in discoloration or warping of the metal item being purged. Exercise caution when performing *libbun*. Metal baking pans and sheets cannot be kashered because they require direct fire, which will cause warping.

d. Earthenware (china, pottery, etc.) cannot be kashered. However, fine chinaware that was stored and not used for over a year may be used after thorough washing. This china is considered *pareve* and may be designated for meat or dairy use.

e. Ovens and ranges: Every part that comes in contact with food must be thoroughly cleaned. This includes the walls and the top and bottom of the oven. The oven or range should then be heated at its highest possible temperature. The oven should be heated at maximum heat for an hour; the range top should be heated until the elements turn red and glow. Parts of the range top around the elements that can be covered should be covered (usually with aluminum foil), and carefully heated. After a general and careful cleaning, a self-cleaning oven is put through the full cleaning cycle while empty. Following this process, the oven should be cleaned again to remove any ash. If the oven was very dirty to begin with, two cycles may be needed to assure a thorough cleaning.

f. Smooth glass-top electric ranges require kashering by *libbun* and (pouring boiling water over the surface of the range top). First, clean the top of the range thoroughly; then turn the coils on maximum heat until they are red-hot. Then carefully pour boiling water on the surface area, over and around the burners. The range top may now be used for cooking.

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g. Microwave ovens that have no convection option should be thoroughly cleaned. Then place an eight-ounce cup of water inside the oven and microwave until the water almost disappears. (At least 6 of the 8 ounces need to evaporate.) Do not heat until the water is completely evaporated, as this may damage the oven. A microwave oven that has a browning element cannot be kashered.

h. Convection ovens are kashered like regular ovens. When cleaning, be sure to thoroughly clean around the fan.

i. Glass dishes used for eating and serving hot food are to be treated like any dish used for eating and serving hot food. These dishes may be kashered by cleaning and then immersing in boiling water. Glass cookware is kashered in the same method used for a metal pot (see paragraph "a" above). The issues regarding glass bakeware are complex. Some authorities allow glass bakeware to be kashered, while others do not. Drinking glasses or glass dishes used only for cold foods may be kashered by a simple rinsing. Some follow the custom of soaking them in water for three days.

j. A dishwasher needs to be cleaned as thoroughly as possible, including the inside area around the drainage and filters. Then run a full cycle with detergent (with racks inserted), while empty. After 24 hours of not being used, the dishwasher is again run empty (with racks inserted), and set on the highest heat for the purpose of kashering. If the sides of the dishwasher are made of enamel or porcelain, the dishwasher cannot be kashered for Pesah.

k. Other electrical appliances can be kashered if the parts that come in contact with *hametz* are metal and are removable, in which case they may be kashered like all other metal cooking utensils. If the parts are not removable, the appliances cannot be kashered. We recommend the purchase of small appliances designated for strictly Pesah use, thus avoiding the difficulty of kashering these appliances.

l. Tables, cabinets, and counters should be thoroughly cleaned and covered for Pesah. Suitable coverings include: contact paper, regular paper, foil, or cloth that does not contain *hametz* (e.g. treated with starch made of *hametz*). Note that the covering material should be made of material that is not easily torn.

m. Many countertop surfaces can be kashered simply by a thorough cleaning, a 24-hour wait, and (pouring

boiling water over surfaces). For this process to be effective for kashering, the surface must have no hairline cracks, nicks or scratches that can be seen with the naked eye. Plastic laminates, limestone, soapstone, granite, marble, glass, Corian, Staron, Ceasarstone, Swanstone, Surell, and Avonite surfaces can be kashered by this method. A wood surface that does not contain scratches may be kashered by in the same way. Ceramic, cement, or porcelain countertops cannot be kashered using this process. The potential effectiveness of this method depends on the material of which the counter was made. A full list of counter materials that can be kashered (according to their decisors) may be found on the website of the Chicago Rabbinical Council (CRC).

n. A metal kitchen sink can be kashered by thoroughly cleaning and scrubbing the sink (especially the garbage catch), letting it sit for 24 hours, and then carefully pouring boiling water over all the surfaces of the sink, including the lip. A porcelain sink cannot be kashered, but should be thoroughly cleaned and used with Pesah dish basins and dish drains, one each for dairy and for meat.

o. Non-Pesah dishes, pots, utensils, and hametz foods that have been sold (see below) should be separated, covered, or locked away to prevent accidental use.

## FOODS:

The Torah prohibits the ownership of *hametz* (flour, food or drink made from the prohibited species of leavened grain: wheat, oats, barley, rye or spelt) during Pesah. Ideally, we burn or remove all *hametz* from our premises. In some cases, however, this would cause prohibitive financial loss. In such cases, we arrange for the sale and subsequent repurchase after Pesah of the *hametz* to a non-Jew. The transfer is accomplished by appointing an agent, usually one's rabbi, to handle the sale. This must be considered a valid and legal transfer of ownership and thus the items sold must be separated and stored away from all other foods and supplies. At the end of the holiday, the agent arranges to repurchase the items on behalf of the owner, since the *hametz* at that time is again permitted. (One must wait until certain the repurchase has been transacted.) If ownership of the *hametz* was not transferred before the holiday, the use of any such *hametz* remains prohibited after the holiday and any such products should be given away to a non-Jewish food pantry.

Since the Torah prohibits the eating of *hametz* during Pesah, and since many common foods contain some *hametz*, guidance is necessary when shopping and preparing for

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**Pesah.** An item that is kosher all year round, that is made with no *hametz*, and is processed on machines used only for that item and nothing else (such as ground coffee) may be used with no special Pesah supervision. As we learn more about the processing of foods and the ingredients they contain, relying on the kashrut of a product for Pesah that does not hold a Pesah *hekhsher* – stamp of approval) may be problematic. Wherever possible, processed foods ought to have a *Kosher l'Pesah hekhsher* from a reliable source. Since that is not always possible, however, our guidelines reflect some acceptable alternatives. Any food that requires a *kosher l'Pesah hekhsher* must have a label that is integral to the package and should display the name of a recognizable, living supervising rabbi or creditable kosher supervision agency, if possible. If the label is not integral to the package or if there are questions regarding the label, the item should not be used without consulting a rabbi or religious authority.

## PROHIBITED FOODS:

Prohibited foods *hametz* include the following: leavened bread, cakes, biscuits, crackers, or coffees containing cereal derivatives (i.e. anything made with wheat, barley, oats, spelt, or rye). Any food containing these grains or derivatives of these grains (the five prohibited species for Pesah) is forbidden. Flavorings in foodstuffs are often derived from alcohol produced from one of these grains, rendering that food *hametz*. Such products require Pesah supervision.

Ashkenazic rabbinical authorities have added the following foods *kitniyot* to the above list of prohibited foods: rice, corn, soy, millet, beans, and peas. These and other plant foods (e.g. mustard, buckwheat, fennel, fenugreek, and sesame seeds) are not permitted on Pesah. Although many rabbinic authorities have prohibited the use of peanuts and peanut oil, the Conservative movement's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards has permitted their use and consumption on Pesah, provided that these items have proper kosher certification and do not contain any *hametz* ingredients. Most Sephardic authorities permit the use of all the *kitniyot* foods other than those that might have come in contact with the prohibited grains. Most Ashkenazic rabbinical authorities also forbid processed products derived from *kitniyot*, whether liquid

or solid. These might include, but are not limited to: corn sweetener, corn oil, soy oil, and ascorbic acid (vitamin C). Israeli products are often marked "contains *kitniyot*" and thus Ashkenazic Jews who do not use *kitniyot* need to be vigilant when purchasing Israeli products for Pesah.

## PERMITTED FOODS:

a. The following foods require no *kosher l'Pesah* label when purchased before or during Pesah: fresh fruits and vegetables; eggs; fresh fish (whole or gutted); fresh or frozen kosher meat other than chopped meat; whole (unground) spices and nuts, including whole or half pecans (not pieces); pure black, green, or white tea leaves or teabags; Nestea regular and decaffeinated unflavored tea; coffee (unflavored regular); baking soda and bicarbonate of soda.

b. The following items may be purchased before Pesah without a Pesah *hekhsher* but if bought during Pesah require a *hekhsher*: white milk, Tropicana 100% orange juice, filleted fish, frozen fruit (with no additives), pure white sugar (with no additives), olive oil (extra virgin only), non-iodized salt, quinoa (with no additional ingredients).

c. The following products require reliable *kosher l'Pesah* certification (regular kosher supervision is not sufficient), whether purchased before or during Pesah: all baked goods (matzah, Pesah cakes, matzah flour, farfel, matzah meal, and any other products containing matzah), 100% fruit juices, herbal teas, canned tuna, wine, vinegar, liquor, decaffeinated coffee and tea, dried fruits, oils, frozen uncooked vegetables and all frozen processed foods, candy, chocolate-flavored milk, ice cream, yogurt, cheeses, butter, and soda. (For Sephardic Jews, the presence of *kitniyot* in some of these products does not present a problem, as long as there is no *hametz*.) In some cases an onsite inspection of a local dairy performed by the *mara d'atra* (religious authority) may suffice to resolve potential questions. Any processed food bought during Pesah must have a *kosher l'Pesah* certification.

d. Any detergents, cleaners, etc. which are not a foodstuff and which are not eaten, may be used for Pesah and do not require a *hekhsher*. These items include: isopropyl alcohol, aluminum products, ammonia, coffee filters, baby oil, powder and ointment, bleach, charcoal, candles, contact paper, plastic cutlery, laundry and dish detergent, fabric softener, oven cleaner, paper bags, plates, wax paper, plastic wrap, polish, sanitizers, scouring pads, stain remover, and bottled water with no additives.

e. Medicines: Prescription medicines are permitted. Non-prescription pills and capsules are permitted; for liquids, check with your rabbi or religious authority.

Please contact your local Conservative rabbi or local religious authority if you have any questions.