

# Pesah Kashrut and Cleaning Guide

Excerpted from Torah Ve-Ahava Pesah Guide and Reader by Rabbi Haim Ovadia



We are grateful to Rabbi Haim Ovadia for allowing us to share this guide with the BJ community and invite you to consult his [complete guide](#) for further resources and halakhic sourcing.

The intent of this guide is to make your life easier, as HaShem intended for it to be. It will hopefully allow you to focus more on the spiritual experience of the Seder night, and spend less time, money, and energy, on unnecessary cleaning and on purchasing expensive certified kosher products. Even if you are not planning to spend Pesah at home this year, you might benefit from some general laws of Kashrut offered here.

## CLEANING THE HOUSE

Spring cleaning is fun, for some people, but it should not be confused with Pesah cleaning. When cleaning the house for Pesah, attention should be given only to places where edible hametz is used or stored: kitchen, pantry, garage, etc. The purpose of cleaning and searching for hametz is to:

- Avoid contact of hametz with the food we prepare and
- Prevent a case of eating hametz found on Pesah.

To the cleaning and searching, we add another protective measure: nullifying the hametz. For that reason, even if we missed a well-hidden hametz, no prohibition was transgressed. Before going through toys, removing books from shelves, and checking clothes' pockets, ask yourself these questions:

- What are the chances that I will find here a piece of hametz, clean and edible, which I will be tempted to eat upon seeing?
- What are the chances that an edible piece of hametz, whose flavor has not been spoiled, will be mixed into a hot dish made for Pesah?

If you can answer those two questions with "negligible or infinitesimal", abort mission and turn to more important things.

### Kitchen

You only need to clean cabinets and storage areas where food is stored and which you are going to use on Pesah. If only dishes, utensils, paper goods, or non-hametz foods are stored there, there is no need to clean. If food is stored there but you are not going to use it on Pesah, seal the cabinet and rely on the sale of hametz.

### Cooking before Pesah

If the flavor of hametz was mixed with Pesah food before Pesah, the flavor is nullified. You can, therefore, clean your kitchen the way you normally do, and then, before Pesah, use your everyday dishes and utensils to make freezable food from kosher-for-Pesah ingredients. Freeze and enjoy on Pesah.

## KASHERING THE KITCHEN

### Dishes and utensils

The reason for kashering dishes is the concern that flavor absorbed from hametz will be released

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into the kosher-for-Pesah food. That concern was valid in the past, when dishes were made from porous low-quality materials. In today's modern kitchen, this is almost non-existent. Therefore, unless you know for sure that even after thoroughly cleaned a utensil transfers flavors from one dish to another, you can use it for Pesah after washing it regularly. You can wash by hand or in the dishwasher and then use utensils made from the following materials, even if used for hametz immediately before cleaning: Glass, plastic, metal, chinaware, Corelle, Bakelite, silicone, stoneware, Teflon.

The only dishes which should be put aside are earthenware dishes (which are not widely used in the common kitchen.) Wood utensils can be cleaned thoroughly, and if you are concerned about flavor absorbed in them, soak in water with detergent for a couple of hours.

When in doubt whether dishes or utensils absorb flavor, conduct this fun experiment: cook a batch of hot peppers (ghost, habanero, jalapeno) with the strongest spices you have. Rinse the dish and cook in it bland rice or pasta. Taste the rice or pasta.

### Appliances

**Oven:** Clean regularly. Wash racks. Turn the oven to 450° Fahrenheit and leave on for 20 minutes. Avoid the self-cleaning feature as it operates on extremely high temperatures and would ruin the oven. (A note on using an oven for meat and dairy: The smallest standard ovens today are big enough, by halakhic standards, to be used simultaneously for meat and dairy, as long as the dishes do not splatter. If you feel uncomfortable doing so, you can use the oven for those dishes consecutively, with no need for cleaning, waiting for it to cool down, or kashering between the two dishes.)

**Stove top (Gas, electric, glass, Corning, Halogen, or Ceran) and broilers, grills, BBQs:** clean regularly. Turn on high for 10 minutes. (Non-kosher BBQ: if you are traveling and would like to use a public BBQ, on Pesah or year round, it is preferable to cover it with thick aluminum foil after it is well heated.)

**Microwave oven:** Clean the turntable and the oven regularly. Put in the oven half a cup of water with a drop of dish soap and a wooden stick (to avoid explosions), for 90 seconds. During the year, there is no need for separate microwave ovens. In case a meat or dairy dish splattered on the oven walls, clean it regularly. There is no need to wait between uses.

**Shabbat Plata (hot plate/blech):** Clean regularly and heat for 10 minutes.

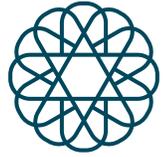
**Dishwasher:** Can be used for Pesah after the last round of hametz dishes was washed, with no waiting period or cleaning necessary. For good feeling, you could run it empty for the shortest cycle and clean the filter. (During the year: There is no need to have separate dishwashers for meat and dairy. Meat and dairy dishes can be washed together, even without removing chunks of food from them, because the detergent is very powerful and any flavor "absorbed" in the dishes is utterly destroyed.)

**Refrigerator, freezer, warming drawers, coffee machines:** clean regularly.

**Toaster oven, toaster:** clean like an oven and leave on high heat for ten minutes.

**Upright smoker:** Run one cycle of burn-through.

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**Sandwich maker, waffle maker:** If you need to use those on Pesah, clean them as you normally do and then turn on high for ten minutes. (Make sure that the Teflon is not scratched, and flavor is not transferred from one food to the next. If there is a need, test it by making a strongly flavored waffle mix, baking it, and then, after cleaning, baking another mix, this time bland.)

**Electric knife, KitchenAid, food processors, including blades and receptacles:** Clean regularly.

**Serving dishes:** all modern serving dishes today do not absorb flavor and could therefore be used for Pesah after a regular wash. This includes Corelle brand and chinaware. Glazed dishes, even if chipped can be used in the same manner, though caution must be taken. (A note on flavor absorption: Color is not taste. Plastic utensils and Tupperware sometimes retain color from spices such as paprika and turmeric, but that does not mean that flavor is also absorbed. When in doubt, put hot flavorless rice in the colored utensil and then taste it—before Pesah, of course!)

**Baby bottles and paraphernalia, baby high chair and tray:** clean regularly.

**Table and benchtops:** clean regularly.

**Dentures, bite plates, braces, water filters:** No special action required.

There is no need to clean inside or behind vents in ovens, microwave ovens, and refrigerators, or remove, as some Kashrut guides recommend electric panels and tubes. Remember that the cleaning is performed to prevent the possibility of an edible piece of hametz mixing into the food. Ask yourself before approaching any nook or cranny if there is a chance that the hametz monster will crawl out of there and latch itself to your food.

**Sinks and countertops:** As previously explained, the concern when kashering is that flavor absorbed from a hametz dish will be released into a Pesah dish. The only way hametz flavor can be transferred from sinks and countertops to your food, is if boiling pasta water spilled or a hot loaf of bread was placed on them, and then hot Pesah food was put directly on that surface (a piece of meat, for example). No one eats foods which were placed in that manner on countertops or in sinks, and in any case, they do not absorb flavor. Therefore, there is no need to have separate sinks for meat and dairy, and there is no need to kasher them. Clean regularly, and if it makes you feel good, pour hot water. There is no need to seal off cabinets with all-year dishes, even if you are not going to use those dishes on Pesah.

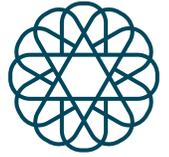
Decorative, non-edible hametz, such as pasta projects, colored and glued, or colorful pasta in sealed glass jars, does not need to be removed before Pesah.

### Cleaning Supplies

Kosher-for-Pesah certification is needed only for edible products. Since no one serves Windex shakes with Ajax sandwiches, no cleaning supplies need supervision, and stamping them with any Kashrut symbol borders with deception. For good feeling, you might want to use new dish-washing sponges for Pesah.

It seems obvious that all paper, aluminum foil, and plastic products do not need Kashrut supervision. However, I have to mention it here because some Kashrut organization claim that paper goods coated with wax and paper bags are not kosher for Pesah. To clarify: all paper goods, foil, Styrofoam, and plastic disposables are kosher for Pesah.

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**Medicine:** all medicine is kosher for Pesah.

**Vitamins:** If the pills are swallowed with water, they can be used on Pesah. Chewable vitamins: if the ingredients do not include one of the four grains (wheat, barley, spelt, rye), they can be used on Pesah. Cosmetics and hygienic products, including oral hygiene: all are kosher for Pesah since none is edible, including Listerine strips.

**Pet food:** The only pet food which can present a problem is dog food, and within the variety of dog foods, the only category which should be preferably avoided on Pesah is baked goods. All other foods, even if grains are mixed in them, are non-edible for humans, and therefore can be used by pet owners for their pets.

## Edible Items

**Open packages, bottles, spices, and spreads:** if containers or bottles are used to pour from, and no utensils are inserted into them, or if you know that only clean utensils were inserted, they can be used on Pesah. Though some claim that spices, salt, olive, and wine which were used over boiling hametz have become hametz because of the vapor absorbed in them, this is not true, and they can be used on Pesah.

**Rabbi Abadi's list:** A comprehensive list of products which do not bear a kosher-for-Pesah stamp but are kosher for Pesah is available at [www.kashrut.org](http://www.kashrut.org). Here is sample of the list:

- *Alcoholic beverages:* all alcoholic beverages which are not made of grains or grapes are kosher for Pesah with no need for supervision, including potato, cane, or corn vodka, and agave tequila.
- *Baby food:* most of Beech Nut mixes of fruits, vegetables, and corn or rice cereal are kosher for Pesah, check the list for details.
- *Cereals:* Chex—Apple Cinnamon; Chocolate; Cinnamon; Corn; Honey Nut; Rice; Kellogg's Gluten Free Rice Krispies; Cocoa Pebbles; Fruity Pebbles.
- *Yogurt:* Many of Dannon and Yoplait flavored yogurts are kosher for Pesah—details in the list.
- *Ice Cream:* Many flavors of Breyer's, Edy's, and Haagen Dazs are kosher for Pesah—details in the list.
- *Ingredients:* refer to Rabbi Abadi's list for kosher ingredients (hundreds of them!). In that manner, you will be able to determine whether a product is kosher based on the ingredients listed on the package.
- *Snacks and candies:* Baby Ruth; Butterfinger bar; Bit-O-Honey; Nips; Oh Henry!; Raisinets; Bamba;

There is much more on the list. Check it out.

**Flour:** all flour is kosher for Pesah, even if the grains were processed with water, but it can only be used for baking matzah. The Shulhan Arukh recommends buying kosher-for-Pesah flour, but comments that if it is not available one can use any flour. The exorbitant prices of kosher-for-Pesah flour today put it under the category of "not available". You could use this flour to bake matzah at home, as long as you observe the dough to make sure it does not rise.

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**Fresh and frozen fish:** Kosher all year round when purchased from a major chain (Costco, Stop and Shop, Whole Foods etc.) or from a reputable fishmonger. The fish can be bought on Pesah.

**Spices:** all 100% pure spices can be used on Pesah.

**Oil, milk, plain yogurt, hard and soft cheeses, soft drinks, jams and jellies** do not need Pesah supervision.

**Vinegar:** When buying vinegar, check the label to see if it is grain vinegar. If so, contact the manufacturer to find out which grain because in many cases it is corn.

**Vinegar as an ingredient:** When vinegar is listed as an ingredient and it is bought before Pesah, one can rely on the fact that the single word “vinegar” on the label implies fruit vinegar.

**Tea:** all tea bags and tea leaves are kosher for Pesah.

**All pickles (unless you know with certainty grain vinegar was used), olives, frozen vegetables, canned vegetables, dried fruits and of course fresh fruits and vegetables** are kosher for Pesah.

**Coffee:** All coffee, including instant and granulated is kosher for Pesah. You can also buy whole bean coffee and grind it at the store. **Starbucks:** you can buy unflavored coffee from Starbucks or similar establishments on Pesah. For flavored coffee, and K-cups, check ingredients.

**Pure peanut butter, almond butter etc.** are kosher for Pesah, including the DIY mixes available at Whole Foods.

### OATS, GRAINS AND LEGUMES

**Oats:** The Mishnah mentions five grains which can become hametz. Four of them are identified without doubt: חטה, שעורה, כוסמת, שיבון—are, respectively, wheat, barley, spelt, and rye. Regarding the fifth grain there is confusion, and the identification of its Hebrew name—שועל שכולת, with oats, has been contested. I am presenting here the information, not as a ruling in the matter.

Rabbi Yitzhak Abadi does not consider oats to be one of the five grains but does not officially allow their use on Pesah. Professor Yehudah Felix, the leading authority on Biblical and Talmudic fauna and flora, argues that the Mishnaic species is not oats but a sub-specie of barley which contains gluten and ferments with water. Yosef Efrati claims that in an experiment conducted for him by Professor Moshe Zacks, oats became hametz.

The arguments against the identification of shibbolet shu'al with oats are:

- a) Oats were unknown in Israel at the time of the Mishnah, so the rabbis could not have referred to them.
- b) Oats do not contain gluten and do not behave like the other four grains (oatmeal does not rise). They do contain avenin, to which about 15% of celiac patients are sensitive.

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In addition, there is the visual/etymological aspect. Oats stalks resemble wheat and barley, but so does rice. The name shibbolet shu'al means fox's stalk, which probably referred to a grain with long hairs resembling the fox's tail. That description does not fit oats but rather wild barley, which supports Professor Felix's argument.

**Legumes and beans:** Ashkenazi Jews have a custom of not eating legumes on Pesah. Today, globalization has turned Jewish population worldwide into one big community, and people are aware of each other's customs. For that reason, Sepharadim and Ashkenazim can adopt the customs of each other, but great caution must be practiced not to infringe upon norms of the community or the family, and either do the transition privately or gradually. This includes using legumes on Pesah.

Those who decide to adhere to the custom should know that the original custom, starting in 14th-century Europe, applied only to flour of certain legumes which could have been mistaken for flour made of hametz grains. Peanuts, soy beans, corn, and quinoa, which were not known in Europe at the time, cannot therefore be part of the custom. Similarly, fresh beans and legumes, or liquids distilled from legumes, such as corn oil, corn syrup, or saki, as well as legumes by-products mixed with other foods, were never a part of the original Ashkenazi custom of avoiding legumes on Pesah.

It is customary among some Moroccan Jews not to eat rice. Some believe that they decided to follow the Ashkenazi custom, but Rabbi Yosef Messas explains that the custom had practical roots. At the time, only whole grain rice was used. It was shipped, stored, and sold with wheat and the two could easily mix. This concern does not apply to white rice, and today there is no concern even with whole grain because there is great caution not to mix grains for concern of allergies. An additional reason that Moroccan Jews avoided rice on Pesah is that it never was a major staple of the Moroccan cuisine.

In general, all rice is kosher for Pesah. There is no need to check rice before Pesah since storage and shipping conditions have changed, but it should be checked briefly before cooking on Pesah. In the rare case that a grain of wheat is found in rice on Pesah it should be thrown away.

### SHOPPING FOR THE SEDER

**Matzah:** there is no need to buy matzah marked as shmurah, since all commercial matzahs are Shmurah. The term shmurah means supervised, and the difference between the shmurah and "regular" matzah, is that Shmurah is supervised from the moment of harvesting and the "regular" from the moment of grinding. One is not more kosher than the other, only more expensive, and it is preferable to buy the less expensive matzah and give the difference to charity.

Alternatively, you can make matzah at home. Any flour is kosher for Pesah, and since it takes a mixture and flour a couple of hours to rise, you should not be worried that it will become hametz under your hands. Even if you want to keep the 18 minutes rule, it is easy since the 18 minutes start from the moment you let go of the dough. As long as you are kneading, the Talmud says, the dough cannot become hametz, and it would take much less to make the dough into matzah.

In this manner, you can have soft matzah, which will be easy to cut and wrap.



**Maror:** any bitter herb will do, but there is no need to suffer. Even though today's lettuce is much sweeter than it was forty years ago, it still counts as bitter herbs. When cleaning lettuce or any other leafy vegetables, there is no need to go on a crazy bug-hunt. Wash the leaves well and look for tiny flies or mosquitos, but not for tiny bugs which require a magnifying glass or intense light.

**Salt water:** I suggest you give a try to my tradition. Babylonian Jews use a mixture of lemon and orange juice to dip the celery and the egg in. It is delicious.

**Haroset:** Moroccan tradition—crushed dates with wine, cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg; Iraqi tradition—date honey (silan) with ground nuts or peanuts.

**Karpas:** the best vegetable to use for karpas is celery, which is called karpas in Hebrew. Celery stalks, dipped in lemon-orange juice are delicious and nutritious.

### KASHERING DISHES IN MODERN TIMES

The requirement to make dishes kosher was originally mentioned in the Torah regarding dishes looted from non-Jews at war. It is based on the notion that the flavor of the non-kosher food was absorbed in the dishes. If they will be used without Kashering, the flavor will be exuded into the food and will make it non-kosher. There is a simple rule which governs the process of kashering dishes: פולטו כך כבולעו —It exudes the same way it absorbs.

The meaning of this rule is that if a certain dish is used with boiling liquids, the flavor should be extracted from it by using boiling water. If it is used directly on the fire, it has to be heated, empty, to a higher temperature. There is an extensive discussion in the halakhic literature regarding the fine details of this requirement, but they all depend on the assumption that the dish absorbed flavor from the non-kosher food. This factor must be examined in order to determine how to make dishes kosher.

There could be several circumstances when kashering would be necessary, for example: for Pesah, in case of a mixture of dairy and meat, when staying at a hotel room or at an Airbnb.

When discussing material quality of dishes in the modern kitchen, we have to take into consideration the tremendous progress achieved in the field since the industrial revolution. Some materials, such as clay, were used in antiquity but are not used today, while others, such as stainless steel, Teflon, Bakelite (poly-oxy-benzyl-methyl-englycol-anhydride), plastic, and Pyrex, are new inventions.

The Halakhic literature recognizes two systems for determining kashering method. One is the absorbent/non-absorbent divide, and the other is by material: wood/metal/clay and so on. Since modern materials differ from their namesakes in antiquity, it is understood that when we want to define the status of a certain dish, we should use the general halakhic yardstick of absorption and not the material label for the dish.

Here are a few documented examples of physical changes in the absorption of dishes:

- The Talmud speaks of “sweating dishes” in reference to dishes in which the food travels through the dish and can be seen from the outside—this never happens with modern dishes.



- The Mishna says that liquids are absorbed in the utensils containing them, at a level between 1.5% and 15% of the original volume of the liquid
- In today's utensils the absorption is less than 1:175,000 or 0.00000006%.
- Rabenu Nissim writes that when kashering many dishes one has to change the water frequently because the residue exuded from the dishes could turn the water into thick sauce.

This also does not happen today. There are opinions that measuring the level of absorption in utensils should be conducted with scientific methods, and that even then the results might not be reliable. We know, however, that the Talmud says that in order to check whether flavor was absorbed in a utensil or a dish, one could taste it, in case it is not a forbidden flavor. For example, if terumah (sacred food which only the kohanim could eat) was cooked with regular food, a kohen would taste the food. If it tasted like the terumah, it would be given to the kohanim, and if not, regular people could eat it. In case the flavor is forbidden, such as in a mixture of dairy and meat, we ask a non-Jewish chef to taste it.

The famous rule of 1:60 ratio between the ingredients of the mixture is used only if there is no non-Jew available to taste it, or if the two ingredients have the same flavor, for example, kosher and non-kosher fat. The statement of the Talmud that we rely on one's taste buds is supported by the rulings of great scholars, who say that laws which depend on human senses are defined by these very senses and not by scientific tools. Here are a couple of examples:

Rabbi Ovadia Yosef says that the sharpness of a slaughtering knife is determined by touch, and that the question of whether a matzah is well baked is determined by our eyesight. Similarly, Rabbi Yosef Messas writes that looking for bugs in fruits and vegetables should be done with the naked eye and not by magnifying glass or other tools.

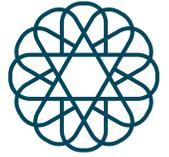
Following the guidelines of the Talmud and these great scholars, we can now say that in order to check whether a certain dish or utensil absorbs flavors, we are allowed, or even obligated, to rely on our taste buds. Here is how it is done: Have a person with a healthy sense of flavor conduct the following experiment:

1. In a pot, cook a pound of habanero peppers with oil and garlic;
2. Empty the pot and rinse it thoroughly with detergent the way you usually wash it;
3. In the clean pot, cook a pound or bland rice, with no salt or spices;
4. Taste the rice.

If you feel the spicy flavor, it means that the pot absorbed it from the peppers and exuded it into the rice. If not, it means that there is no absorption. If you do not want to conduct this experiment, it is fine. It has already been done. With the exception of wood and earthenware, the dishes in the modern kitchen do not absorb flavor. This is true regarding all types of metal, plastic, glass, and Pyrex.

As explained above, the modern kitchen uses dishes, utensils, and tableware, which are nonabsorbent. To that we have to add that even if some flavor has been absorbed, if the utensil has not been used for 24 hours, that flavor which is considered spoiled and unwanted (לפגם טעם נותן). We also use very powerful detergents and scrubbers, so even if there was an absorbed flavor, it would have been overcome, if not completely removed, by the detergent.

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The implication of these facts and rules is that once we know a certain dish is non-absorbent we could use it after it was cleaned in the regular method, without boiling or burning. This is true regarding kashering a dish for Pesah, converting it from meat to dairy and vice versa, and using dishes at a hotel.

The idea of converting dishes from dairy to meat might seem strange to some of the readers for two reasons. One is that while the Shulhan Arukh allows kashering dishes from meat to dairy, the Magen Avraham, who is followed by most Ashkenazi Jews, established a practice to avoid doing so. The second is that today kitchenware is mass produced and most people can afford to have two sets of everything, so the question of such conversion is highly uncommon.

However, the fact that one is not aware of a certain law does not invalidate that law. As a matter of fact, Sepharadim have been following this ruling for quite a long time now. We have been using glass dishes for both dairy and meat, with only washing in between. The same is true when kashering glass dishes for Pesah. Only washing is necessary, which means that the clean glass dishes in your cabinets are ready for Pesah.

Rabbi Ovadia Yosef stated this law very forcefully and applied it to switching even cookware from meat to dairy:

We [Sepharadim] do not follow the ruling of the Magen Avraham, and we convert meat dishes to dairy and vice versa by kashering them. We are therefore allowed to use glass dishes for both meat and dairy as long as we wash them in between. This follows the ruling of Shulhan Arukh that everyday glass utensils need only be washed in order to be kosher for Pesah. I accordingly ruled that one can use a Pyrex dish to cook meat, and then clean it thoroughly and use it to boil milk and vice versa. There is no concern [as some have suggested] that there will be confusion or forgetfulness [and that people will cook meat and dairy together or will forget to clean the dishes.]

Rabbi Ovadia Yosef goes on to say that if an Ashkenazi Jew would like to follow this ruling, which is supported by many great scholars, no one can prevent him or her from doing so. As discussed above, and as I heard personally from Hakham Yaakov Peretz, the head of the Semikha program at the Shehebar Sephardic Center, the same rule applies to pots, silverware, plastic ware and all utensils. Only thorough rinsing is necessary to make them kosher for Pesah or to use them at a host's house with your kosher ingredients.

There is of course the element of disgust that many would feel when thinking that a dish was used for non-kosher food, as well as the inertia of centuries-old traditions. This is perfectly understood and respected, as the halakha stated here does not force people to follow it, but rather to offer options to those who need them. One possibility to respect one's tradition and gut feeling would be to pour hot water from an electric kettle on the utensils which needs to be kashered.