

**Activity: Plant Care** **Goal: Psychological/Emotional** **Populations: Other Specialized Populations & Mental Health**

## TH Activity Plan – Adopting a Room Plant: Growing a Sense of Place in Residential Treatment

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**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Participants will adopt an indoor plant, learn to care for & keep in their room while in residential treatment.

### THERAPEUTIC GOALS

**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Expand horticulture knowledge; exercise power of choice; develop strategies for building a daily routine; foster a sense of place and belonging

**Physical:** Enhance fine motor skills

**Psychological/Emotional:** Develop strategies for self-care; practice identifying emotions; build self-efficacy; develop personal connection to nature

**Sensory:** Enhance mood through sensory stimulation

**Social:** Engage in social connection & community building; practice listening and sharing with others

### Materials

A variety of small houseplants  
(at least three different varieties)

Watering can

Optional: informational cards  
on plant species

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Collect a variety of small houseplants (at least three types) that are engaging to senses. Confirm with program directors & counselors that clients can keep houseplants in their rooms. Set up chairs and/or mats on the floor in a circle. Preferred activity location is outdoors, but session can be delivered inside.
2. Facilitator begins session by placing all flats of houseplants in the center of the circle on tables for easy access & viewing. Facilitator then identifies each plant, including any fun plant facts & care level for each. Facilitator shares a personal reflection with one of the plants to inspire participants to do the same. ie: "This is my favorite plant right now because it seems to grow out in all directions & has a few rough leaves, which is how I too am growing in my life & managing my emotional 'rough' parts."
3. Participants choose one plant. Everyone is encouraged to connect to the plants arranged on tables by picking up, touching & smelling. Participants are encouraged to take time selecting & feeling each plant out, sensing which one "speaks" or stands out to them. Participants return to their seats.
4. Time for sharing - facilitator can again highlight a personal identification with a specific plant & encourage participants to share why they picked their plant. Sharing is, of course, optional.
5. Caring for the plant. Talk about how a plant can be a reflection of how one cares for self, daily care routines, & fears of caring for the plant. Plant care needs (watering, sunlight, pruning) are covered. If time & space allows, suggest everyone waters their plant before taking to their respective room.
6. Conclude the session with time for questions & reflection – did they enjoy the session, learn new plant information, feel more connected to their space, feel excited about the plant care activity?

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** This session was originally delivered as a TH activity for women ages 18+ within the specific setting of a community non-profit treatment center for [substance use](#) and/or co-occurring disorders. This population can include people experiencing trauma, substance use, PTSD, other mental health related challenges, homelessness, displacement and recent incarceration. This activity can incorporate multiple therapeutic goals including fostering a sense of belonging and sense of place, developing listening skills, identifying and coping with emotions, developing strategies for self-care and daily routine, and gaining general horticulture skills and knowledge. The primary focus is on plant care as a reflection of self-care, introducing the foundations of a structured daily routine that includes tending to both oneself and a plant. The plant that participants choose becomes their personal ‘room plant’. By adopting a personal ‘room plant,’ participants establish a meaningful, consistent presence within their environment, creating their own sense of place.

This activity also introduces the concept of creating a safe space whereby plants can create an environment, in this context, in an unfamiliar or challenging treatment setting. Some may extrapolate that having plants and caring for them can create a personal space anywhere, not just as a one-time activity in residential treatment facility, and that this can be a strategy for self-care with several components (safe space, self-care linked to plant nurturing). Creating a sense of place using plants as a key element, in various settings, is being used in TH practice.

The scope of this activity can be broad depending on participants and can include cultivating a mindful space for participants to express and be heard/validated. The session can provide an opportunity to build confidence and self-efficacy through the act of caring for a living entity. Therapeutic techniques (use of self, hands-on experiential plant activities, therapeutic communication, modelling), as well as therapeutic goals, benefits and outcomes will vary by participant and what they are able to comprehend and accept during the session.

**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS:** Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Only non-toxic plants and ones that do not have hallucinogenic properties should be used for this activity. Do not use [psychoactive plants](#) like *datura* species, *salvia divinorum*, or various morning-glory species including *turbina corymbosa*. Consideration for accessibility and mobility around the flats of plants is important. Potting medium should not have fertilizer pellets which can be inappropriately ingested.

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** Confirming with facility personnel that residents are allowed to keep plants in their rooms is essential prior to session. In many community non-profit residential treatment facilities, bringing in outside items is often restricted. Exceptions for materials used in therapeutic sessions may be approved, making this session’s activity a unique experience.

Adopting a personal plant for their room gives participants the opportunity to bring a plant—a piece of nature—into their personal space and care for it throughout their stay. Participants are also encouraged to take their plant with them when they transition out of the residential center, reinforcing continuity and personal growth. This session, or subsequent ones can emphasize the importance of resiliency - trying again with another plant if the original plant does not survive. If resources allow, participants can be given another plant for a second attempt, reinforcing perseverance and learning through experience. The TH activity is versatile for all populations; this activity was written based on a very specific population within community non-profit centers. A series of activities related to adopting a room plant can provide additional benefit extending the theme of plant care-self-care, for example, a monthly follow up session focused on nurturing and examining how plants are doing, or repotting plants or propagation – creating new entities/beginnings with plants.

#### **REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:**

Fleming, L., & Creus, E. (2024). [Therapeutic techniques applicable to people-plant programming](#). *Cultivate*, 4(3).  
National Alliance on Mental Health. (2025). [Residential treatment](#). *Nami.org*.  
National Institute of Drug Abuse. (2018). [Understanding drug use and addiction drugfacts](#). *NIDA.NIH.gov*.

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2025.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2024.