

Activity: Food Goal: Cognitive/Intellectual Populations: Mental Health

TH Activity Plan – Blackberry Iced Tea - Depression

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Photo by Ve Eat Cook Bake



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will make blackberry iced tea as a social, nutritional and healthy lifestyle strategy.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Identify lifestyle choices that could be improved; learn about depression & sadness

Physical: Identify physiological symptoms of sadness or depression

Psychological/Emotional: Express emotions in an acceptable manner; develop strategies to improve nutrition

Sensory: Experience sense of taste & smell; distinguish between flavors

Social: Create a sense of belonging; practice prosocial communication

Materials

Makes 6 servings

2 cups blackberries
3 tablespoons sugar
5 tea bags + kettle
6 cups water + 3 cups for later
1 lemon sliced
Fresh rosemary sprigs
Ice cubes
Forks, bowls, measuring cups,
colander, cups, spoons, pitcher

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials. Wash blackberries. Pre-cut lemon. Determine how materials will be divided amongst participants so that all are involved in the hands-on activity.
2. Facilitator begins session by welcoming participants to a blackberry tea party, beginning with making the iced tea. The materials including fresh blackberries are on the table.
3. Facilitator distributes the written recipe & verbally runs through the steps. The group is divided (or divides itself) into small groups. Materials are distributed, asking people to help do this.
4. The recipe (below) is followed, with participants taking turns with the kettle, working cooperatively in pairs, & in these small groups interacting/communicating. Tea is refrigerated to cool down.
5. Once blackberry tea has been made, participants serve it to themselves, & sit together for conversation about making it, tea flavor preferences, & lifestyle choices that make them feel better (like tea & quiet reflection, participating in small group activity, improved nutrition – tea vs soda). Topics related to symptoms of depression & strategies for coping can be included.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: “Depression can cause severe symptoms that affect how a person feels, thinks, and handles daily activities, such as sleeping, eating, and working” ([NIMH, 2025](#)). It can affect all ages, genders, and races. Health professionals believe that biological, genetic, psychological and environmental factors contribute to depression. Depression can co-occur with other health issues including chronic illness, chronic pain, mental disorders, heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

Different types of depression are recognized by medical and therapeutic professionals. Each has distinct treatment methods, and for some, medication is prescribed. Major depression and persistent depressive disorder (dysthymia or dysthymic disorder), as well as bipolar disorder, seasonal affective disorder and

depression with symptoms of psychosis (hallucinations or delusions) fall within this health category. Women can experience depression related to premenstruation, perinatal and perimenopausal cycles (NIH, 2025).

Understanding symptoms and types of depression is essential for HT/TH practitioners and often may involve or require co-treatment with medical doctors and psychotherapists using cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and interpersonal therapy (IPT). Symptoms of depression vary by individual and can include sad or anxious moods, feelings of hopelessness, irritability, guilt, restlessness, as well as fatigue, changes to sleep, appetite, physical pain, and thoughts of suicide. Part of treatment should involve assessment, where these symptoms would be identified and diagnoses provided. One type of treatment that may be recommended might be HT or TH, depending on the severity of the depression, service provider (mental health facility), or availability of interdisciplinary treatment teams. It is recommended that TH practitioners train with, or co-treat with professionals specializing in depression when delivering services for people with clinically diagnosed depression.

Therapeutic horticulture sessions like making blackberry iced tea will not resolve depression. Activities like this can aid individuals or groups in identifying lifestyle choices that can contribute to healthier nutrition, social activities, and ways to express sadness or other emotions during an enjoyable hands-on plant-based activities. TH may be one component of a treatment plan involving other treatment modalities listed previously. In particular, activities that support positive social interactions, often a difficult challenge for people experiencing depression, can provide relief, mood shifts from negative to positive, and practice with prosocial behavior.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts.

Medical permission to consume blackberry iced tea should be obtained. [Some fruit seeds contain cyanogenic compounds](#) that when chewed, crushed or consumed in large quantities can be harmful. Swallowing a few whole seeds is generally considered safe. Blackberry seeds may pose a swallowing or digestion issue for some, as may sugar. As with all TH activities where participants will taste or eat plants, allergies, swallowing issues or contraindications with medication need to be identified prior to session. Caution with hot water.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: The blackberry iced tea recipe is from [Fresh from Florida](#) which promotes the use of fresh Florida produce. Other recipes and fruit can be substituted. Safety considerations may vary with substitutions. Blackberries are most plentiful in late spring with the peak season in July and August. Blackberries can last 1-2 days at room temperature, 5-7 days refrigerated and stored in an airtight container, and 9 months frozen (typically recommended that a cup of sugar be added before freezing to preserve beyond 6 months).

Blackberry Iced Tea

Mash blackberries with sugar using a fork in a large mixing bowl. Bring 6 cups water to slight boil, add tea bags, cover & steep for 10 min. Remove tea bags, adding the tea to the blackberry mixture. Stir. Set aside or refrigerate to room temperature or cooler, then strain the tea through a colander before serving. Add the additional 3 cups water to the tea, & serve with ice & garnishes.

[The nutritional value of blackberries](#) is considered high, with vitamins C, K, and E and large amounts of dietary fiber (Xu et al., 2025). Researchers suggest numerous phytochemicals like anthocyanin and phenolic compounds in the fruit hold the potential to prevent chronic and inflammatory diseases, cancers and age-related cognitive disorders (Kaume, Howard, & Devareddy, 2012).

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. (2025). [Fresh from Florida](#).
NIMH.NIH, (2025). [Depression](#). National Institute of Mental Health.
Psychology Today. (2025). [What is depression?](#)
Xu, T., Yin, Y., Samtani, JB. et al. (2025). [Blackberry fruit: Nutrition facts and health benefits](#). Virginia State University Virginia Cooperative Extension.

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