

Activity: Food/Cooking Goal: Physical Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Blueberry Activities

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Photo by Unsplash

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Materials

Wild or cultivated blueberries

Materials necessary for the specific TH activity (trowels, shovels, baskets)

Gloves, wipes

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants can participate in a variety of activities where blueberries are the primary plant of focus.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Explore the nutritional attributes of blueberries; understand the term superfood for nutrient-dense foods

Physical: Harvest & consume blueberries; use fruit to address hunger cravings

Psychological/Emotional: Consider the historic/cultural impact of blueberries in communities like Nova Scotia, Washington state, Mississippi

Sensory: Savor the taste, smell & visual appeal of blueberries

Social: Participate in a group activity where blueberries are the focal point; learn about blueberry's ethnobotany/cultural history

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Facilitator reviews the list of TH activities, determining which ones are appropriate for the populations/participants they will be working with.
2. Facilitator begins session by introducing the TH activity where blueberries are the main focus of the hands-on activity. Activities begin.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Blueberries are a versatile and nutritious plant recognized as a superfood. They can be the focus of therapeutic horticulture programming offering activities and health goals-outcomes across populations.

Nutrition goals/TH activities: Tasting & eating blueberries; life skills preparing nutrient dense recipes with the fruit; nutrition literacy/education re blueberry ingredients in teas, breads, infused water and salads.

Social health goals/TH activities: Blueberry socials; field trips picking wild or cultivated blueberries; jam-making parties at community kitchens or urban farms; establishing blueberry plants as perennials in home or community gardens; literal and symbolic “putting down” roots in a garden/community; sensory stimulation tasting berries as a group activity.

Psychological health goals/TH activities: Discussion promoting childhood reminiscences about blueberry picking; reflection/discussion of (blue) color as a mood descriptor; blueberries as a positive connection to nature, and to (Nova Scotia) geographic history as sense of place; positive self-help strategy of eating nutritious foods.

Emotional health goals/TH activities: Consuming blueberries as a positive health option responding to emotional eating or cravings; creative expression using plant pounding (blue color transfers onto fabric) or as anger or stress release activity; practicing positive behavior nurturing blueberry plants.

Vocational health goals/TH activities: Growing/harvesting/grafting blueberries as vocational skills, hobby or business activity; making products like soaps, breads & teas using blueberries.

“The health benefits of blueberries are unique, primarily due to the rare pigments that they contain. These pigments, called anthocyanins, are responsible for the distinct violet-blue color of the berry and contain antioxidant compounds. In fact, wild blueberries have the highest levels of antioxidants compared to most common fruits and vegetables (Wild Blueberry Producers Association, 2019). As well, blueberries contain approximately 7-21 mg of ascorbic acid for every 100 grams of fruit (Kalt and Dufour 1997). Other health benefits include lowering the risk of heart disease, treatment of urinary tract infections, and relieving eyestrain.

These significant health benefits have made blueberries a popular food staple. Wild blueberries are Nova Scotia’s largest fruit crop with more than 40 million pounds grown annually (Wild Blueberry Producers Association, 2019). Of note are the food pathways blueberries provide; many indigenous peoples, such as Cree and Métis folks, use the berry while making pemmican, a food made from lean dried ground meat and animal fat. Blueberries are often found in smoothie bowls, baked goods, and can be stirred into oatmeal for an extra nutrient boost. With the increase in popularity of frozen blueberries, and its anticarcinogenic properties, this berry is quickly becoming a year-round favorite for many individuals” (Marcaccio, 2019).

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: For the diverse number of activities involving blueberries listed here, safety considerations for tools and TH delivery sites need to be reviewed prior to sessions. Allergies or food sensitivities to blueberries should be determined prior to activities.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: “The wild blueberry plants of Nova Scotia are a lowbush variety with the scientific name *Vaccinium angustifolium*... highbush blueberry plants, *Vaccinium corymbosum*, also grown in Canada... must be cultivated (wild blueberries are not a cultivated crop). [Wild blueberries] grow naturally from pre-existing plants and spread through underground runners referred to as rhizomes. These runners grow slowly, and as such it can take many years for a blueberry field to expand... Since [wild blueberries are] perennial, growers do not have to till or reseed the soil. The plant is grown on a two-year cycle, with the first year focused on growth and the second year on harvesting... Wild blueberries thrive in clear, level lands that contain well-draining, acidic soil, specifically with a pH between 4.5 and 5.0... The Government of Canada has identified 29 common species of weeds that can overtake wild blueberry fields, a list that includes plants such as black bulrush, narrow-leaved goldenrod, and wild rose (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, n.d.)” (Marcaccio, 2019).

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. (n.d.). Can you recognize these weeds of blueberry fields and do you know how to control them? *Government of Canada*.

Kalt, W. & Dufour, D. (1997). Health functionality of blueberries. *HortTechnology*, 7(3), 216-221.

Wild Blueberry Producers Association of Nova Scotia (2019). Welcome. <https://www.nswildblueberries.com/>

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2023.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2023.