## Activity: Plant Care   Goal: Cognitive   Populations: All

# TH Activity Plan – Care of Houseplants

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**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Participants will learn how to care for houseplants. This can be a single or multi-session activity.

**THERAPEUTIC GOALS:**
**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Acquire new knowledge & skills taking care of houseplants; obtain certificate in plant care; do career exploration
**Physical:** Water, prune, move interior plants; improve physical strength & stamina standing, lifting
**Psychological/Emotional:** Care & nurture plants; take pride in work
**Sensory:** Identify personal alertness level participating fully in session
**Social:** Work cooperatively with partner; share resources & greenhouse space

### Materials

Variety of houseplants (see below)

Watering can, fertilizer, aphid traps, mister

Gloves, wipes

**STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:**

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Facilitator gathers houseplants and equipment required for their care.
2. Facilitator begins session by introducing session goal of learning techniques for caring for houseplants as part of horticultural training for career exploration or vocational skill development.
3. A brief overview of types of jobs and required job tasks involved in caring for houseplants at nurseries, box stores & commercial spaces provide the context for acquiring this knowledge & experience.
4. Using a curriculum from a reputable school or horticultural association guides dissemination of info on: watering, fertilizing, grooming, pest control, light, soil/media, temperatures, humidity, repotting, (Ch.15 Florida Nursery, Growers, Landscape Association).
5. Working in pairs participants undertake watering, fertilizing, grooming & pest control over a series of weeks. Selection of light, humidity & temperature to maximize growth is determined, finding the optimal location for houseplants under their care.
6. Tracking factors (light, pests etc.) over a designated period of time, discussing these with group & analyzing best practices can be used for evaluation & improved care. Discussion of locations for interior plant care (greenhouse, nursery, other) can broaden understanding.
7. Testing of knowledge and mastery of plant care can provide confidence, certificate of achievement (formal or informal).

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** This therapeutic horticulture activity can be delivered as part of a vocational horticulture program. It is appropriate for people incarcerated who are learning new skills, at risk youth considering a horticulture career, students expanding their knowledge in science, people with developmental delays who will be working at supervised nurseries, and other populations interested in interior/houseplants.

Activity can occur in greenhouses, nursery settings, shade houses, and indoor facilities like seniors residences and schools.

**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts.** Some of the listed plants should be handled with gloves due to sap or juice. Safe working space in greenhouse, nursery or other is the responsibility of facilitator who trains participants in safety protocols as part of the vocational horticulture activity (avoiding tripping hazards, exposure to chemicals/fertilizers, mechanized equipment, cutting tools etc.). For incarcerated populations, close supervision and daily accounting for equipment (sharp & other) is recommended.

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** There are numerous houseplants that are cared for and sold across the country. They come in all sizes and shapes from miniature to full size (tree) specimens placed in commercial settings. Care of houseplants/interior plants will vary by specimen. Facilitator needs knowledge of interior/houseplants. Facilitator will select plants to be used in the TH session, probably those available locally or grown by the greenhouse or nursery. Critical to their care is light exposure.

Interior plants that are considered safe and non-toxic, are identified by University of Connecticut (see link below). Another good source of information is the [Florida Gardening and Plants section](#) in the Florida Horticulture for Health Network's Resource Hub (see link below).

The following plants are readily available interior plants, but are not necessarily "safe" to use with all populations. Some plants may be toxic if ingested or cause dermatitis. Use plant species appropriate for your participants. The asterisked plants need investigation by facilitator given some health concerns and may not be ideal houseplants in homes where there are pets that might chew or ingest them.

Small houseplants: air plant (*Tillandisa* spp.), aloe vera* (*Aloe* spp.), Chinese money plant (*Pilea peperomioides),* lithops (*Lithops pseudotruncatella),* oxalis (*Oxalis triangularis),* polka dot plant (*Hypoestes phyllostachya),* Geraniums (*Pelargonium* spp.), Peperomia (*Peper omia* spp.), zebra plant* (*Aphelandra squarrosa),* lucky bamboo (*Dracena braunii).*

Medium houseplants: cast iron plant (*Aspidistra elatior*), peace lily (*Spathiphyllum* spp.), fiddle leaf fig* (*ficus lyrate*), juniper bonsai tree*, anthurium* (*Anthurium* spp.). wild Boston fern (*Nephrolepis exaltata),* corn plant* (*Dracena fragrans),* jade plant* (*Crassula argentea),* and ZZ plant* (*Zamioculcas zamiifolia).*

**REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:**

Florida Horticulture for Health Network. (2024). Florida gardening & plants.
  https://www.flhhn.com/florida-gardening-and-plants.html
Florida Nursery, Growers, Landscape Association. (n.d.). Ch. 15 Interior plant selection and maintenance.
  https://www.fngla.org/resources/InteriorChapterFCHP.pdf
University of Connecticut. (2016). Houseplants: Safe and toxic varieties. College of Agriculture, Health and
  Natural Resources. https://homegarden.cahnr.uconn.edu/factsheets/houseplants-safe-and-toxic-varieties/

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.