

TH Activity Plan – Celery Shenanigans

Text by Lesley Fleming, HTR

Photo & graphics by Simple Living & The Gardening Crossword Book



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will have fun with celery, tasting the vegetable & learning how it grows, then making art & doing a vegetable crossword puzzle.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Expand knowledge of plants, specifically celery; challenge self by finding solutions to crossword puzzle

Physical: Use fine motor skills for artwork; practice handwriting to complete puzzle; taste a raw vegetable

Psychological/Emotional: Build confidence in the ability to grip & write/paint with pencils or brushes

Sensory: Taste celery being mindful of its sensory qualities

Social: Participate in group activity; share materials

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials. Print hard copy of crossword puzzle. Have celery seeds & live plants available during session, not just celery stalks.
2. Facilitator begins session by introducing celery as the focus of the TH session. Several activities will be incorporated into the session.
3. Beginning with a tasting of raw celery, participants will describe taste, texture, crunch, color, having fun making teeth marks in celery stalks, and pulling strings of celery fiber. Facilitator shares some celery jokes. Option: Ranch dressing for dipping when tasting.
4. Throughout session facilitator shares nutritional facts about celery, this important for some therapeutic goals.
5. Celery fun facts can be shared including types of celery, nutritional value, growth & care facts. Follow this or intersperse in session when doing a vegetable crossword puzzle, as a group or individually.
6. Next celery activity uses the vegetable to make art where a stalk or crown becomes the stamp (usually the end – half-moon shape), using a water-based ink pad or paint, note cards or paper.

Materials

Celery, pre-washed
Napkins, wipes, Ranch dressing
Live celery seeds, crowns & plant
Notecards, paper, inkpads, paint, brushes
Crossword puzzle, pencils
Grips for accommodating fine motor hand skills
Gloves, wipes

7. Using a specific plant as the focus of a TH activity can lighten up a therapeutic session. The common celery plant offers lots of intellectual intrigue if the facilitator is willing to be funny and do some research. Not everything has to be serious and not every TH activity has to be hard. “What did the celery say to the veggie dip? I’m stalking you” (see reference for celery jokes below).

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: It is surprising how celery, the common vegetable, can prompt strong opinions about liking or disliking the flavor and texture. This starting point for a TH session—asking participant’s opinions—can lighten the mood, and be a fun segway for several activities that can be adapted for the particular group and its interests and therapeutic goals. Taking a lighter approach to TH, the facilitator can use jokes, plant history and horticultural tidbits to cover plant care where intellectual stimulation can be a primary goal structured for specific ages and abilities. Did you know that celery has been consumed for more than 3,000 years?

Or use a hair scrunchie to develop mild-flavor - secure the stalks into a bunch after the plants have been growing in the garden for eight to 10 weeks? Want your celery to look paler? Blanch it while growing it. Exclude light from the stalks to prevent chlorophyll production for one to two weeks.

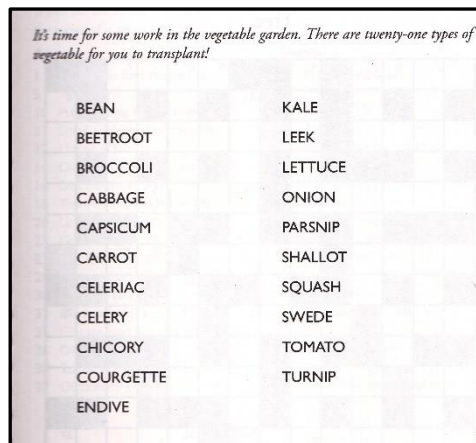
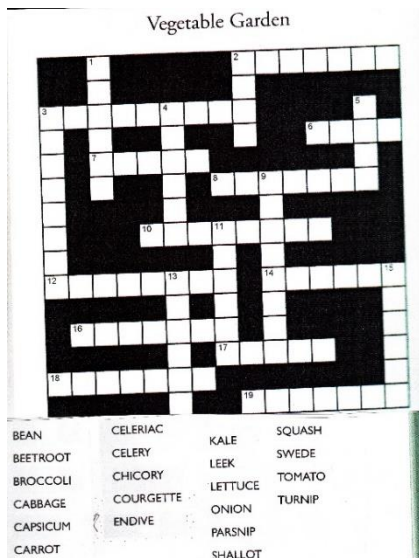
Therapeutic goal in the physical domain: Some populations will have physical challenges related to fine motor hand skills, grip, handwriting, and holding paintbrushes or pencils. The celery activities can be a more pleasant way to practice these skills important for stroke recovery, dysgraphia, hand surgery or dystonia, ataxia, neurological or muscular problems, Tourette Syndrome, tremors or Parkinson’s disease (Cleveland Clinic, 2024). Accommodations for grip can include larger diameter pencils and brushes, using a tripod or rubber grip, different positioning of fingers, and/or placement of arm and elbow. Using the wider celery crown for the art activity can also be an accommodation along these lines; or bundle several celery stalks together for same purpose.

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

As with all TH activities where participants will taste or eat plants or in this case, possibly Ranch dressing, allergies, swallowing issues or contraindications with medication need to be identified prior to session. Ensure that there is a clear plan in place for handling any allergic reactions or other health issues that might arise, including easy access to first aid and emergency contact information, especially with younger and older age groups. Safe food handling protocols should be used and any food should be pre-washed.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Nutritional value of celery – it is a good source of vitamins A, C and K and is low in calories and high in fiber. It’s anti-inflammatory health benefits include protection against inflammation in the digestive tract. Some of the unique non-starch polysaccharides in celery—including apiuman—appear especially important in producing anti-inflammatory benefits. The dozen antioxidant nutrients in celery include dihydrostilbenoids like lunularin as well as furanocoumarins like bergapten and psoralen. Try pronouncing these as a group three times! Puzzle from *The Gardening Crossword Book*.

Growing celery can be easy if given a long head start indoors using rich, moist soil. Celery seeds of all types are small and may germinate erratically. Start them indoors or in a greenhouse with a sunny site. Celery requires constant moisture; keep plants’ roots moist at all times.



REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Cleveland Clinic. (2024). Dysgraphia. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/23294-dysgraphia>
 Jokes4Us.com. (2024). Celery jokes. <https://www.jokes4us.com/miscellaneousjokes/foodjokes/celeryjokes.html>

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.