

**Activity: Creative Expression/Arts**    **Goal: Psychological/Emotional**  
**Populations: All but Dementia**

## TH Activity Plan – Creating Succulent Pumpkins

Text by Megan Goulden

Photo by M. Goulden & Harris Seeds



**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Participant(s) will create their own pumpkin decorated with succulents, moss and natural materials.

**THERAPEUTIC GOALS:**

**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Follow multi-step directions

**Physical:** Maintain fine motor skills & spatial awareness while creating a designed plant container

**Psychological/Emotional:** Expand personal creativity, agency & beauty

**Sensory:** Experience tactile & visual stimulation using natural materials

**Social:** Share materials; gift item to another person, if desired

**STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:**

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather and set out materials.
2. Facilitator begins session by displaying a sample succulent pumpkin planter.
3. Participants attach dry sphagnum moss or Spanish moss\* to top of pumpkin around stem to provide a base for materials to adhere to using tacky glue or if appropriate, glue gun.
4. Participants choose favorite items for design, made available in session.
5. Starting with larger items, glue is applied to the bottom of an item and pressed onto moss. If using tacky glue, item needs to be held until adhesion is strong.
6. Continue building design with different succulents, turning pumpkin to varying angles to cover top portion with succulents. Generous use of glue particularly for heavier items will secure them to pumpkin.
7. Finish off with raffia, ribbon on the stem or gift tag if desired.

**Materials**

Pumpkins of any size/color

Variety of succulent cuttings

Dried moss

Glue: tacky or glue gun

Variety of natural dried materials: seed pods, flowers

Marker, gloves, wipes

Optional: raffia, ribbon, gift tags

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** With seniors, or those with physical disabilities, participants can choose materials and placement with HT practitioner assisting with gluing if required. This activity is not recommended for people living with mid to late stages of dementia.

Finished pumpkins can be given as gifts or used in common spaces as decoration if participants are not allowed to keep items themselves (such as in some mental health facilities). This activity can be enjoyed by many populations and is a way to bring plants that need minimal care into a space, connect with nature and celebrate seasonal pumpkin time.

Gifting of handmade items can be a therapeutic activity across populations. For individuals with social goals related to sharing, showing gratitude, appreciation, or strengthening relationships, small demonstrations including plant gifts can begin conversations with therapist or family members with whom improved connections can be important. Seligman’s research on gratitude, a topic discussed with positive psychology interventions, suggests that increased happiness is a correlated outcome to gratitude (Harvard Medical School, 2021).

**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS:** Use of cool/hot glue gun by some individuals or populations needs to be assessed prior to use and may not be appropriate. HT practitioner can assist, or glue, particularly for larger objects. Tacky glue is a non-toxic, safer option that may take more time but with less risk for most populations other than those with tendencies of putting items in mouth. Choose materials that are non-toxic, not sharp or thorny or very small. Spanish moss can contain insects and needs to be properly treated to kill these prior to use in activity.

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** Moss can be adhered to pumpkins prior to session depending on time available and attention span of participants. Other pumpkins (*Cucurbita*) appropriate for this activity can include Pumpkin Field Trip F1 hybrid, Rouge Vif D’Etampes or Baby Boo (Hunter & Kelly, 2023). Harris Seeds identifies small pumpkins with intriguing names (that can be humorous in the TH session) including: Baby Pam, Blanco F1 seed, Pumpkin Flatso F1, Pumpkin Iron Man F1 and Pumpkin Prankster F1 (2024).

This TH activity can be extended. Previous sessions can grow and harvest small pumpkins, such as the ‘Jack Be Little’ variety or varieties listed above. Plan growing and harvesting schedule carefully. Succulents can also be pulled from the pumpkins and propagated when pumpkin is no longer needed or viable. If one has access, harvesting of succulents can happen two weeks prior to session, as well as propagation of Spanish moss. Insects need to be removed from Spanish moss\* by boiling or heating methods (Morris, 2017).

**REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:**

Demos, K. (n.d.). How to make a succulent pumpkin [YouTube]. Fine Gardening.com.  
<https://www.finegardening.com/article/how-to-make-a-succulent-pumpkin>  
Harris Seeds. (2024). Small pumpkins. <https://www.harriseseeds.com/collections/small-pumpkins>  
Harvard Medical School. (n.d.). Giving thanks can make you happier. Harvard Health Publishing.  
<https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/giving-thanks-can-make-you-happier>  
Hunter, S. & Kelly, A. (2023). 14 types of pumpkins you’ll see this fall. Martha Stewart.com  
<https://www.marthastewart.com/2124321/pumpkin-varieties>  
Morris, T. (2017). How to treat Spanish moss for bugs. Garden Guides.com.  
<https://www.gardenguides.com/95664-treat-spanish-moss-bugs.html>



Pumpkin Prankster F1



Pumpkin Icicle F1



Flatso F1

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2023.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 202