

Activity: Herbs Goal: Sensory Populations: Senior/Dementia

## TH Activity Plan – Dream Pillows

Text by Diane Relf, PhD, HTM & Susan Morgan

Photo by D. Relf



**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Participants will prepare mesh bags filled with fragrant herbs and then added to pillow inserts for relaxation.

### THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Practice following step-by-step instructions

**Psychological/Emotional:** Learn relaxation and self care techniques; improve mood; practice self-regulation strategies

**Sensory:** Engage olfactory, auditory, and tactile senses with herbal materials; enhance mood through sensory stimulation

**Social:** Make social connections; work collaboratively within a group

### Materials

24 pieces of 6" x 6" pieces of cotton fabric (or larger) sewn together on three sides

12 mesh sachet bags for herbal insert (approx. 3" x 3")

1/8 cup dried rose petals

1/8 cup dried chamomile

1/8 cup dried lavender

Essential oils, such as rose, lavender, peppermint, yarrow, jasmine, or sandalwood

Polyester pillow stuffing

12 pieces of 1/4" or narrower ribbon or string, about 6" long

Lace

Velcro

Measuring cups

12 plastic containers with lids, such as margarine containers

12 funnels, cardboard tubes, or thick art paper or cardboard rolled into funnels

Trays (one per participant)

Disposable gloves, wipes

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

- 1. Pre-Session Prep, part 1:** To make the pillowcase, cut fabric into a 6"x6" square to allow for seams. Fold with the wrong side facing outward to form the square. Sew three of the sides, leaving a short end open for stuffing. Lace can be added if desired. Finish by adding Velcro to the open end of the pillowcase, so that the herb bag can be changed, and the case can be washed. Turn the cases right side out.
- 2. Pre-Session Prep, part 2:** Harvest and dry herbs from the garden to be used or purchase in bulk tea section at natural foods market. Create several funnels out of the thick paper/cardboard or have several funnels on hand. The funnels should have large enough openings for materials to pass through. Prepare a tray for each participant with the following materials: one pillow shell sewn on three sides, one mesh bag, funnel, measuring cup, plastic container with lid, Velcro, pillow stuffing. Gather together remaining materials.
- Facilitator begins session with participants measuring out the three dried herbs and placing into the plastic container. Participants are encouraged to feel the textures and note the fragrances.
- The facilitator should assist in selecting essential oil and adding the 3-4 drops to the mixture.
- Seal the container with lid; shake to mix the oil evenly with the herbs.
- Using a funnel, put herb mixture into a mesh bag and tie bag securely closed with string/ribbon.
- Fill the pillowcase about halfway full with pillow stuffing.
- Place the mesh bag/herbal insert inside the pillowcase and loosely finish filling the pillowcase with pillow stuffing. Air circulation is important for the scents to be released, so do not pack full.
- Form the finished dream pillow into a flat shape so that it can be inserted into a case with a traditional pillow.

10. Explain that dream pillows are small sachet-like pillows that can be inserted into the pillowcase of a bed pillow for aromatherapy or used as eye pillows for relaxation.

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** Research and share stories about the history of dream pillows as well as other historical uses of herbs and aromatherapy for relaxation and wellness by different cultures. This activity presents opportunities for participants to discuss and explore self care and relaxation through multi-sensory engagement. Participants living with arthritis, chronic pain, stiffness, and other musculoskeletal and medical conditions will engage the olfactory (herbal/essential oil fragrances), auditory (percussive sounds made when shaking materials together), and tactile (handling variety of plant, pillow stuffing, and other materials) senses. For participants who have conditions where they may have a reduced sense of smell, the other sensory aspects of the herbal bags (auditory and tactile) are still engaging. Provide a typed instruction sheet outlining how to use and maintain dream pillows after the activity; offer occasional dream pillow refresher sessions for replacing herbs in the herbal inserts.

**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS:** Be aware that some essential oils may cause skin irritation or other issues for some people. Make sure the oil is safe to use with group; consult medical staff as necessary. Because essential oils can be quite potent, use disposable gloves to protect hands and reduce lingering scents on hands following activity. Keep in mind that some participants may have strong olfactory sensitivities (due to medical conditions or medications they are taking) – alert these participants to the possibility of the strong fragrances during the session and give them the choice of attending the session or avoid using the essential oils altogether, only using the dried herbs for subtle fragrance. Supervise safe handling of materials and equipment during the activity. Monitor individuals with tendencies to place non-food items in the mouth.

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** Build confidence and self-esteem by utilizing the talents of participants with sewing skills to create the pillowcases. Use many different fabrics so each participant can choose which fabric they prefer for their pillow. Recycle clothes or scraps from sewing projects. Cotton is easier to sew, especially if participants will participate in sewing the shell.

Refer to THAD *Harvesting and Drying Flowers* activity plan.

**REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:**

Belsinger, S. (2018). How to create a dream pillow from dried herbs. *Fine Gardening*.

<https://www.finegardening.com/article/how-to-create-a-dream-pillow-from-dried-herbs>

Mountain Rose Herbs. (accessed 2023). How to make herbal dream pillows.

<https://blog.mountainroseherbs.com/herbal-sleep-dream-pillows>

Shirey, T. (accessed 2023). Dream pillows. <https://www.centraltexasgardener.org/resource/dream-pillows/>

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.