

Activity: Food/Cooking **Goal: Social** **Populations: Other Specialized Populations**

TH Activity Plan – Eating Plant Parts – Immigrant/Refugee

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Photos by UFSeeds.com & Long Produce



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will identify edible plants & plant parts of their preferred foods from their homelands, sharing these with others in the group.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Explore ethnobotany & global food knowledge; learn about plant parts that are edible

Physical: Practice reading & writing skills; eat nutritious produce

Psychological/Emotional: Connect with others by sharing food traditions from other countries; reminisce about homeland

Sensory: Explore new gustatory flavors tasting vegetables

Social: Make social connections; demonstrate tolerance of others; practice using language skills

Materials

Variety of vegetables/fruits popular in other countries

Plates, napkins, knives

Gloves, wipes

Tasting chart & pencils



STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** In a previous session – ask participants to identify or bring vegetables from their home countries if available. Determine if any participant has allergies, medication-food interactions or swallowing issues that would prevent them from tasting the session’s raw vegetables. Gather materials.
2. Facilitator begins session by welcoming all participants to this global food tasting. Each person introduces themselves & the country they lived in prior to coming to the current country.
3. Facilitator shares some food facts about most consumed, nutrient dense vegetables from around the globe, importance of food traditions (trying to include some from participants’ countries) as an introduction to session.
4. Facilitator identifies goals: learning about new vegetables or fruits, understanding what plant parts are edible, learning from others, sharing food traditions as a mechanism for accepting others & a new country.
5. One at a time, participants are invited to share information, pictures or produce with group, explaining food traditions, the plant part being consumed & how to prepare the vegetable or fruit. Safe food handling protocols are used.
6. If tasting will be part of the session, plates, forks etc. are distributed, confirmation that no allergies, swallowing issues or medication-food interactions exist & tasting begins. Discussion of flavors, traditions, plant parts, preparations for cooked produce & celebrations with the food provides an understanding of different foods, cultures & plants.

7. Using a *Vegetable/Fruit Tasting Chart* (below) participants identify their preferences for taste, juiciness, firmness, crunch, color, smell including name of vegetable, reference for future purchase, planting & consumption.
8. Group can collectively create a handout for distribution after session with information on the plants, availability, growing conditions, edible parts, nutrition & preparation. This could also be a group exercise for a subsequent session with different educational/therapeutic goals.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Becoming acquainted with fruits and vegetables popular in other countries or a new country can be daunting, expensive and challenging. With a nutrition focus, therapeutic horticulture goals can include learning about other nutrient dense foods, less available produce, ethnobotany, edible plants and what parts of plants are eaten, along with food preparations. This knowledge transfer can occur in any number of settings from immigrant services programs, churches, community gardens and schools. This can be particularly significant for recent immigrants and refugees who can share their food knowledge, traditions, gardening/growing expertise and culture with others in a safe setting where the information will be warmly received. Social goals establishing new connections can increase participants’ sense of belonging, sense of self, attitude about a new country and its tolerance of others. Psychologically, this type of TH activity can impact the mood, self-esteem, ambition and feeling of safety of participants, and by extension, often their families too.

Communication goals can be addressed. Communicating verbally and in writing, reading instructions, sharing pronunciations of plant names, using a *Vegetable/Fruit Taste Chart* or creating a summary sheet handout can boost confidence and be undertaken as a group learning/social activity.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Prior determination of food allergies, swallowing issues, and medication-food interactions should be done. Safe food handling protocols should be discussed and used.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Not all vegetables and fruits may be available; photos can be substituted. If facilitator/program chooses to have produce for session, shopping at ethnic markets, farmers’ markets or talking with urban farm growers can assist in identifying produce like Tokyo Bekana (*Brassica rapa var. chinensis*), ‘Blue Pod Capucijner’ pea (top left photo), winter squash ‘Shishigatani’ from Japan, Vietnamese coriander (*rau ram* or *Persicaria odorata*) (bottom photo), gai lan Chinese broccoli/Chinese kale, tindora (*Coccinia grandis*) or caigua (*cyclanthera pedate*). This activity was adapted from Texas Cooperative Extension. (1999), *Junior Master Gardener Teacher/Leader Guide*.

Vegetable/Fruit Taste Chart

Vegetable/Fruit	Taste	Smell	Firmness	Color	Edible Plant Part
A	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5		
B					
C					
D					
Comments					

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Gomex, S. (2022, July). 11 Caribbean and Latin American vegetables to discover and enjoy. *The Vegan Atlas*. <https://theveganatlas.com/11-caribbean-and-latin-american-vegetables-to-discover-and-enjoy/>

Fleming, L. (2021). Vegetables on the verge. *Digging In*, 7(2).

Jabbour, N. (2018). *Niki Jabbour’s veggie garden remix: 224 new plants to shake up your garden and add variety, flavor, and fun*. Storey Publishing.

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