

Activity: Planting Goal: Psychological/Emotional Populations: All but dementia

## TH Activity Plan – Fairy Garden Planters

Text by Marcia Lilley, HTR

Photo by M. Lilley



**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Participant(s) will create a fairy garden by mixing the potting soil, planting succulents into a shallow planter & adding whimsical items.

### THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Practice following step-by-step instructions; exercise decision making skills

**Physical:** Practice hand-eye coordination and hand dexterity; work with small items in small confined area (planter dish)

**Psychological/Emotional:** Reduce anxiety & depressive symptoms through repetitive motion; increase self-efficacy and self-confidence; be creative

**Sensory:** Use senses for visual & tactile stimulation

**Social:** Practice teamwork by sharing materials in a group setting; show leadership by volunteering to help others.

### Materials

Various kinds of succulents

Planter bowls

Potting soil

Coarse sand

Narrow trowels

Decorative stones

Fairy and gnome figurines

Garden label and marker

Watering can

Optional: Construct Fairy house

Gloves, wipes

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials.
2. Facilitator begins session by having participants pick out planter bowl that has drainage holes & 3-5 succulents.
3. Suggest that different colors and textures of plants make for an interesting planter, giving agency to participants to choose what they like.
4. Have one volunteer or participant scoop potting soil into the middle of the table/potting bench. Next, add sand. Aim for a 3:1 ratio potting soil to sand.
5. Another participant mixes the soil with their hands or trowel.
6. Once mixed, participants add soil to the bottom of their planting bowl.
7. Participants remove a plant from container, gently squeezing the pot while holding the plant sideways with the other hand, gently pulling plant out.
8. Set on table & repeat with remaining plants.
9. Participant(s) will either place plants one at a time or place all plants in the planter. Demonstrate how deep to place the plants inside the pot so that there will be roughly 1" spacing from soil level to the rim of planter.
10. Next, fill up the bowl with succulent soil using hands or trowel, pressing soil around plants using their fingers.
11. Participants will select their fairy/gnome figurine and any stones to add to their fairy garden. Label their fairy garden planter with their name.
12. Demonstrate to participants how to lightly water the succulents and have them water their own planters.
13. Discuss plant care with participants.

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** This activity was originally designed for adults recovering from complex mental health challenges living in a residential care facility. The original goals for this activity were to build autonomy through decision making and creative expression as well as practice social skills in a small group setting. Participants who are living in a full-time treatment program often have limited choices due to their living situation so this activity was a space where they could make decisions for themselves, express themselves creatively and create beauty using plants and whimsical items. Skills of self-efficacy and decision making can readily apply across other populations.

**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts.** Plants should not be toxic, thorny or sharp. Some succulents have pointy ends to their leaves (e.g. *Haworthia* spp.) which could upset those with tactile sensitivity. If this is the case, then explain to participants how to gently handle the plants or work with the individual practicing selection of items that suit their sensitivities. Items that may be a self-harm safety issue (small and ingestible, sharp tools) should not be available. Facilitator should know their participants and possible safety concerns.

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** This activity can be expanded to include building a small fairy house, painting rocks, and/or propagating succulents for the next group to do this activity.

Succulents appropriate for container gardens are available on-line, at specialty nurseries and other plant nurseries. Smaller succulents are a bit more challenging to find. Consider donkey's tail (*Sedum morganianum*), *Dudleya* spp., ghost plant (*Graptopetalum* spp.), hens and chicks (*Sempervivum*), stonecrop (*Sedum* spp.), living stones (*Lithops*), *Echeveria minima*, baby jade (*Crassula ovata*), ice plant (*Corpuscularia lehmannii*), dancing bones cactus (*Hatiora salicornioides*), and *Gasteria bicolor* var. *liliputana*.

**REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:**

Stephy, A. (2023, June 29). *100 Best DIY Fairy Garden Ideas*. Prudent Penny Pincher.

<https://www.prudentpennypincher.com/100-best-fairy-garden-ideas/>

Balogh, A. (2024). *Planting succulents: 8 tips for growing succulents in your garden*. GardenDesign.com.

<https://www.gardendesign.com/succulents/planting.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.