

Activity: Plant Care Goal: Psychological/Emotional Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Forcing Blooms in Winter

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Photo by Pexels & Nettleton Hollow

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will participate in forcing a bloom activity using stems from flowering shrubs.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Become informed about neuroscience inputs & self-regulation that impacts responses, need for gratification, cognitive impacts of addictions & other behaviors

Physical: Strengthen standing/walking in outdoor setting

Psychological/Emotional: Learn about delayed gratification using plants as metaphors for human behavior; discuss passage of time both positive & negative aspects

Sensory: Recall/reminisce about sensory experiences related to springtime plants

Social: Communicate & engage with others discussing & sharing progress of flower blooms over a 3 week period

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Identification of shrubbery available for cutting & forcing bloom activity. Recommended that some blooming stems be pre-cut & in bloom to demonstrate the end result to participants for inspiration.
2. Facilitator begins session by describing process & the resulting blooming of shrubbery flowers.
3. If included in this session, participants walk outside to cut stems, bringing them inside to prepare. If going outside is not part of session, photos of shrubs as they appear in wintertime a bit barren, their location in the garden & then in bloom specimens to give timeframe context, is helpful for engaging participants.
4. Stems should be cut at a 45 degree angle above the node or collar, and at twice the height of the vase to be used. Participants can function in several capacities depending on their abilities & safety concerns: cutting stems, being handed stems, carrying stems, carrying a bag or bucket for stems, carrying a bottle of water that will be poured into the bucket as stems are cut.
5. Once inside, stems should be recut underwater in a drain-stopped sink or plastic tub using very hot water. Place in vases with preservative.
6. Select location out of direct sunlight, in a cool location, where they will be placed & observed over the weeks it takes for blooms to emerge. Change water regularly.
7. Discussion of blooms, the process of forcing blooms, reminiscences & memories, geographical locations of participant's homes where

Materials

Sharp pruners, vases, hot & cold water, plastic tub for recutting underwater
Commercial or homemade floral preservative
Shrubbery as listed in applications section
Gloves, wipes



they saw various shrubs in bloom & discussion of topics related to therapeutic themes of delayed gratification can extend activity.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: “An ideal activity for wintertime is forcing stems to bloom early. A wide variety of spring flowering shrubs can be used including red maple, quince, willow catkins, lilac, forsythia, apple, ornamental plum and cherry (respectively: spp. & cvs. of *Acer rubrum*, *Chaenomeles*, *Salix*, *Syringa vulgaris*, *Forsythia*, *Malus domestica*, *Prunus triloba*, & *Prunus subhirtella*). By cutting new branches weekly through January and February, a continual supply of blooms will be available” (Fleming, 2021). Programs may choose to do this as a single activity but it will require delayed gratification, waiting for the blooms to appear. This can be a therapeutic goal, relevant for people with self-regulation dysfunction in this area (though more often impulsive behaviors in need of instant gratification involves addictions (food, drugs, sex). Forcing flower blooms will not resolve these complex issues but can provide a different perspective, a hands-on activity in support of counseling, cognitive behavioral or other therapy.

This activity can be combined with a walk outside in a garden or natural area to cut stems. Incorporated into an on-going program, the activity of cutting stems can be an opening or closing part of each session getting participants outdoors in this way. This would work well for facilities that have these types of shrubbery on site, close at hand near paths. Cutting stems for forcing blooms could be one smaller part of another activity, say, one that uses sensory stimulation touching and smelling blooming plants available at the time of the year session is conducted. Related goals of passage of time for those grieving, incarcerated, plus seniors finding time long can be addressed and discussed with waiting for the spring flowers to bloom as a metaphor using plants’ life cycles.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Caution when using sharp pruners, scissors or very hot water, the use of these by participants should be determined by their functional and cognitive abilities. Note that a bucket with water may be heavy – too heavy for some clients. Alternatively, a client(s) could carry a bottle of water to be emptied into bucket once stems are in it. If activity involves going outside, pathways should be dry, free of water, ice or snow.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: “A few important tips to keep in mind. Branches need about six weeks of cold temperature dormancy to set buds. Look for flower buds, rounder and larger than leaf buds, which tend to be pointed. Using sharp pruners, cut branches at a 45 degree angle above the node or collar, and twice the height of the vase that will be used. Place in water immediately. Coaxing the bloom will take two to three weeks with warmer temperatures inside. Once indoors, recut branch underwater in sink, using very hot water to deter oxygen from intruding and blocking water intake. Some gardeners crush the branch ends or make a vertical cut up the stem for better water absorption. Add commercial or homemade floral preservative (1 T Listerine or 1 T lemon lime soda per 1 quart of water). Keep branches out of direct sunlight, in a cool location, with water changed out regularly.” (Fleming, 2021).

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

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- Shillingworth, M. & Fleming, L. (2016). Cherry blossoms, symbolism and horticultural therapy. *Therapeutic Horticulture A Practitioner’s Perspective*. Smashwords.

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