

Activity: Food/Cooking Goal: Cognitive/Intellectual
Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Freezing Herbs

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will prepare and freeze herbs for future use in cooking.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Learn new nutritional skills; increase awareness of cost-saving, plant-based culinary techniques

Physical: Improve nutritional intake

Psychological/Emotional: Improve sense of control; practice problem-solving; build confidence

Sensory: Use sensory-intense activity as mechanisms for joy, pleasure

Social: Prepare plant-based foods as a collaborative social activity; cultivate sense of belonging within a community

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Harvest herbs from the garden or supplement with purchased fresh herbs from the grocery produce section. Gently wash herbs and pat dry. Chives, basil, tarragon, sage, dill, and parsley all lend themselves well to freezing. Blanch basil leaves before freezing – see Notes below. Set up a tray and scissors for each participant, as needed, and have the herbs in a basket or box which you carry around so that individuals can select the ones they want to prepare. Limit the amount provided at one time to avoid confusion.
2. Facilitator begins session by demonstrating how to select young growth and cutting 4-6” long stems.
3. Remove any dead or diseased leaves & flowers, if not done earlier.
4. Herbs with tough stems, such as basil, tarragon, & sage, should have leaves removed from the stems before freezing. Stems of parsley or dill should be separated & frozen individually before storing in one container.
5. Freeze herbs using one of the following methods:
 - Option A:** Put leaves out in a single layer in a baking sheet or tray. Slide the tray into the freezer. Check on the leaves after about thirty minutes. When the leaves are all frozen, you can take them out of the freezer, move them to an airtight bag or container, and place back in freezer. Use in cooking.
 - Option B:** Chop leaves until they fit into the slots of the ice cube tray, cover with water, and freeze. Store frozen cubes in plastic bags. The herb ice cubes can be added directly to soups or teas or thawed & used in cooking.

Materials

Herbs harvested earlier in the day (see text for options)

Plastic bags or ice trays for freezing

Safety scissors

Trays or baking sheets on which to process the herbs

2-4+ stems or leaves of an herb for each participant to prepare & freeze

Disposable gloves, wipes

Optional, pot of boiling water, cooktop, tongs, strainer, paper towels- blanching basil

Refrigerator/freezer

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Have participants identify the herbs by smell, sight, or touch. Ask if they have ever grown this herb before and how they used it. Many participants enjoy sharing stories and tips about their own gardening and cooking experiences. Discuss activities/recipes that can be done with frozen herbs and other ways of harvesting and preserving herbs and other produce from the garden. When appropriate, invite participants to take on leadership or mentoring roles during harvesting or preparing herbs for freezing or leading follow-up cooking classes that use frozen herbs from this activity. Present this activity as part of multi-activity nutrition program on growing, harvesting, and preparing herbs and garden produce at home.

This activity is particularly impactful for immigrants, refugees new to the country and people with food insecurity. Encourage participants to describe herbs they use from their cultures and foods. Sharing this information can be incorporated into therapeutic goals related to increasing tolerance of others, creating a sense of belonging and inclusion within a social activity context. Future sessions could build on this and include looking at, smelling etc. herbs from other cultures. For example, herbs used in Vietnamese cooking include Perilla (Tia To), Thai Basil (Hung Que), Garlic Chives (He), Lemongrass (Xa) and Sawtooth (Ngo Gai).

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Wash hands and follow sanitary food handling procedures prior to, during, and following herb prep activities. Encourage participants to help each other in task sharing, especially if working with individuals with cognitive or fine motor challenges. Supervise careful handling of materials and equipment during activity. Discuss dietary restrictions with participants prior to consuming herbs at later date.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Herbs may be difficult to separate from unused parts after freezing, so be sure to separate or cut the needed parts beforehand. Herbs may stain ice cube trays during use. Blanch basil leaves before freezing to prevent leaves from losing their bright green color. To do this, place basil leaves in a strainer and pour boiling water over them followed by cold water. Drain well. Gently pat excess water from the leaves. Flavor is just as good without blanching.

Refer to THAD *Air Drying Leafy Herbs* or *Drying Herb Flowers* activity plans.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

TasteAtlas. (2023). 10 most popular herbs in the world.

<https://www.tasteatlas.com/most-popular-herbs-in-the-world>

University of Wyoming Nutrition and Food Safety. (accessed 2023). Freezing and drying herbs.

<https://uwyoextension.org/uwnutrition/freezing-and-drying-herbs/>

Zepp, M. (2022). Freezing herbs. Pennsylvania State University Extension.

<https://extension.psu.edu/freezing-herbs>



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