

TH Activity Plan – Games with Weird & Wonderful Plants

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Photos by Pexels, Proven Winner & Curiokids.net

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will participate in imaginative & verbal games with plants to stimulate their intellectual abilities.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Play games to stimulate intellectual curiosity & knowledge; practice communication skills

Physical: Practice twisting torso passing plants/photos to people seated at the table

Psychological/Emotional: Use reminiscing & memory skills to express preferences for plants, ideas, experiences

Sensory: Use verbal skills to express emotions & sensory experiences

Social: Communicate with others verbally; share ideas, humor

Materials

A variety of plants: themes of animals, colors, etc.

Photos of plants

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials & plan activities appropriate for intellectual abilities.
2. Facilitator begins session by encouraging participants to look at the assembled plants on the table. Encourage participants to informally talk among themselves about the plants, promoting socialization, communication & humor.
3. Facilitator selects plants, one at a time, and asks “What name would be good for this plant?” Then each plant is passed around group for closer observation, touching/smelling with people sharing suggested plant names, the sillier the better. Facilitator tells group the actual plant name. Prompt “does this look like a beehive (ginger)?” Continue this based on attention span & number of plants. Photos can be substituted especially if a theme is used & plants are difficult to find.
4. A second game with a plant theme (in this session or another) – *Plants That Look Like to Animals* or *Plants with Animal Names*. Begin by asking group to name some examples like lion’s mane mushrooms or parrot plant. Share some live plants or photos with this theme. Encourage discussion, laughter, jokes & reminiscing. See verbal prompts below.
5. A third intellectually engaging plant activity can focus on plant colors, asking what plants are pink, purple, yellow etc. Discuss color preferences. Have live plants or photos brought out as colors are mentioned. Ask participants to share memories related to plants & which colors/plants they prefer.

Photos left: Fiddlehead fern & black cat pussywillow



APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Plant activities can provide “intellectual stimulation, along with fascination and humor, using weird and wonderful plants in therapeutic horticulture programming. Most populations have health goals involving intellectual stimulation, be they advanced or basic cognitive functioning levels. Different tempo and style to HT/TH sessions can be delivered using weird and wonderful plants, which lend themselves to games, riddles and puzzles...

Halloween and other seasonal holidays can provide ample ideas. [Facilitator should be sensitive to cultural and developmental considerations. Some religions do not celebrate these holidays. Young children may be sensitive to scary images of ghosts or vampires.] Therapeutic goals of reminiscing and intellectual stimulation can be sparked by incorporating plants like pumpkin on a stick (*Solanum integrifolium*), Dracula orchid genus, Ghost plant and ‘Ghost’ fern (*Monotropa uniflora* & *Athyrium* ‘Ghost’), ‘Black Cat’ petunia, voodoo lily (*Amorphophallus konjac*), devil’s claw (*Proboscidea louisianica*), Chinese lantern (*Physalis alkekengi*), and witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*). Each of these can provide strong visual imagery along with live plant examples.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Practitioners with strong plant knowledge will be able to select plant material appropriate for clients, taking into account plant toxicity, sensitivity to sap, sharp cones or propensity for putting items into mouths...

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Sessions using a game—*name that plant*—can promote laughter, thinking skills and group interaction. Does the plant resemble the actual name for doll’s eye (*Actaea pachypoda*), beehive ginger (*Zingiber spectabile*), bat flower (*Tacca chantieri*), dancing plant (*Codariocalyx motorius*), or eyeball plant (*Spilanthes oleracea*)? Though exotic or out of season plants may be difficult to find, photos can be easily substituted. Easier to source plants include lipstick salvia (*Salvia microphylla*), and pink or blue oyster mushrooms (*Pleurotus djamor* and *ostreatus* respectively)...

Another theme that is guaranteed to start discussion and laughter, is the use of plants that look like, or are named after animals. The Cheyenne Mountain Zoo (2019) suggests: lion’s mane mushroom (*Hericium erinaceus*), wet dog plant (*Illicium floridanum*), monkey orchid (*Dracula simia*), Buffalo grass (*Bouteloua dactyloides*), parrot plant (*Impatiens niamniamensis*), cowslip (*Primula veris*), and bear’s breeches (*Acanthus mollis*)...

Color-specific plants can provide an unusual focus. Black plants, for example, are by their very nature weird and wonderful. Questions or riddles can stimulate thinking skills—are these plants really black, why would they be called black, would you like to receive a black plant? Matching a plant name with a plant/plant picture can be fun: ‘Black Velvet’ petunia (*Petunia* ‘Balpevac’), wine and roses (*Weigela florida* ‘Alexandra’), ‘Queen of Night’ tulip, dahlia ‘Arabian Night’, ‘Nigra’ hollyhock (*Alcea rosea* ‘Nigra’)” (Fleming & Davis, 2020).

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Cheyenne Mountain Zoo (2019). Plants with animal names. <http://www.cmzoo.org/index.php/animals-plants/plants/plants-with-animal-names/>
Curiokids.net. (2023). The 10 strangest plants. <https://curiokids.net/en/the-10-strangest-plants/>
Fleming, L. (2017). Laughter therapy and horticultural therapy: Cross-pollination. *Journal of Therapeutic Horticulture* 27(2); 57-68.



Drosea carnivorous plant



Octopus stinkhorn mushroom



Bleeding tooth fungus

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.