

Activity: Planting Goal: Psychological/Emotional Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Grass Seed Heads

Text by Lesley Fleming, HTR & Yuki Miyake, OT

Photo by Worcester Central Kids Calendar.com, Todaysfabulousfinds.com,

Original Publication: Fleming, L., Hudak-Salvat, J., Lawless, M., Miyake, Y., Morgan, S., Stark, B. & Hatcher, J. (2022). Seed exchange: Sharing activity ideas. *Cultivate* 2(3). 10-11.

https://www.flhhn.com/uploads/1/3/8/6/138696150/summer_2022.cultivate.flhhn.pdf



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will plant grass seed in such a manner that it simulates growing like human hair.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Learn about seed germination, conditions for germination

Physical: Identify & address symptoms of depression, sad moods; maintain hand dexterity

Psychological/Emotional: Incorporate sense of humor into life as a mood enhancer

Sensory: Demonstrate decreased defensiveness for tactile sensory items

Social: Practice nurturing skills with plants; encourage reminiscing

Materials

Socks, pantyhose cut to 6” length with toe intact

Grass seed (rye grass, wheat grass seed, wheat berry, broccoli or microgreen salad sprouts or small green onions)

Potting soil, moss, spoons, elastics, twine

Markers, google eyes, glue

Bucket, cups or yogurt containers

Scissors

Gloves, wipes

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials & purchase rye grass, wheat grass seed, wheat berries (*Triticum aestivum*) or other fast growing varieties, broccoli or microgreen salad sprouts or small green onions. Grow a sample grass head for the session.
2. Facilitator begins session by showing the sample grass head & describing how each person will make one for themselves.
3. Socks are distributed or selected, one per person, with grass seed being scooped by hand & put in the toe of the sock. Fill up sock with potting soil or moss to form a ball the size of a baseball or slightly larger than the diameter of the cup it will sit in. Tie sock off with twine or elastic.
4. Decorate face with permanent markers (if age appropriate), chenille stems or other theme related items.
5. Dip grass head into a bucket of water several times, wetting it so that soil or moss is moist. Place in cup or clean yogurt container so that head sits above rim. Place in sunny location like a windowsill.
6. Nurture the grass head watching it daily for signs of “hair” growth. When the sock has dried a few days, google eyes can be glued on. It should not need to be watered or wetted again but if grass has not sprouted in a few days, use a spritz bottle to wet it.
7. Participants can choose a name for their grass head and determine when to give their grass head a haircut using scissors. This may occur outside of programming sessions. Discuss what to expect, days to germination & care.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Most populations enjoy this therapeutic horticulture activity which involves tactile sensory engagement touching grass seed, soil (or moss substitute) and water. For people who have sensitivities to tactile sensations, gloves may be appropriate or introducing them to these may address sensory defensiveness. Goals of extending their tactile tolerance may be incorporated.

Measuring outcomes for the therapeutic horticulture session growing grass seed heads can be done using pre-post evaluations where participants self-evaluate their mood, abilities, expanded horticultural knowledge and perspectives before and after the session (Fleming, 2012; Cole, 2020). Evaluative tools measuring well-being are also available and being used in therapeutic settings (Diener et al., 2010).

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Latex/non-latex gloves will provide protection for populations where immune compromised health exists. Water in bucket may need to be changed out during session. Watch for participants who may be tempted to put items like small seeds in mouths. In hospitals and elderly facilities where soil is not allowed, clients can enjoy this activity by using moss instead of soil.

Wheat Grass Instructions

Today you have planted wheat grass seeds, also called wheat berries. Botanical name: *Triticum aestivum*. It will sprout within the week. Keep watered and in sunlight. Once sprouted you can give it a haircut. Some people feel eating wheat grass has health benefits, but the consensus on this is pending. Celebrate St. Patrick's Day and Easter 2016 with your wheatgrass centerpiece!



NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Growing grass heads is a fun activity that has recreational, educational and therapeutic applications depending on participants. Used across populations, don't underestimate who will find the humor and fun in this cost-effective session. Incarcerated individuals for example have found the levity in the session, and afterwards, cutting the "hair", expressing interest in doing the activity with their children. (Scissors for this population may need to be strictly monitored and controlled). In settings where treatment or isolation can be difficult, using humor, moments of laughter and even choosing a name for their grass head can change moods and promote group interactions. For clients with complex chronic health, mental health, addictions or trauma challenges, this therapeutic intervention alone will not resolve all issues and is probably best done in conjunction with other therapeutic services, interdisciplinary team approach and counselling.



Growing grass seed has many activity applications: growing it in a container as a table decoration for celebrating St. Patrick's Day, Easter, or wintertime grey days. Most grocery stores will sell a sleeve of small plastic containers used for cut fruit, these the ideal size for personal grass "centerpieces" or bedside plant decorations.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

- Cole, R. (2020). Pre-post outcome analyses. *Mathematica-mpr.com*.
<https://opa.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/tpp18-pre-post-webinar-slides.pdf>
- Diener, E., Wirtz, D., Tov, W., Kim-Prieto, C., Choi, D., Oishi, S. & Biswas-Diener, R. (2010). New measures of well-being: Flourishing and positive and negative feelings. *Social Indicators Research*, 39, 247-266
- Fleming, L. (2012). A Tool of the Trade: Retrospective Evaluations. *American Horticultural Therapy Association News* 40(1); 12.

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