THAD Therapeutic Horticulture Activity Database

Activity: Plant Care Goal: Social Populations: Youth

TH Activity Plan – Grave Gardening - Youth

Text by Sarah Sterling, LSW Photo by S. Sterling.

Based on Sterling, S. (2023). Sowing Cemeteries and Seed Libraries: Inspiration from Shipley School's Horticulture Program. [Video]. YouTube <u>Sowing Cemeteries and Seed Libraries: Inspiration from Shipley School's</u> <u>Horticulture Program</u>.



6. Facilitator works with students re plant selection, an important part of this project. Therapeutic role of plants, related to goals can integrate: education – researching common plants during Victorian era; social goals – collaborating on color/form design; and psychological goals – choosing plants with meaning or that link the bereaved to the deceased.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: This TH project requires multiple sessions and requires permission from the cemetery, heavy equipment work by others and collaboration with the <u>Legacy Marker Project</u>. Delivered at the cemetery as an outdoor classroom and laboratory, senior high school students developed and demonstrated leadership and decision-making skills throughout the project. A strong focus involved cognitive/intellectual skills for the multi-faceted service project.

Psychological components, some identified as therapeutic goals, involved understanding the emotions of bereavement, the need for a resting place, life and mortality, and impacts of service projects on others. Another component in this health domain was the perpetual changes of a cemetery, with many changes over time to plants, landscapes, societal mores related to burial sites and bereavement.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Safety rules for this type of project should be outlined along with any required safety clothing (helmets, gloves, hard toe shoes) prior to and during project particularly if heavy equipment will be on site.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Cradle graves, the name based on the shape, were used in Victorian times and still exist today in some cemeteries. In earlier times, <u>cemeteries were considered pubic land</u>, the first public green spaces in the 1830's. Cemeteries played multiple roles – spending time with deceased loved ones, socializing, and spiritual communing (Downing, 1849).

<u>Grave Restoration/Rebuild Component</u>: The part of the project that involves the 2-ton crank for moving the sides of the graves requires expertise, input and work by non-students/participants. This part can be separated out from the other tasks that are part of the TH sessions. Heavy equipment work performed by others is required for this part of grave gardening. Collaboration with the <u>Legacy Marker Project</u> played an important part in this segment, and the other tasks. The students were informed about this phase, were present during the work, and observed these tasks, understanding it as part of the bigger project/restoration.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Downing, A.J. (1849). Public cemeteries and public gardens. Horticulturist, 4, 9–10.

Fleming, L. (2023). Landscapes for Health: <u>Cemeteries: Historical Context as Healing Places and Green Spaces</u>. Digging In, 9(3).

The Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery. (2025). Cradle graves. Fomh.org.

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2025.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2024.