

Activity: Nature Goal: Cognitive/Emotional Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Growing Mindful Awareness in TH Activities

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Photo by Psychology Today



Materials

Garden or green space
Plants
Mandala materials: paper,
nature's items (leaves, buds,
flower petals)
Optional: glue

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will learn about mindfulness, one type of meditation and how it can be used in gardens, greenhouses & natural environments.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Practice mindfulness techniques; discuss temporality; improve attentional self-regulation, focus & introspection

Physical: Reduce pain & relieve physical symptoms of stress using mindfulness techniques

Psychological/Emotional: Recognize mindfulness as a coping strategy that can calm & relax; use mindfulness grounding techniques to control unpleasant emotions in situations promoting wellness

Sensory: Observe & sense plants & nature using the 5 main senses

Social: Share feelings in group setting; improve functional relationships using mindfulness techniques & being present in the moment

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Identify a space, indoors or outside that will be appropriate for mindfulness plant-related activities. Facilitator should practice some verbal prompts to create a calm environment starting with a short mindfulness practice (breathing meditation).
2. Facilitator begins session by introducing the basics of meditation practices, and mindfulness. During the TH session, participants will explore how mindfulness can be used in a variety of contexts, particularly in gardens, natural areas or simply using plants or flowers.
3. Using a calming exercise(s) like breathing or progressive relaxation exercises, the tone is set for calm introspection (refer to [THAD Calming Exercises in the Garden](#)). Note that it isn't all about being still & quiet. Mindfulness focuses on paying attention to a particular aspect of the present experience with openness, curiosity, and acceptance.
4. Using a plant-rich environment and plants in containers or vases, facilitator suggests participants touch, smell, & look at the plant with mindfulness, enjoying the plant in the moment, directing attention to the senses the garden & plants offer.
5. A walk through the garden or green space can expand using mindfulness. Facilitator can provide verbal guidance & prompts: "Observe the colors in the garden, listen quietly for nature's sounds, are there any fragrances?". Do a second walk where participants do not have verbal prompts but are encouraged to be mindful on their own. What emotions or thoughts arose during the mindful walk?
6. A second activity focusing on mindfulness and being in the present moment could include making a nature mandala (refer to [THAD Nature Mandala](#)). Facilitator can use verbal prompts for mindfulness: "what colors speak to you, what flower petals are beautiful, can you smell fragrances by taking deep breaths?". What

aspects of nature did you choose, and why? Being in the moment, and considering temporality (for a limited time – not permanent), gluing mandala materials may or may not be part of the activity.

7. Facilitator closes TH session by briefly talking about being grounded, (with plant-based interventions it is primarily with the senses), how the experience contributes to an emotional state, feeling calm and relaxed. Additional plant-related activities can be identified that can offer mindfulness experiences like contemplating a plant, flower or seed, or exploring posture while performing a specific plant task. Encourage participants to practice mindfulness on their own, being open, curious, & practicing being in the moment.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: “Mindfulness, referring to an individual’s self-regulation of attention to experiences in the present moment with curiosity, openness, and acceptance, is a technique and practice used in therapy” (Fleming & Creus, 2024). Bringing attention to the present moment, allowing the body and mind to relax while increasing focus and calm helps participants connect with the present moment and from there develop the ability to observe their thoughts, emotions, and sensations without reacting adversely to them (different than “emptying the mind”). This allows for experiencing the activity with a set intention.

Most populations can benefit from mindfulness, especially people with anxiety disorders and depression. There can be increased risk of adverse effects from mindfulness in people with post-traumatic stress disorder (they may re-experience traumatic memories). Mindfulness can be used in health interventions, and as a practice that can be done individually on their own. Mindfulness can be used to calm an anxious brain, work towards calm behavior and thoughts, and relaxation. Like meditation, mindfulness can support health and wellbeing.

Clinical use of mindfulness practice and techniques are being incorporated more extensively into meditative and therapeutic disciplines. “Several forms of clinical mindfulness-based interventions (MBI), (mindfulness-based stress reduction, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy) as well as non-clinical mindfulness-based therapies like meditation and mindfulness-based art therapy and nature-based mindfulness interventions, all non-pharmacological techniques, can be used in combination to reduce anxiety/depression, promote stable disposition and life satisfaction (Campos et al., 2016; Djernis et al., 2019)” (Fleming & Creus, 2024).

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Garden should be free of hazards (tripping over hoses, thorny plants, slippery walkway).

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Techniques mentioned here are essentially meditative practices that can be applied to all therapeutic horticulture activities. Activities that involve planting or sowing and are therefore rhyming/repetitive, as well as creating a mandala (e.g., nature mandala, flower mandala, leaf mandala, stone mandala), a mini soil/sand box, etc. are well suited for Mindful-TH.

Sense Foraging Practices:

5 senses: 5-4-3-2-1 exercises in the garden

Sight: Contemplating green, ...a flower, ... a leaf

Smell: Smelling fragrant plants (flowers, leaves...)

Touch: Noticing a leaf, a seed, a bud,...

Sound: Sound foraging, enjoying the silence, crunch of acorns underfoot

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

- Campos, D.C., Bretón-López, J., Botella, C.S. et al. (2016). Meditation and happiness: Mindfulness and self-compassion may mediate the meditation–happiness relationship. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 93.
- Djernis, D., Lerstrup, I., Poulsen, D. et al. (2019). A systematic review and meta-analysis of nature-based mindfulness: Effects of moving mindfulness training into an outdoor natural setting. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(17), 3202.
- Fleming, L. & Creus, E. (2024). [Therapeutic techniques applicable to people-plant programming](#). *Cultivate*, 4(3).

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2024.

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