

Activity: Harvesting Goal: Sensory Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Harvesting Herb Seeds for Culinary Activities

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Photo by HGTV



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will harvest herb seeds for future use in culinary activities. This can be step one in a multi-session therapeutic horticulture program harvesting herb seeds first, followed by culinary activities.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Focus on task at hand & completion of harvest

Physical: Increase time outdoors building tolerance to sensory climate environment with wind & temperature

Psychological/Emotional: Take responsibility for performing assigned tasks to complete the harvesting

Sensory: Tolerate touching soil, plants & seeds for longer periods of time; demonstrate decreased tactile defensiveness without adverse reactions

Social: Share garden space with others as a tool for socialization & cooperation

Materials

herbs grown for their seeds
& ready for harvesting
garden clippers or safety
scissors
light-weight containers to
collect harvest
containers to store herbs
Labels & pens

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparations:** Prepare a harvesting kit for each participant consisting of clippers & containers. Determine how much should be harvested for session as prep for a separate activity using herbal seeds for culinary activities.
2. Discuss & determine if herbs are ready to be harvested to collect seeds.
3. Demonstrate harvesting technique & best practice – snip stem just below seed head taking care not to knock seeds off. Consider & communicate how many flowers from the plant should be left unharvested (for other purposes or activities).
4. Participants harvest herbs with blooms, with clear directions re amount to be harvested. It may be logical to have participants harvest one type of herb each. (Suggestion - conduct harvesting activity in the garden with support from staff and volunteers to ensure that plants are not over harvested or damaged.)
5. Remove the seed from the seed head using fingers (see comments below). Sort seeds & spread on flat clean surface to dry completely before storage.
6. Gather together as a group to observe harvested bounty. Examine herbs for pests, discoloration & mold, discarding damaged leaves & debris.
7. Discuss as a group the plant materials, taking time to touch & smell herbs, then discussing characteristics of each herb, description of flowers & seeds (size, shape, color), culinary uses of herb seeds & emotional connections to these plants or flavors.
8. Store herbs in a cool, dark, dry airtight container until they are to be used.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: This therapeutic horticulture activity is appropriate for most populations. Populations that have sensory processing & sensory integration challenges, sensitivity to tactile experiences,

lack tolerance for outdoor or nature settings or have nature deficit disorder will need one on one, or close supervision with possible other supports to undertake this activity. Using the platform - working with flowers & harvesting their seeds can lend themselves to therapeutic goals related to taking responsibility for completing a task, focusing on the assigned task, building tolerance to outdoor sensory conditions & working cooperatively with other group members harvesting different herb plants. Some participants may want to wear gloves & consideration for the degree of sensory inputs each person will experience based on their particular tolerance & neurological thresholds should be determined prior to session (Gabaldo, 2019). Bringing seed heads indoors to extract & sort the seeds may be an option if being in the outdoor setting becomes overwhelming. This could also be a sequential activity for another day.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Close supervision may be required for some populations or individuals using scissors. Accommodations could include a partner using scissors to cut stem while participant holds stem. Or flowers/seed heads can be brought inside already cut, with participants using fingers to remove seeds from flowers. People who have tendencies to put items like seeds in their mouths should be closely supervised or provided with another activity (touching & smelling herbs). Gloves should be available as well as wipes or wash station. Sun protection is recommended.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: To get the most from any herb, it needs to be harvested at the right time. The ideal time of day to harvest herbs, whether for fresh use or preserving, is in the morning. Gather herbs after the dew has evaporated, but before the heat of the day. Sun and heat wilts plants. Collect seeds when they're ripe but before they fall off the plant. It is usually easy to know when herb seeds are ripe because they turn from green to tan or brown. A week after the flowers fade, start checking seeds for ripeness. Herbs grown for their seeds include dill, caraway, mustard & anise among others.

- Dill: Harvest seed heads about 2-4 weeks after flowers mature, when the seeds turn light brown. Use in vinegar, pickles, and bread.
- Anise: Gather seeds about 1 month after flowers bloom. Use the seeds to flavor confections such as cakes and cookies. Oil from anise seed is used in medicine. Chew the seeds as a breath freshener.

Refer to THAD activities *Harvesting Herb Leaves*, *Harvesting Roots* which offer additional information.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

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- Gabaldo, M. (2019). Exhibit 7.1: Perspective and technique: Sensory processing. In Haller, Kennedy & Capra (Eds.), *The Profession and Practice of Horticultural Therapy*. CRC Press, p 148-149.
- Hiskey, D. (2019). Humans have a lot more than five senses – here are 18. *Hellahealth.com*. <https://www.hellahealth.com/blog/wellness/humans-five-senses/>
- Morgan, S. (2024). Using 5-4-3-2-1 sensory exercise in therapeutic horticulture activities. *Cultivate* 4(1). <https://www.flhhn.com/cultivate-epub.html>
- Morgan, S. (2023, May). *Sensory Engaging Plants for Therapeutic Gardens* (video). Florida Horticulture for Health. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2fSqLVuZq8>

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TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan, and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2023.