

Activity: Harvesting Goal: Physical Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Harvesting Herbs for Oils

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Photo by D. Relf, Zenaidebar.com, Brighter Blooms & G.D. Bebeau, Gardeners World



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will harvest herbs specifically for oils. Herbal oils will be made in another TH session. Harvesting would be step one in a multi-session therapeutic horticulture program.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Become informed about neuroscience inputs, physiological inputs related to addictions, pain, death

Physical: Reduce irritability & restlessness due to cravings, pain or bereavement by being physically active; demonstrate reduced agitation

Psychological/Emotional: Demonstrate reduced agitation

Sensory: Enhance mood through sensory stimulation, particularly sense of sight of beautiful flowers

Social: Reduce verbal or physical outburst; build/strengthen a can do attitude

Materials

Herbs with flowers ready for harvesting

Garden clippers or safety scissors

Light-weight containers to collect harvest

Containers to store herbs
Labels & pens

Photo above-Bee Balm

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 making herbal oil.
2. Facilitator begins session by discussing & determining if flowering herbs are ready to be harvested.
3. Demonstrate harvesting technique & best practice - how much stem with flower to harvest & how many flowers from plant should be left unharvested.
4. Participants harvest herbs with blooms, with directions re amount to be harvested. Suggestion - conduct harvesting activity in the garden with support from staff and volunteers to ensure that plants are not over harvested or damaged.
5. Gather together as a group to observe & label harvested bounty. Examine herbs for pests, discoloration & mold discarding damaged leaves.
6. Discuss as a group the plant materials, taking time to touch & smell herbs, then discussing characteristics of each herb, description of flowers, multiple uses of herb flowers & emotional connections to these flowers.
7. Store herbs in an open plastic bag in the refrigerator until they are used for making herbal oil.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: This therapeutic horticulture activity is appropriate for most populations. It can involve many therapeutic goals and benefits. One such focus can be related to strategies for distraction for reducing cravings or pain that may be experienced by a variety of populations—people with addictions, pain, trauma or bereavement. Therapeutic goals in several health domains can reinforce and integrate methods of

reducing irritability, shifting moods, distractions from unwanted physical, psychological thoughts and physiological inputs. Coping mechanisms, reducing impulsivity, reducing verbal and physical outburst can be intertwined into this activity using the beauty of the flowers as the positive physical and psychological platform for moving away from negative behaviors to more positive activities.

Some populations may benefit from learning about and exploring neuroscience connections to self-regulation, polyvagal theory and how they affect human behavior. Physiological inputs related to self-regulation and human responses to inputs like pain, threats and substance use are based on current empirical studies and mental health treatment (Fleming et al., 2023).

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 brought inside already cut, with participants removing flowers from stems using fingers. Some herbs (rosemary and calendula) have sticky residue. Gloves should be available as well as wipes or wash station. Sun protection is recommended. For participants who have experienced trauma or recovering from addictions, involving specialists or agency staff from these fields can provide support if re-triggering or inappropriate behaviors occur.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: 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 will wilt the plants. The best time of year to harvest herbs depends on the plant and the part that is to be harvested. If just a fresh sprig or two is needed, it can be collected at any time during the growing season.

For most plants, harvest as soon as the flowers are fully open. It may be useful to harvest them at different stages, from just-opening buds to full blooms to see which works best for your purposes. If the stems aren't needed, cut off the flowers just below the uppermost leaves on the stem. For crafts, cut the stem 6" below the flower head. Refer to THAD database activity *Making Herbal Oil*.

- Chamomile – Harvest open flowers in summer for fresh use or drying calendula and chamomile. Place flower head between fingers and pull up until flower pops off. Used to make tea.
- Lavender – Clip off flower stalks just as blooms open. Use for potpourri and pillows.
- Nasturtium – Harvest leaves and flowers as needed for fresh use. Use in salads or sandwiches.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Fleming, L., Bethel, M. & Roberts, T. (2023). Self-regulation, its neuroscience foundations and horticultural therapy: Growing the connections. *Journal of Therapeutic Horticulture* 33(1).

Fleming, L. (2023). Need to know developments in horticultural therapy and horticulture for health (self-regulation, polyvagal theory) [YouTube]. American Horticultural Therapy Association 2023 Annual Conference. [New Developments in Horticultural Therapy and Horticulture for Health - YouTube](#)

Whitaker Smith, M. & Lindsay, H. (2023). Addressing mental health challenges using horticulture-focused programs. [YouTube]. <https://youtu.be/hxmNL9pPJLk>



Rosemary



Mint



Lemon Verbena



Nasturtium

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.