

Activity: Harvesting Goal: Psychological/Emotional Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Harvesting Herbs Grown for Flowers

Text by Lesley Fleming, HTR & Diane Relf, PhD, HTM

Photo by D. Relf, LAFCO New York, Hoss Tools & Gardeners World



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will harvest herb flowers.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Use nature/plant interactions for social & intellectual growth

Physical: Develop & do physical activities to shift mood

Psychological/Emotional: Reflect on positive & negative aspects of passage of time; explore spiritual focus (through nature interactions)

Sensory: Use sensory interactions as mechanisms for experiencing/recognizing moments of joy, happiness, pleasure

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

Materials

herbs with flowers ready for harvesting
garden clippers or safety scissors
light-weight containers to collect harvest

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.
2. Facilitator begins 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 harvested bounty. Examine herbs for pests, discoloration & mold discarding damaged leaves.
6. Discuss as a group, themes related to passage of time (harvesting after planting), moving forward finding positive & enjoyable (nature/plant) activities, resiliency & activities that can shift mood.
7. Store herbs in an open plastic bag in the refrigerator until they are used.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: This therapeutic horticulture activity is appropriate for most populations. For individuals and groups that have experienced adversity or bereavement, the beauty of flowers and moments of awe can be uplifting and guide the therapeutic focus of the session. These can include psychological focus reflecting on positive and negative aspects of passage of time, leaving behind traumatic, difficult experiences and exploring activities and thoughts that can bring joy and happiness. These will impact physical, social, and emotional health including mood shifts and social and personal growth. Using the sensory aspect of harvesting flowers can reinforce therapeutic goals in multiple health domains (review goals listed above). Measuring outcomes for these therapeutic goals using a Flourishing Scale (Diener, 2020) and/or pre and post retrospective

evaluations (Cole, 2020) with questions on mood, happiness, learning new skills, positive leisure activities and cooperating with others can be effective for participants and program evaluation (Fleming, 2012).

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Close supervision may be required for some populations or individuals when using scissors. Accommodations can include a partner using scissors to cut while participant holds stem or flowers brought inside already cut, with participants removing flowers from stems using fingers. For participants who have experienced trauma or bereavement, involving trauma specialists or agency staff can provide support if re-triggering occurs.

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.

- 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.

Refer to THAD activities like *Harvesting Herbs Grown for Leaves*, *Harvesting Herb Seeds for Culinary Activities & Drying Herb Flowers* for additional sessions.

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.

Norris, M.K. (2019). Herbal flower garden tour-How to harvest chamomile & medicinal flowers. [YouTube]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODtlo7tc-Co>

Polackova, Z., Fleming, L., Brown, J. & Kelejian, H. (2023). Horticultural therapy health interventions with female survivors of human trafficking: Program models. *Journal of Therapeutic Horticulture* 33(1).



Chamomile



Calendula



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.