

Activity: Harvesting Goal: Psychological/Emotional Populations: Bereaved

TH Activity Plan – Harvesting for Communal Meal – Bereaved

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will harvest fresh produce from the garden, sampling it while learning about horticulture & techniques.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Acquire new knowledge and experience

Physical: Exercise moderately

Psychological/Emotional: Engage in purposeful garden activity; recognize caring for a young edible plant as a mechanism for regrowth & moving forward

Sensory: Promote healthy nutrition while engaging taste, smell & sight senses with fresh fruit & vegetables

Social: Contribute to group meal; participate with group members, sharing tasks; increase social interactions

Materials

Garden with edible produce

Prepared edibles (papaya, guavas, bananas, rice or rice noodles)

Harvest basket, plates, napkins

Young edibles started in 4” pots with printed care instructions (Longevity spinach, Ceylon spinach)

Gloves, pruners, wipes

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Review edible garden to ensure there will be sufficient edibles, or schedule activity when this is so. Gather materials. Pre-determine food allergies, swallowing issues or contraindications with medication for food that will be served.
2. Facilitator begins session by welcoming participants to the harvesting activity for their communal meal. Sharing some benefits of communal meals (shared loss, sense of community, meaningful contribution), the participants sample the prepared produce.
3. A tour of the food garden begins with information on growing practices, identification of species, & demonstration of harvesting techniques. Participants are assigned to harvest a specific amount of selected edible plants to contribute to a communal salad or meal. Harvested edibles can be combined with supplemental pre-washed salad greens or sauteed and placed atop prepared rice or rice noodles. This depends on available amounts and facility resources.
4. After completing the harvest and communal meal, each person can select a potted perennial edible plant to take with them. Facilitator provides verbal & printed plant care instructions.
5. Optional - discussion of grief, life cycle, coping mechanisms, and/or mention of their loved one intended to promote interactions.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: This harvesting activity can be used for most populations. When used with individuals or groups who have lost a loved one, therapeutic goals can include psychological focus on coping mechanisms where purposeful garden activity encourages forward movement, and recognizing a young edible plant symbolizing new growth and moving forward. Depending on group dynamics and their needs, a discussion on grief topics like life cycle, stages of grief, coping mechanisms, physical activity as an outlet for grief, and

opportunities to mention their loved one may be appropriate. Each person will have their own grief journey and timeline. Facilitator needs to be sensitive to this, each person's resiliency, and physical and emotional ability to participate including sharing memories of loved one.

This TH activity acknowledges communal healing, the benefits of communal meals (sense of belonging, for example), and how combining nutrition, intellectual stimulation, physical exercise and social interactions with others who have experienced loss can be therapeutic in multiple health domains.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Pre-determine food allergies, swallowing issues or contraindications with medication. Sun protection is recommended. Ensure garden is free of hazards, preferably accessible.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: When making salad with harvested edibles, blending unusual leafy greens with more familiar salad blends may encourage experimentation for those who are trying them for the first time. To determine what to grow, look to local agricultural extension resources for information appropriate for the region. A useful planning guide for Florida is a University of Florida publication: Florida Gardening Calendar. To ensure vegetables are available year-round, consider growing a variety of perennial plants so they are readily available. They are low maintenance and once established, provide a considerable amount of edible plant material. Examples of edible perennials that grow in sub-tropical Florida and work well in this activity include bananas, green and ripe papaya, guava, Longevity spinach, ginger, sweet potatoes, Ceylon spinach, green bunching onions and garlic chives. Many annual edibles are suitable like culantro, brassicas like mizuna, Tokyo bakana and arugula, spigariello broccoli and various heat tolerant lettuce. All but bananas can be harvested by hand, but gloves and pruning shears should be provided in case of skin sensitivities.

Have one large harvest basket for approximately every 3 people or one per general area where harvesting is occurring. Sharing baskets encourages social interaction. If someone does not want to harvest, they can carry the basket from person to person, collecting harvested edibles. Establish a contemplative sit-spot in the garden marked with a piece of art, stone or sculpture. Introduce this spot at the start of the activity. Encourage participants to come to the area during the harvest to offer found objects to memorialize their lost loved one or collaboratively create an ephemeral piece of art, like a mandala, using leaves, flowers or other objects found in the garden. Encourage participants to say the name of their loved one out loud or provide notepaper for writing a brief poem or message to leave. This act will allow participants of all ages to honor or connect with their loved one, preserving their relationship with them while providing a way to express emotions.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

- IFAS Communications. (2024). [Florida gardening calendar](#). University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.
- Kübler-Ross, E., & Kessler, D. (2014). *On grief and grieving: Finding the meaning of grief through the five stages of loss*. Simon and Schuster.
- Raymond, C. (2023, March 28). [What does grieving do to your body?](#) Verywell Mind.
- Toensmeier, E. (2007). *Perennial vegetables: From artichoke to zuiki taro, a gardener's guide to over 100 delicious, easy-to-grow edibles*. Chelsea Green Pub.

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.