

Activity: Food/Cooking Goal: Social Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Herbal Tea Party

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will prepare and taste tea using a variety of herbs (apple mint, chocolate mint, pineapple mint, lemon balm).

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Compare a variety of herbs using cognitive and sensory inputs especially gustatory & olfactory senses

Physical: Use fine motor hand skills; explore nutritional benefits of herbal tea

Psychological/Emotional: Consider how drinking tea influences mood; plan self-care strategies using such plant products

Sensory: Observe sensory stimulation from tea & pleasure it brings

Social: Practice socializing in a group setting; practice taking turns & sharing materials

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials and set up hot water so it is available for tea-making on time. Review precautions re: allergies, swallowing difficulties, medication interactions.
2. Facilitator begins session by inviting participants to sit at small tables and socialize with others. Explain how the tea party will proceed, and the idea of making & tasting different types of herbal tea.
3. Distribute labelled samples of fresh herbs being used to make teas.
4. Place a handful of selected herbs in a teapot (or carafe) of hot water. Repeat process for each variety of herb chosen for tea party. Allow tea to brew for a few minutes.
5. Distribute tea cups to participants along with a selection of saucers they can match as desired.
6. While tea brews, discuss the fresh samples of herbs at each table and have participants pass them along to their group for all to see, feel and smell the fresh herbs, sharing the ingredients.
7. Pour the first selection of herbal tea. Allow time for tasting.
8. Add condiments as desired.
9. Repeat this as each selection of tea is sampled.
10. Facilitate discussion on the variety of teas, self-care techniques, things that impact mood like tea, meditation and friendships.

Materials

Fresh herbs

Scissors, labels, spoons, stir sticks, cinnamon sticks

Tea pots, tea cups, kettles or electric urn, tea strainers

Sweetener, milk, lemon

Napkins

Wipes

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: The hands-on social activity of the tea party invites opportunities to integrate therapeutic horticulture goals into the mix. These can include plant items like tea and their impacts on mood, self-care ideas, importance of friendship and social interactions as activities and factors contributing to health, and natural plant products as health lifestyle choices.

An herbal tea party offers opportunities for reminiscing, laughter, and socialization at any time of year. Appropriate for many populations including: vulnerable populations, seniors, youth, persons with allergies or medical conditions, and incarcerated individuals. Herbs can be used fresh or dried. Extended projects can include: propagating, cultivating and harvesting herbs, preserving herbs for later use and related herb activities.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: It is essential to check with staff and individuals before the activity for allergies, swallowing difficulties, contraindications with medication. Some individuals and populations may not be able to identify these issues for themselves. People under medical supervision need to check with their providers to ensure no potential problems (diabetes, heart disease, eating disorders). Mint might be harmful for those who are allergic to menthol or have asthma. Consuming apple mint might bring about certain side effects. Excessive apple mint consumption can lead to muscle ache, cramps, tremors, drowsiness, diarrhea and slow heart rate (Only Foods, 2024).

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: The tea plant *Camellia sinensis* produces true tea. Herbal teas in contrast, come from soaking various flowers, leaves and spices in hot water and do not have caffeine. As such they are considered to be healthier. A variety of plants can be used as herbal teas: rooibos, rose hip, hibiscus, sage, echinacea, turmeric, passionflower, kava, lemon balm, chamomile, ginger, peppermint and valerian (Seed, 2022).

Refer to related THAD activities: DIY Tea Bags, Harvesting Herb Seeds for Culinary Activities and No Bake Thumbprint Cookies.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

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