

Activity: Food/Cooking Goal: Social Populations: Mental Health

TH Activity Plan – Herbal Tea

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Photo by D. Relf, The Naked Botanical & Food & Home Magazine



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Prepare tea using mint.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Strengthen cognitive functions, including language skills & maintaining attention & focus in social setting

Physical: Practice coping skills that have a physical component for reducing agitation

Psychological/Emotional: Increase self-esteem; practice interpersonal skills; respond appropriately to social cues

Sensory: Improve mood through sensory stimulation

Social: Practice communication skills, like self-initiating conversation w/ others; work cooperatively with others; create a sense of belonging

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Set up the coffee makers in a central location within the activity room, so participants can experience the mint aroma while the tea is brewing. Fill the coffee makers with water. Place mint and bowls on the table convenient to the participants.
2. Facilitator begins session by demonstrating preparation of mint, then assisting the participants in putting on gloves, as needed.
3. Strip mint leaves off stems; put in bowl or colander to be washed.
4. Wash mint and place it in the coffee filters (fill filters full of mint).
5. Turn on the coffee maker and let the water run through once. Repeat, using the freshly brewed tea to repour back into coffee maker and adding more fresh mint to the filter if a stronger taste is desired.
6. After the tea has been run through the coffee maker twice, either serve it in a mug or fill the pitcher(s) with the tea and ice and serve it chilled.
7. Keep in mind the dietary requirements of participants and add sweetener accordingly.
8. Discussions of tea flavor preferences, strategies for calming & relaxing self (including drinking tea), storytelling where tea or social interactions are involved can extend the activity or provide verbal/social exchanges while tea is brewing.

Materials

10-12 cups fresh mint from the garden
Sweetener, sugar or honey
Ice (if ice tea is desired)
2 coffee makers
2 coffee filters
2 or 3 bowls
Colander
2 pitchers
Teaspoons
Disposable gloves
Mugs or glasses (depending on how tea is served – iced or hot)

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: If possible, harvest mint directly from the garden or purchase from grocery or farmer's market. Organize a periodic (weekly, monthly, etc.) tea gathering where participants gather

together for a therapy group or social community, brew mint tea or unique blends of tea using herbs from the garden, and work on individual/group goals within this group context on a limited short-term or ongoing basis. The gathering can be based on hobby/interest/resource sharing, a women's or men's group, or other means for

social connection. Encourage participants to help organize group meetings and/or planning the tea, as appropriate. Have extra mint sprigs on hand to pass around to participants for added sensory stimulation & social interaction.

Therapeutic goals integrated into the activity can focus on social interactions with a mental health and wellbeing theme appropriate for most populations (perhaps not tea for children). For more focused therapeutic interventions for people with mental health challenges or diagnoses, goals related to improving social interactions, responding appropriately to social cues, communication skills and working cooperatively together to make tea can deepen the social component of the activity while providing a hands-on experience in support of talk therapy with these same goals.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: The facilitator should pay attention to specific dietary requirements of participants and consider herbs that may counteract medications that participants may be taking or have negative side effects. Offer regular drinking water or other preferred drinks as alternative options for non-tea drinkers; some participants may require thickening agents for consuming liquids. Consult medical staff as needed. Monitor safe use of kitchen equipment and food materials, especially high heat items and equipment, such as hot liquids, pitchers, and coffee makers. Practice handwashing and other sanitary practices when handling food items. Wash herbs prior to using.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: In the garden planning and design phase, consider growing herbs used in making teas and other beverages; research herbs for an herbal tea garden, plant these in the garden, and harvest when ready to use. Herbs can be used fresh or dried. Do not use herbs that have been sprayed with chemicals. Experiment with the tea making process using other herbs, such as chamomile, lavender, thyme, rose petals, lemon balm, lemon verbena, pineapple sage, anise hyssop, scented geranium, rosemary, lemongrass, ginger, or even native plants such as sassafras or sumac. Also, consider using other techniques for brewing teas, such as steeping in a boiling pot of water on the stovetop or a large mason jar set in the sun. Research and share the health benefits of various herbs used in making tea, as appropriate.

Refer to THAD *Harvesting Herbs Grown for their Leaves*, *Air Drying Leafy Herbs* and *Drying Herb Flowers* activities.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Herb Society of America. (accessed 2023). Herbal beverages: Library links.

<https://www.herbsociety.org/hsa-learn/herb-information/hsa-library/library-links/herbal-beverages.html>

Torpey, J. (accessed 2023). Grow an herbal tea garden. *Fine Gardening*.

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