

Activity: Creative Expression Goal: Psychological/Emotional Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Leaf Prints

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Photos by Shaker Gallery.org, Sparkle Stories, Sejalvaywala.weebly.com & The Artful Parent



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will make artwork printing leaves onto paper or fabric using paint.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Creatively express self using natural materials; acquire horticultural knowledge of skeletonized leaves & insects

Physical: Practice fine motor skills; practice hand functions focused on reducing, coping or managing trembling

Psychological/Emotional: Practice strategies for coping with unexpected outcomes; build self-esteem

Sensory: Cope with tactile defensiveness

Social: Participate in an art show or community service project

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Determine if session will include a walk to gather plant materials or just have these on hand. Gather all materials & set up work area using paints. Make a sample art piece.
2. Facilitator begins session by showing examples of leaf printing on paper, fabric or notecards. An explanation of the session, possibly including a walk outside acquaints participants with steps they will be doing.
3. Print names on paper. Plan which leaves to use & the pattern on the paper(s). Recommend using gloves.
4. Gently dip leaves into paint or use a paintbrush to apply paint. (Use small plates for paint). This may take several practices to get the right amount of paint. Re-using the same leaf may not work if too much paint is on it; or it can be just the right amount with first application reducing the paint, making it perfect for printing.
5. If using stamping ink pads, lay leaf on paper towel, pressing ink pad on top of item.
6. Once paint or ink is on leaf, turn it upside down onto paper or fabric. Blot (don't rub) paper towel or paper if necessary to absorb excess paint or to experiment with printing. Press gently. Remove leaf.
7. Ideally participants can make many leaf printings (have lots of paper on hand), placing them in a designated area to dry.
8. Session can include a discussion of skeletonized leaves horticultural facts (Behrens, 2021), printing techniques, best plants for printing images, or organizing an art show (& observing all the artwork). Discussions on themes like coping with mix-ups or unexpected outcomes, use of creative expression to improve mood, challenging self, or sharing art with others as community service or fundraiser may be appropriate.

Materials

Leaves, petals

Water-based paint, brushes, water, water-based inkpads, pencils

Paper, notecards, mural paper, fabric

Paper towel, newspaper

Wipes, gloves, aprons

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Using live plant leaves to create artwork is both creative and therapeutic for most populations. A relatively easy art project, leaf printing can promote self-esteem, creative expression and can be used as a community service project when art or leaf-printed note cards or artwork are donated to local groups or sent to seniors' facilities as expressions of friendship. The cognitive ability requirements can accommodate a range of intellectual/reasoning/decision-making skills, making it inclusive of everyone. Demonstrating how to paint or dip leaves into paint provides visual cues. Working one on one or with a volunteer partner are techniques that will allow for participation by all. Supervise paint and what is being touched if needed (not the chairs or participant's hair for example). More complex versions of leaf printing include layering printings (hint: wait until first layer is dry), overlapping prints, using metallic paints (more expensive), or printing on fabric.

Leaves that work well for this type of printing - leather leaf and other types of ferns, maple, oak, elm and sage leaves, feathery herbs like fennel and ornamental grass plums. Ribs on leaves and skeletonized leaves make the print interesting. Select a variety of shapes and sizes. Fresh leaves that are pliable work best.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Pre-determine plant sensitivities or allergies to leaves or flowers that will be used in session. Some populations will need close supervision of paints or ink pads.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: This same activity can use flowers instead of leaves. Consider mums, tulip petals or daisies. Dip the flower head into paint, then print onto paper. If using fabric (quilt-sized pieces, t-shirts, garden gloves) consider using fabric paints, these not as easy to wash off and may stain clothing. Hosting an art show, framing the artwork (with stock cardboard matting materials or inexpensive frames), or fundraising by selling the artwork (with permission from artist/participant) can extend this activity into multiple sessions using related but different therapeutic goals.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Behrens, T. (2021). Watch out for skeletonization. College of Agricultural & Environmental Sciences University of Georgia. <https://site.extension.uga.edu/barrowanr/2021/07/watch-out-for-skeletonization/>

Dreamstime.com. (202). 402 skeletonized leaves stock photos, images & pictures. <https://www.dreamstime.com/photos-images/skeletonized-leaves.html>

Morgan, S. (2021). Plant activities using paper materials. *Digging In* 6(4).

Vaywala, S. (n.d.). Leaf prints in 3 layers. <https://sejalvaywala.weebly.com/education-blog/leaf-prints-in-3-layers>



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