

TH Activity Plan – Lettuce Be Different

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Photos by L. Lulucmy, P. Messina & Demetri.unsplash

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Materials

variety of lettuce
comparison chart
wipes, gloves

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will compare & contrast plants considering differences, relating these to differences between people.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Improve memory & reasoning skills

Physical: Develop fine motor skills

Psychological/Emotional: Expand understanding & tolerance for (plants &) people of all sizes, racial backgrounds, intellectual skills

Sensory: Increase feelings of calmness & relaxation

Social: Develop verbal & social skills; model healthy patterns of social interactions

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials & set up work area.
2. Facilitator begins session by explaining what the session will cover, the hands-on component & food safety rules.
3. Each lettuce sample is introduced with participants passing around samples (these not to be eaten at any point), comparing color, shape, texture, size, smell etc. A chart may be used or verbal discussion may be appropriate for some groups.
4. If educational or therapeutic goals are integrated into the session, time for writing (fine motor, written communication skills), sensory integration (tolerating tactile experience), or cognitive-memory skills (remembering previous sample, reasoning that one sample is a different shade of green) will guide how the session is conducted.
5. Tasting the different types of plants (washed & not handled during session) can also involve comparing & contrasting taste & texture. Horticultural information on each plant can be included, as can planting, harvesting & safe food handling of the plants.
6. Discussion re differences of plants can lead to a discussion of human differences, tolerance, nutrition & other related topics pertinent to age group, cognitive abilities, social & situational circumstances.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: The concept of comparing and contrasting plants is an activity that can be adapted for any therapeutic session, any time of year, using any type of plant. Used successfully in the *Digging Horticulture* program for at-risk middle school students, a Michigan program written and developed by Kathy Carroll, HTR this specific activity, was an effective stand-alone activity as well as a springboard for subsequent sessions. This activity lends itself to both therapeutic & educational purposes.

The activity involves participants using a rubric, looking at attributes of three different types of lettuce. Applications for other plants like herbs, fruits and vegetables, particularly those with vibrant colors— purple eggplant, orange carrots and red sweet peppers—can be appealing on a sensory level as well as easily adapted for participants with visual impairments, intellectual disabilities, or eating disorders.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: If edible plants will be consumed, prior permission & identification of allergies, food sensitivities or swallowing issues need to be addressed. Plants should be washed prior to eating them & safe food handling protocols should be implemented (no passing food between people then eating it).

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Therapeutic goals can be wide-ranging depending on the client and may include development of verbal and social skills; modeling healthy patterns of social interaction; increasing feelings of calmness and relaxation; improving social functioning, memory, reasoning skills; and physical improvements in fine, gross motor skills and eye-hand coordination.

Participation in adjunct activities like harvesting, cutting, cooking, and mixing edibles can focus on following directions, building self-esteem, and identifying positive traits in self and others. Individual or group discussions might include food experiences, school and home gardens, and food insecurity. One important aspect offered from this activity is social metaphoric implications—people come in all different shapes, sizes, and colors with different attributes, feelings and preferences. Using a salad analogy, literally and figuratively, mixing people together makes a delicious combination!

Lettuce Be Different	Sample A	Sample B	Sample C
What do the seeds look like?			
What color are the leaves?			
How do the leaves feel?			
What shape are the leaves?			
How tall is the plant?			
How does it taste?			
What else do you notice?			

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

National Geographic. (2023). Teaching tolerance.
<https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/teaching-tolerance/>
 Sung, E. & Sevier, J. (2023). 18 types of lettuce and the best ways to eat each one. *Epicurious.com*.
<https://www.epicurious.com/ingredients/varieties-and-types-of-lettuce-article>
 University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. (n.d.). Lettuce. *Illinois Extension Home Vegetable Gardening*.
<https://extension.illinois.edu/gardening/lettuce>

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.