

Activity: Creative Expression Goal: Physical Populations: All

TH Activity Plan –Living Art with Moss

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Photo by Symbiotikwalls



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will make a living piece of art for themselves using preserved moss and items from nature.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Observe art sample & create one for self using similar natural items; follow verbal or written instructions

Physical: Strengthen physical endurance doing a standing task; improve attending to task

Psychological/Emotional: Expand personal creativity; embrace positive emotions by creating something of beauty; connect with nature through art

Sensory: Touch items as a factor to determine their inclusion in art; expand sensory tolerance by brushing with moss

Social: Develop sense of self through artwork; learn to be present in the moment

Materials

A variety of dried moss

Inexpensive frames

Pinecones, sticks, small vases

Glue, hot or cold glue guns,
wire

Gloves, wipes

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Purchase sheet moss. Gather materials. Set up work area.
2. Facilitator begins session by displaying a completed living art moss piece. Directions for making one are given verbally or in written format depending on needs/abilities of participants.
3. Participants select a frame that is provided. Inexpensive frames can be purchased. The moss (sheet moss or other) is glued to the backing as the first step. Different types of dried moss can be used to give texture, 3 dimensional qualities & color variety.
4. Other items are arranged on the surface including pinecones, sticks, flowers and small vase. Living nature items like flowers, ferns make this art into a living piece of art. Some items may need to be wired onto surface or using a small vase attached to art allows for living items requiring water.
5. These items can be changed out if they droop or if participant tires of the design, or wants to make an artwork with a seasonal theme using the moss backdrop.
6. The group observes each art piece, offering positive support for the work. Discussion related to expressing self with natural items, connecting with nature as way to relieve stress & improve well-being, and psychological lift when creating something of beauty can share health benefits of activity, not necessarily described in clinical terms.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Developing sense of self as a therapeutic horticulture activity can involve creativity using natural products. This TH session, appropriate for most age groups, including youth and older adults, can foster self-awareness, build self-confidence, and demonstrate how creativity (with plants or other materials) can create positive emotions, improve mood, and reduce stress levels.

Therapeutic goals related to physical requirements can span a wide array of populations and health challenges including stroke recovery and physical injury where increasing length of time standing doing the artwork on an easel vs sitting down can work towards increasing physical strength. Using arms and upper body in the standing position can address range of motion, stamina, and eye-hand coordination challenges in a context different from formal physical therapy. For populations where physical sensory challenges exist, touching the moss can provide opportunities to practice regulating adverse sensory reactions by incorporating brushing techniques frequently used with people living with an autism spectrum disorder. Relatedly this can work towards decreasing tactile defensiveness, each of these measurable by time of engagement, degree of defensiveness or anecdotal comments from facilitator. Accommodations can include doing project from a seated position.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Gloves should be provided for handling glue and natural products. Some items may have sharp edges. Instructions should include avoiding putting any items into mouths and washing hands to remove any residues. Glue guns, both hot and cold, may be considered as a tool for the session, used with populations capable of managing safety issues. Easels should be sturdy and stable for people who may have balance or stamina challenges and may try to use them for support.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Preserved dried moss is an all-natural product that is no longer alive. It is typically processed using non-toxic materials for color, scent and texture. Vendors offer a variety of dried moss including hair moss, flat moss, sheet moss, moss mats, ball and mini ball moss, star moss, long moss and reindeer moss (Jamali Garden, n.d.; Second Flor.us, n.d.). Some moss has been dyed, available in different colors - army green, fruit green, tender green, grass green, yellow green, rice and white.

Cost of moss varies by type and vendor. Session budgets may dictate the type and amount of moss. No specific vendor is recommended; the ones cited identify types of moss for facilitator reference. Faux moss exists and is typically used for events, tablescares and living walls.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Jamali Garden. (n.d.). [All moss.](#)

Second Flor.us. (n.d.). [Preserved moss.](#)

Sterling, S. (2024). Moss frame. *University of Florida Therapeutic Horticulture Activities Database.*

<https://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/media/hortifasufledu/therapeutic-horticulture-activities-database/pdfs/Moss-Frame.pdf>

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.