

## TH Activity Plan – Making Potpourri

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**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Participants will make potpourri using natural ingredients primarily herbs.

**THERAPEUTIC GOALS:**

**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Learn new strategies for self-care; learn how to make health products

**Physical:** Practice hand-eye coordination measuring recipe ingredients

**Psychological/Emotional:** Practice strategies for self-care

**Sensory:** Identify personal alertness level

**Social:** Take turns using materials; use humor during session

**Materials**

plant material:  
lavender, lamb's ear,  
sage, rosemary,  
calendula, oranges,  
lemons, marigolds  
orris root  
lavender/lemon oil  
measuring tools/cups  
individual  
containers/lids, trays  
larger containers for  
ingredients

**STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:**

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Prepare a tray with a container & measuring cup for each participant. Have large containers with various ingredients for potpourri from which to choose.
2. Begin the session with a discussion of dried plant ingredients, and directions/recipe for making potpourri.
3. Participants measure specified amount of dried plant material as directed by facilitator putting them into their personal container.
4. Facilitator adds the essential oils to each participant's potpourri.
5. Cover the container & shake, blending it thoroughly. Sensory stimulation using the sounds from the shaking can add interest & humor to the session.
6. Potpourri should be stored in closed containers for a few weeks to allow the scent to penetrate all of the plant material uniformly. Stir the mixture regularly.

Potpourri A = less than 1.5 cups

½ cup dried lavender

3-4 drops lavender oil

¼ cup lambs ear leaves broken into small pieces

¼ cup dried sage leaves broken into small pieces

¼ cup dried rosemary broken small

¼ cup calendula/nasturtium petals

1 tablespoon orris root

Potpourri B = less than 1 cup

¼ cup orange peels finely sliced & dried

¼ cup lemon peels finely sliced & dried

¼ cup lemon verbena/lemon balm

¼ cup marigold/calendula petals

3-4 drops lemon oil

1 tablespoon orris root

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** This activity lends itself to sensory stimulation, appropriate and enjoyable for most populations, with the exception of those who may be tempted to put items into their mouths. Looking & observing potpourri ingredients provides opportunities for plant identification, exercises related to math & measuring, comparing & contrasting color/shape/smell/brittleness/size. Activity can provide some physical activity of arms & hands shaking ingredients to mix, and hand eye coordination practice which may be a goal for some populations. Therapeutic horticulture goals focused on self-care can connect intellectual & psycho-

emotional health domains. Sensory goals can involve individuals identifying personal alertness level (their thresholds for sensory inputs – smell, touch, see), self-selecting appropriate breaks from sensory activities & tolerance for others while in a group setting. Therapeutic goals for classroom or group setting can include practicing social interactions where taking turns at the ingredient containers reinforces positive polite group dynamics, working cooperatively & providing a safe space to use humor related to potpourri/poh-poo-ree, rotten stuff & smells. Facilitator might have to take the lead with humor, perhaps setting some boundaries.

**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS:** Care with essential oils is necessary; facilitator should handle the oil taking extra care with people with sensitive skin. The essential oil should never touch skin directly. Gloves should be available. Potpourri should never be ingested. Populations with tendencies to put items in their mouths should be closely supervised, partnered with a buddy or another activity with fragrance substituted.

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** Potpourri, pronounced *poh-poo-ree*, means rotten pot in French. The mixture can include dried flower petals, herbs, spices, essential oils and a natural fixative like orris root. Potpourri materials can be expensive if purchased. With advance planning, plants for potpourri can be grown & dried. Filler materials of redbud pods, dried flower petals, fruit peels, attractive seed pods or leaves & wood shavings can be gathered & added (as a separate TH activity). Orris root, made from the dried root of the Florentine Iris is typically used to preserve the fragrance (it has little scent of its own) & can be purchased at whole food stores.

Discussing self-care is a natural segway - this activity making a natural product can improve mood through scent, with other topics like developing strategies for self-care involving nutrition, exercise, sleep & time outdoors positive adjuncts to improving health through lifestyle choices. The impact scent can have on mood now has extensive empirical evidence though this topic is probably best presented with hands-on olfactory experiences, though TH facilitator can expand their knowledge with awareness of the research.

Other related products that can be made from potpourri include sachets & dream pillows. Making potpourri as gifts and as items for plant sales or fundraisers can extend the activity into multiple sessions.

#### REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

- Kontaris, I., East, B.S. & Wilson, D.A. (2020). Behavioral and neurobiological convergence of odor, mood and emotion: A review. *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience*, 14, 35.
- Park Brown, S. (2020). Drying and preserving plant materials for decorative uses. UFIFAS Extension. <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/EP004>
- Noonan, J. (2012). Teacher craft project: How to make potpourri. [YouTube]. *Scholastic Instructor Magazine*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uuhi711LV9I>



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.