

Activity: Planting **Goal:** Psychological/Emotional **Populations:** Mental Health

TH Activity Plan – Marigold Seedlings Intention Letter

Text by Katie Pukash

Photo by K. Pukash

Original publication: Pukash, K. (2025, Aug.). *AHTA Newsletter*.



Materials

Coffee filters, pens,

Nursery pots, potting soil, soil
scoop, marigold seeds

Water, watering can

Wipes

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will write a letter of intention on coffee filters and place them in the bottom of a nursery pot. Participants will then plant marigold seeds and as they care for their plant they can be reminded to care for themselves and their recovery.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Follow directions; acquire/learn new horticultural information

Physical: Strengthen dexterity, fine motor skills, & hand-eye coordination

Psychological/Emotional: Create, express & demonstrate intentions, mindfulness, vulnerability, empathy

Sensory: Practice self-awareness related to sensory stimulation as positive or negative experiences

Social: Participate in group discussion; connect with peers in socially appropriate manner

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials. Create a handout that provides information on the culture & care of marigold plants.
2. Facilitator begins session by welcoming participants & engaging them in a mindfulness breathing exercise.
3. Participants will write a letter of intention for their recovery on a coffee filter, place the coffee filter at the bottom of the nursery pot, fill the nursery pot with soil & plant their marigold seeds.
4. Participants will then learn about the culture & care for marigold plants.
5. End in a group discussion where participants can talk about what they wrote for their letter of intention, what their experience was like, & what they got from the experience. Engage them in a discussion about how caring for their plant can mirror caring for themselves in recovery.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: This TH activity has been used with substance use and co-occurring disorders. It would be appropriate for other populations as well including eating disorder recovery. Horticultural therapy (HT) helps individuals in rehab settings by promoting mindfulness, self-discipline, and a sense of purpose. Patients engage in activities such as gardening, weeding, and cooking with harvested produce, guided by trained therapists. The nonjudgmental nature of plants allows individuals to connect with something living, reinforcing accountability and personal growth. Programs like Enlightened Recovery and Mountainside

Treatment Center use gardening as a metaphor for recovery, emphasizing cycles of growth, renewal, and transformation (Ogren, 2023).

Horticultural therapy, which involves working with plants, can offer special benefits in addition to the general positive effects of nature. These include providing a relaxing and engaging activity that promotes focus and a sense of purpose, reducing stress and helping to manage emotions, and creating a connection with the natural world that can build resilience as individuals witness the growth of plants, mirroring their own recovery. The sensory experience of gardening, like the smells and textures, can also increase mindfulness and reduce craving (Warnick, 2024).

What are adaptations and strategies available to assist clients? If clients have trouble coming up with intentions, assist them by giving examples and asking them how they wish to grow. Before setting any intentions, they can ask themselves:

- Why do I want to recover?
- What kind of person do I want to become?
- What do I want more of in my life—peace, connection, freedom, clarity?

And identify core values: What truly matters to you? Is it honesty, growth, family, compassion, faith, or freedom? Knowing your values helps you craft intentions that feel authentic and motivating.

You can ask yourself:

- What qualities do I admire in others?
- What kind of legacy do I want to leave behind?
- What behaviors make me feel proud of myself?

Examples of Intentions: Seek connections with others who support my recovery. Respond to challenges with patience and self-compassion. Be kind to myself in difficult moments. Cultivate a genuine desire to break free from addictive behaviors. Engage in daily self-reflection to help myself see what I did well that day, and what I could improve on.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts.

HT Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics should be adhered to as well as practicing universal precautions. Writing a letter of intention about addiction recovery can be emotional. Support clients as needed. Move through the session gently and with care.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: It is believed that there are a lot of health benefits that come with marigold flowers because they contain substances with anti-viral, anti-bacterial, anti-fungal, and anti-inflammatory properties (Mishra et al., 2024). Marigolds are many gardeners' favorite flower because planting them with other outdoor greens helps keep some of those pesky pests and critters away! The bloom itself symbolizes beauty, warmth, creativity, a drive to succeed, and celebration of the dead.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Mishra, DK. et al. (2024). Therapeutic benefits and processing of marigold (*Tagetes* species): A review. *Indian Journal of Health Care, Medical & Pharmacy Practice*, 5(1), 148-166.

Ogren, G. (2023, February 25). [Growing past addiction with horticulture therapy](#). *Recovery.com*.

Warnick, K. (2024). Horticultural therapy in addiction recovery. *AHTA Magazine*, 52(2).

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2025.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2025.