

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

## TH Activity Plan – Nature Picture Frames

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**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Participants will make a picture frame using natural materials. Two variations will be described separately below.

**THERAPEUTIC GOALS:**

**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Identify various seasonal materials found in nature and explore how they can be used to create something artistic

**Physical:** Walk outdoors to collect materials; improve fine motor skills; maintain focus and patience working on frame details

**Psychological/Emotional:** Foster creativity; expand appreciation for the aesthetic value of common natural materials

**Sensory:** Promote tactile and visual stimulation as a creative & pleasurable activity

**Social:** Participate in group interaction during activity; share or gift final product as an act of gratitude or selflessness ([refer to Cultivating Gratitude thad](#))

### Materials

Precut picture frame from cardboard or cardstock

Baskets or bags for collection

Rags/paper towels

Hot glue gun w/glue sticks or craft glue (i.e., Tacky Glue)

Dry natural materials such as seeds, bark, sticks, lichen

Gloves, wipes

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS: Variation I

- 1. Pre-Session Preparation:** Cut cardboard or cardstock into the form of a picture frame. The size of the frame depends upon the size of the picture, but leave about 1.5" on all sides. The inside cutout of the frame should provide a ¼" overlap of the picture on all sides. For example, a 4x6 picture should have a frame that is 6.5x 8.5 outer dimensions and 3.5x5.5 opening.
2. Facilitator begins session by showing a previously made picture frame and some examples of seeds/seed pods, lichen, small conifer cones, sticks, pieces of bark and other material that can be practically used in the activity. Ask participants where they might find natural items.
3. Provide baskets or bags for collection and lead clients on a walk outdoors to collect items, encouraging them to be observant of nature.
4. If it is impractical for clients to collect materials, have these on hand prior to the session.
5. Lay out all the natural materials and have clients observe them, noting details about each, doing sensory stimulation & sharing observations.
6. Make sure materials are dry and use rags or towels to wipe off any dirt.
7. Have participants select materials, arrange on their picture frame and attach with hot glue or craft glue.



### Materials

Precut picture frame from ¼” plywood

Decoupage medium (i.e., Mod Podge)

Paint brushes—¼” wide

Small paper cups

Dried, pressed flower petals and leaves

Newspaper

Gloves, wipes

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS: Variation 2

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Cut plywood into the form of a picture frame, see above regarding dimensions. Sand rough edges until smooth. Paint with a latex paint. (This could be part of session).
2. Collect flower petals and leaves and dry them. Pressing flowers previously as another session is an option. To dry quickly, materials can be placed on paper towels and sandwiched between thin cardboard, held together with binder clips. Place in a food dehydrator on medium setting for 3-4 hours (depending on the thickness of the material).
3. Have small cups of decoupage medium, brushes and frames placed around the table.
4. Facilitator begins session by showing a previously made picture frame and dried materials. Have participants observe the variety and color of the materials. Tell them they will make a picture frame of their own.
5. Have clients select materials and lay them out on the frame.
6. Apply a coat of decoupage medium to the frame and place pressed plant materials on the wet frame. Apply a coat of medium, making sure all materials are covered. Allow to dry and repeat if necessary.
7. While frames are drying, encourage social interaction by asking clients what picture they might put in it. Or if it is intended for a gift, who they might give it to. Discussing the concept of gratitude can also be integrated into the session.

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** These activities are appropriate for many different populations. If clients are mobile, taking a walk and collecting materials can be an important aspect of this activity, expanding exercise and developing skills in observing elements in nature.

The dried flower material in Variation 2 can be very delicate and will require a fair amount of dexterity, patience, and fine motor skills. If this is a concern, Variation 1 may be more appropriate. Using a hot glue gun requires quick work and may be too difficult for some populations.

**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS:** All adhesive materials listed are non-toxic. Using a hot glue gun and dehydrator may be unsafe for some populations, and should be used judiciously.

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** These activities can take a fair amount of time especially if clients are involved in collecting materials. This can be divided into separate sessions with collecting and preparing in one session with a follow up of creating the frame. In Variation 2, a running collection of dried material can be kept, with material collected by the facilitator for the first session. The material collected can be saved for future use.

### REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

- Amy. (2024). Learn how to mod podge for beginners. [Mod Podge 101](#). *ModPodge Rocks.blog.com*.  
 Hendry, L. (2024). [How to press flowers](#). *Natural History Museum*.  
 Rugula, L. (2024). [How to Decoupage Dried Flowers](#).

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.