

Activity: Plant Care Goal: Social Populations: Other Specialized Populations

TH Activity Plan – Newcomer Plot Gardening on Hospital Grounds

Text by Hillary Lindsay & Lesley Fleming, HTR

Photos by Journal of the American Community Gardening Association & L. Fleming



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will garden independently in assigned plots on the grounds of a psychiatric hospital.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Participate in community activity; make a conscious effort to go out into the new community

Physical: Maintain physical skills gardening; maintain nutritional lifestyle choices growing & eating healthy produce

Psychological/Emotional: Use gardening as a food production opportunity; learn new foods different from homeland; grow familiar foods difficult to find in the new country

Sensory: Taste & use edible plants, some new to newcomer participants

Social: Develop a sense of belonging & community; participate in inclusive garden celebrations with wider community members; create community-wide opportunities for inclusion

Materials

Land or garden beds at facility

Garden plants & seeds

Garden tools, materials for support structures (for beans, climbing vines etc.)

Gloves, Wipes

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** On-going garden maintenance & preparations for new plot gardeners.
2. Facilitator begins session having arranged to meet the participant at the garden with a translator present, if needed. Participants are introduced to their plot & other garden logistics such as tool availability & water source.
3. At the beginning of the season, participants are assigned garden plots 3x20 ft to garden as they choose, primarily used for growing vegetables. Participants are given complimentary compost & are able to use tools when the toolshed is open, during designated hours. Participants are responsible for plant care & compliance with the garden's rules & are able to garden throughout the growing season as often as they choose.
4. Tasks include planting, weeding, watering, harvesting, propagating & composting. Facilitator provides horticultural information as needed.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Newcomers to the country are able to garden independently at a community garden located on the grounds of a psychiatric hospital. Intended to support newcomers, their food production, inclusion in the community, and destigmatizing stereotypes about the psychiatric hospital and its patients, the gardening activities are a combination of recreation, education with some therapeutic goals. The participants are immigrants and refugees, many of whom have farming or gardening experience from their homelands. They are typically connected to the garden through their community or organizations that help people settle in their new country. Newcomer plots are in the same hospital garden as those where hospital patients and community members garden. Though interactions are limited between the two groups, mainly due

to language barriers, the sense of sharing community garden space is evident and encouraged, especially during garden events when language interpreters are present.

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

WebMD identifies vegetables/fruits that can be toxic including apple seeds and stone-fruit pits, elderberries, nutmeg, sprouted green potatoes, raw kidney beans, rhubarb leaves, cassava, raw lima beans and butterbeans, asparagus berries, tomato leaves/roots/stems, and some mushrooms, with quantity a factor for some as is raw vs cooked consumption (Reiff Ellis, 2023). Other vegetables to be aware of that may have some health risk - eggplant (high amounts of solanine), raw bean sprouts, and commercially grown lettuce which has had numerous e coli outbreaks (not necessarily pertinent in this activity).

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: This type of newcomer gardening program and its activities typically involve partnerships with social service agencies supporting this population. The institution's garden may rely on outside funding for purchase of garden supplies, and in some cases, subsidization of some plot fees. Considerations: some plots may not be framed, some paths become smaller when plots expand beyond original dimensions (growers love their garden space and want to maximize it), and often demand for plots exceed supply. Similar type programs would be feasible at other facilities like schools, community centers and churches.

One of the signature elements of this type of activity hosted by organizations like the psychiatric hospital, in line with the goal of community inclusion for both newcomers and mental health and addiction patients at the hospital are special events and celebrations open to everyone. Plant and seed swaps, harvest celebrations and mid-summer solstice parties strengthen community where everyone including newcomers are welcomed.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Faurest, K. (2015). Stranger in a strange land: Immigrant gardeners in a nation of immigrants. In Community Greening Review. *Journal of the American Community Gardening Association*, 20.

Fleming, L. (2024). [Therapeutic horticulture activity plan- Eating plant parts – Immigrant/refugee populations](#). *Therapeutic Horticulture Activities Database (THAD)*.

Goralnik, L., Radonic, L., Garcia Polanco, V. & Hammon, A. (2022). Growing community: Factors of inclusion for refugee and immigrant urban gardeners. *Land*, 12(1), 68.

Reiff Ellis, R. (2023). Common foods that can be toxic. WebMD.com.
<https://www.webmd.com/food-recipes/ss/slideshow-toxic-foods>



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.