

Activity: Plant Care Goal: Psychological/Emotional Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Nova Scotia Plants: A Sense of Place

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Photo by Government of Canada, A. Cressler, S. Droter, Tendrils, & Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center



Materials

Garden or nature area

Plant specimens (photo above of Mayflower, floral emblem of NS)

flash cards or photos, handouts

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will expand their horticultural knowledge of Nova Scotia plants.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

- Cognitive/Intellectual:** Expand horticultural knowledge; strengthen reasoning skills; match plant photos to live plants
- Physical:** Increase outdoor exercise; practice mobility & balance on uneven ground; increase intake of fresh air for improved sleep
- Psychological/Emotional:** Explore personal growth; strengthen sense of belonging
- Sensory:** Use all 5 primary senses to explore plants; improve vestibular sense of balance; attend to seated activity
- Social:** Expand social awareness in group setting; practice positive social interactions; share garden space

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather plant examples, check outdoor space for accessibility and hazards.
2. Facilitator begins session by asking participants if plants can make them feel they are in a specific place. Can plants establish a sense of place? Prompting group – have you lived elsewhere & what plants reminded you of being here? What plants represent Nova Scotia (NS)?
3. Prompting a discussion using plant samples or questions, facilitator shares some plant facts (plants can thrive in multiple zones, may be unique to some locations like bogs, forests or coastal areas, and culturally/botanically representative of specific regions). Discuss.
4. To make session more active, facilitator can lead a walk in a garden or nature area pointing out or asking group to identify plants of NS, or set up stations with different plants, encouraging participants to move around stations, discussing what plants resonate/remind them of NS, parts of the province, or specific typography (do these areas have similar climate, garden zones?). Flash cards or photos can be used for a game of “search for this plant”. Working in teams can promote positive social interactions & goals.
5. Facilitator can ask for feedback from session – do they feel a sense of place for NS? Handouts of NS plants, encouragement of participants to be mindful of plants & sense of place in their future walks, gardens, & travels can be the intentional technique for a TH session.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: This TH activity is based on THAD [First Encounters with Florida Plants](#), structured as a workshop to enhance wellbeing. “This TH activity can provide multiple therapeutic goal opportunities from social interactions, physical exertion to cognitive stimulation. The primary focus though is on introducing and expanding participant knowledge of horticulture specific to Nova Scotia. Other applications by facilitators, botanical garden staff, or educators can be specific to other zones, states, or regions. Wellness populations and others with medical, mobility, vision or other health challenges can use this workshop format

to focus on wellness in the outdoors, where health challenges are not overly emphasized and participation normalizes abilities, time in nature, enjoyment of plants and group activities” (Fleming, Ellis & Gibson, 2025).

Session can also be delivered using a drop-in format. Identifying times and dates is recommended. Registration can be left open, capping participation at a set number. Alternatively, a station set up in the outdoor (or indoor space) can accommodate on-going participation. Refer to THAD [Pediatric Nature Station](#). Planting a specimen as part of the session may also provide additional enrichment.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Consideration for mobility, accessibility, sun protection and hydration should be undertaken prior to session. Touching plants is not recommended for specimens that are toxic, thorny or sappy. The following [plants prominent in NS are poisonous](#): **Lupine** (*Lupinus species*), **Canada Anemone** (*Anemone canadensis*), **Black Elderberry** (*Sambucus racemosa*), **Stinging Nettle** (*Urtica dioica*) and **Poison Ivy** (*Toxicodendron radicans*).

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: A sense of place can be established by learning about and recognizing plants that thrive in the area. Some participants will be particularly interested in native plants, or vegetables, or showy plants. Any of these, or a combination can provide an interesting platform for educational, recreational or therapeutic sessions. Nova Scotia for example, is known for its blueberries, apples, Christmas tree exports, and coastal plants. Flower photos below are left to right in same order as table.

| Flowers | Shrubs | Trees |
|--|--|---|
| Spotted Joe-pye-weed (<i>Eupatorium maculatum</i>) has pink or purple flower stalks that have fine white hairs. | Wintergreen (<i>Gaultheria procumbens</i>), of the blueberry family releases scent when leaves are crushed. | Balsam Fir (<i>Abies balsamea</i>) native to N. America & Canada, has smooth bark on young trees; Xmas tree type. |
| Mayflower (<i>Epigaea repens</i>), the floral emblem of NS, has 5 petaled white-pink blossoms on a trailing stem. | Late Lowbush Blueberry (<i>Vaccinium angustifolium</i>) small growing shrub grows in many types of soil preferring acidic soil. | Apple trees (<i>Malus domestica</i>); Honeycrisp, McIntosh, Alexandra, Balwin varieties; crispy fruit raw or cooked. |
| Pink Lady’s Slipper (<i>Cypripedium acaule</i>) orchid blooms from June to Sept.; also called Moccasin flower. | Rhodora (<i>Rhododendron canadense</i>) grows in bogs & swamps with purple blossoms & hairy leaves. | Aspen Poplar (<i>Populus tremuloides</i>) or trembling aspen blooms March – May; male or female, with soft caterpillar-shaped flowers. |
| Multiflora Rose (<i>Rosa Multiflora</i>) ornamental climbing rose produces many flowers on the plant. | Bearberry (<i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i>) trailing evergreen shrub has pink-white flowers shaped like vases with semi-translucent “windows” at base of flower. | Pagoda Dogwood (<i>Cornus alternifolia</i>) is a small tree with horizontal branching pattern with white flower clusters in spring, & red foliage in fall. |
| Star Flower (<i>Trientalis borealis</i>), a woodland flower with shiny stem, white flowers, & brown seed pods. | Weeping Forsythia (<i>Forsythia suspensa</i>) with yellow blooms is a spring perennial, grows to 1-3 m high. | Red Maple (<i>Acer rubrum</i>) or swamp maple deciduous tree with flowers appearing before leaves |



REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Ecology Action Centre. (n.d.). [Living shorelines plant list](#). *Ecologyaction.ca*.
 Fleming, L., Ellis, N., & Gibson, S. (2025). [TH activity plan: First encounters with Florida plants](#). *University of Florida Therapeutic Horticulture Activities Database*.
 Nova Scotia Wild Flora Society. (2025). Gardening with native plants. [NSwildflora.ca](#).
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 TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2024.