

Activity: Creative Expression/Art **Goal:** Sensory **Populations:** All but dementia or young children

TH Activity Plan – Orange Pomanders

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Photo by The Spice House



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will make fragranced pomanders using fruit & spices.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Read & measure ingredients; follow instructions

Physical: Practice hand-eye coordination, improving task performance

Psychological/Emotional: Participate in activities that can improve mood, shift negative to positive thoughts, distract from pain or grief

Sensory: Explore fruit for its sensory aspects of touch, taste, smell & view; smell various spices comparing aroma to each other

Social: Share materials with others in group; practice passing materials

Materials

Orris root powder, cinnamon, ground nutmeg, ground & whole cloves, ground ginger

Whole oranges or other fruits

Small containers with spices, vegetable peelers, ribbon

Wipes

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials, cut orange slices. Set up work areas & divide spices into individual containers. Make sample pomanders.
2. Facilitator begins session by having photos of various decorated pomanders at each seat as inspiration for session. A bowl of oranges is prominently displayed.
3. Participants are invited to reach or pass an orange to each person. Facilitator leads sensory exploration of this fruit – touching rind, smelling fruit, passing around cut orange slices for licking & tasting. Wipe hands.
4. Introducing the pomander activity as a non-edible creative art project, facilitator provides some basic instructions: peel lines in fruit skin first using a vegetable peeler (if desired & able based on functional hand skills), mix spices, roll fruit in spice mix, create holes using knitting needle or skewer, then insert whole cloves. Add ribbon.
5. The session can include measuring spices, reading the recipe, and mixing the spices if appropriate for the group.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Creative projects using plants are well received by most populations, particularly when activities introduce new ideas. Most populations can manage the physical requirements of this TH orange pomander session though safety/risk assessment for populations of people with dementia, [intellectual disabilities](#) or young children should be considered.

For populations that may need practice in the cognitive domain - reading, comprehending, and following sequential steps and recipes, this activity may provide creative and therapeutic dimensions. These skills are transferable to life skills.

The orange pomander activity has been used with bereaved populations for its psychological and sensory benefits. Distraction from grief, pain or other challenges, even for short periods of time can provide some relief. Therapeutic goals of using strategies or activities to shift mood, from negative to positive thoughts have also been incorporated into this TH activity. Enabling participants from bereaved populations to take the pomander home as an attractive and decorative memorial to the loved one they are grieving can be a comforting and positive memento. The sensory elements of orange pomanders, long-lasting and fragrant, support these goals and outcomes.

The physical task requirements for making pomanders does involve hand-eye coordination, fine motor skills, some hand strength and finger dexterity for picking up and manipulating cloves as well as cutting lines in rind. Accommodations can include facilitator pre-cutting or working with participant to create lines, using hand on hand technique, or excluding rind cutting in the session.

Functional assessment, most frequently seen and used in physiotherapy (PT), involves a variety of tests and observations that help therapists determine a client's abilities to perform daily tasks in a formalized process to develop treatment. These can include consultation, observation, palpation (touching), range of motion and muscle testing ([Proactive Health, 2025](#)). Psychometric assessment tools used in PT include functional movement screen (FMS), Berg Balance Scale, Patient-Reported Outcome Measures (PROMS), and technology devices like motion sensors and smartwatches. Also used, and often referred to as the five pillars of human movement - pressing, pulling, level changes, rotation, and locomotion - represent key aspects of functional fitness related to strength, mobility and coordination. Tests for hand functions include [Sollerman Hand Function Test](#) (SHFT) and [Jebsen-Taylor Hand Function Test](#) (JTHFT). The interpretation and use of these assessment tools is done by trained PTs, OTs or other specialists. Understanding the functional tests, goals and use can inform HT/TH practitioners though they may not use these specific tools. Assessing functional abilities is part of HT/TH, but perhaps not to this same degree.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Small pieces may not be appropriate for populations/individuals who may be tempted to put items in mouths (dementia, intellectually disabled, young children). Some TH programs for people living with dementia rely on care partners to carefully watch participants to avoid such problems, but ultimately it is the responsibility of the practitioner to ensure safety. If tasting is part of the session, prior approval from staff re participant allergies, swallowing issues or contraindications with medication should be obtained.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Originally created in France, and known as the pomme d'ambre or amber apple, pomanders were anglicized versions of decorative perfumed balls. Other fruits like limes, lemons, or apples can be substituted. Citrus pomanders seem to last longer without rot.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

American Psychiatric Association. (2025). [What is intellectual disability?](#) *Psychiatry.org*.
Proactive Health. (2025). [Quick guide to functional assessment in physiotherapy.](#) *Proactivehealth.online*.

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2025.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2024.