

Activity: Plant Care Goal: Social Populations: Physical Disability

## TH Activity Plan – Personal Growth Metaphor: Deciduous Fruit Tree Pruning

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**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Participants will use deciduous fruit tree pruning as a metaphor for identifying where they want new growth in their lives.

**THERAPEUTIC GOALS:**

**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Expand horticultural knowledge about deciduous fruit trees, pruning & nomenclature

**Physical:** Strengthen fine motor skill drawing plants & possibly gross motor skills pruning; strengthen hand-eye coordination drawing

**Psychological/Emotional:** Identify potential personal goals (physical, cognitive, spiritual, financial, emotional, social)

**Sensory:** Sensory engagement through touching hardwood cuttings & visual observations

**Social:** Share personal growth goals in discussions with 2-3 people

**Materials**

For each person:  
Deciduous fruit tree branch  
Journals or paper  
Pens, pencils, crayons  
Questionnaire

Optional:  
Magnifying glass  
Water colors  
Multiple examples of deciduous tree  
Pruners, gloves

**STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:**

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather hardwood cuttings from deciduous fruit tree (apple, apricot, plum, nectarine, peach, pear, cherry etc.). Include sample(s) of one year and two-year wood if possible. Print out a copy of the questionnaire – one per participant: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MKW77oYPpfqQ4-FhAehFXC6U9oELjJ9L2HRr8nW3q8/edit?usp=sharing>
2. Facilitator begins session by passing out a branch to each person.
3. Begin discussion of deciduous fruit trees. Has anyone had them or have them currently? What kind?
4. Show where scarring is and identify the previous years' growth, point out plant parts: axillary buds, terminal buds, and that different fruit trees produce on different age wood. Relate this to human growth - sometimes goals are achieved quickly (one-year growth) others take longer (2<sup>nd</sup> year growth +).
5. Hand out journals or paper & tape, pens, pencils.
6. Participants draw their branch or piece of the branch in their journal, label it, date it, adding details of different buds or plant parts.
7. Explain/discuss new growth and optimal pruning times. Spring pruning promotes and encourages new growth, summer pruning slows growth. Explain why timing of pruning causes different outcomes.
8. Discussion can focus on spring - the time for new growth, spring is around the corner, with prompt "where would you like to see new growth in your life?"
9. Hand out questionnaire to each participant and have them tape into the journal.

10. Read questions aloud to all and then ask participants to fill out the questionnaire by circling any of pertinence to them. Have them discuss it with their session partner – areas they want to work on for personal growth & ways of meeting these goals.
11. After individual discussion ask participants if they'd like to share. Acknowledge and give support for any positive actions they are wanting to take.

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** This TH activity was delivered to populations with physical disabilities including people rehabilitating from stroke, traumatic brain injury and people living with Parkinson's disease. Their physical challenges had impacted their lives and the focus of the session—using plant metaphors for exploring personal growth—allowed introspection and frank discussions with others who also experienced adversity, considering their future including setting of personal goals. While acquiring new horticultural knowledge, and drawing plant and pruning specifics was effective for some participants, others, particularly populations that can benefit from a vocational focus might benefit from actual pruning of fruit trees or as an adaptation, practicing pruning cuts on pre-cut limbs brought inside for the session.

Vocational therapeutic goals: Some injuries dictate that changes to vocational paths be made. In many instances, new vocations do not increase physical requirements for the new job, but some may. A vocational change to horticulture-based jobs and tasks including pruning, propagating, grafting and planting may be appropriate. A session exploring the feasibility of such jobs requiring hand-eye coordination and physical strength in hands and upper torso may provide an opportunity to consider or reject new career paths before committing to a course, career or personal goal that is unrealistic. Note that using this type of activity in TH can involve multiple domains: intellectual ability to learn new knowledge and skills, psychological/emotional abilities to accept limitations and map out new growth plans, and physical abilities as outlined, where new vocational undertakings have specific job/physical requirements.

**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitator is responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts.**

Use caution if pruning shears and pruning will be part of the session and re-assess safety and appropriateness of actual pruning for populations. Always consider plant material choices (rough bark, sharp edges, pointy twigs) when working with populations that have dementia, memory loss or risky behavior.

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** The session/TH programming can be extended by including actual pruning of fruit trees or recutting sample branches. If this is the case, safety protocols should be included. Combining the horticultural knowledge of pruning techniques, fruit trees and plant re-growth, with actual hands-on pruning can reinforce knowledge acquisition, skills and psychological strategies for making personal growth decisions. Related discussions can explore symbolism of trees in different cultures and why they represent growth.

**REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:**

- Harris, J.G. & Woolf Harris, M. (2006). *Plant identification terminology an illustrated glossary*. Spring Lake Publishing.
- Martin, O. (2019). *Fruit trees for every garden*. Ten Speed Press.
- Mongomery, B. (2022, February). [Trees don't rush to heal from trauma and neither should we](#). *Psyche*.
- Schroeder, H.W. (1992). The tree of peace: Symbolic and spiritual values of the white pine. *In Proceedings of the White Pine Symposium* (p. 73-83), Sept. 1992, Duluth, MN.

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.