

## TH Activity Plan – Plan, Plant & Eat the Rainbow

Text by Lesley Fleming, HTR

Photos by Daily Mail & Susan Samuelli Integrative Health Institute



### Materials

Graph paper, pencils  
Seed packs, transplants  
Trowels, water source, cans  
Gloves, wipes



**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Participants will design, plant & eat produce from a garden using a theme of rainbow colored edible plants. This can be a multi-session or a single session TH activity.

### THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Develop nutrition-based strategies for self-care improving or coping with physical/medical/lifestyle challenges

**Physical:** Reduce blood pressure, A1C diabetes metrics, weight

**Psychological/Emotional:** Address failure re weight management, healthy diet & related health issues like addictions & abuse

**Sensory:** Use sensory activity as mechanism for exploring joy, pleasure

**Social:** Develop sense of self by planning a rainbow garden that appeals to & reflects all the different parts of one's self

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials for each session in this multi-session activity, depending on what phase will be occurring. Determine if the planning/design of the rainbow garden will be done in small groups or as an individual activity.
2. Facilitator begins session by discussing the various phases of this activity. After introducing some garden design tips for edible produce crops that thrive in the garden (refer to USDA Growing zone), help plan for the current session & factors to be considered (seasons, temperatures, growing days to harvest for various plants, available garden space, budget) plus the nutritional value of various edible plants. Visiting the garden space is optimal.
3. Participants can design their gardens in small groups or individually. Note that the garden design process & drawings may be used for their home gardens as an option, or as the program's garden design.
4. Peer review of each other's design can identify positives & challenges for actual garden installation, maintenance & beautification.
5. For the session when planting occurs, trowels, seeds or transplants & water should be available, along with the selected garden design.\* Assignments or group decisions re who plants what & where can promote a sense of self-efficacy, direct responsibility & teamwork.
6. The session where produce is harvested &/or eaten\* should include evaluating what crops thrived, the nutritional value of harvested produce, insect infestations if any & ideas for improving the garden.
7. Eating the rainbow colors of produce should occur after safe food handling rules are discussed along with a discussion on nutrition.

\* These sequential session activities have not been fully described here. Refer to THAD activities that may provide more detailed information.

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** Planning, planting and eating edibles inspired by the colors of the rainbow can be a fun and therapeutic program. For TH programs that run over a period of months and growing season(s), this activity can be sequenced as a multi-session progression. Or it can be delivered in component parts: planning the garden, planting, and eating produce. Most populations can participate in an activity like this, with specific focus and therapeutic goals related to chronic medical conditions and strategies to improve weight, A1C diabetes, blood pressure being a natural fit. Many hospitals are now delivering nutrition-based programming for populations with these and other health issues, and these are being delivered at wide-ranging places from affiliated community gardens, corner stores, onsite hospital gardens, CSAs, pop-up food demonstrations, as well as Fresh Rx Farm to Patient programs, as nutrition education plus HT/TH services (Fleming et al., 2022).

“The role that plants play in health and nutrition has been examined by The National Institutes of Health and others for the potential to prevent, manage and treat disease (2016; Ahonen et al., 2019; Veldheer et al., 2020). Nutrition focused interventions are linked to improvements in chronic disease and disease management, diet quality, food security, hospitalization and health care costs...Research covering diverse health conditions and links to nutrition span brain health...child and youth development...dietary patterns and cognitive health in older adults...chronic disease prevention...substantiat[ing] the importance of nutrition interventions.”  
Excerpt from Fleming et al., 2022a

Programs interested in this focus should be aware of the *Food is Medicine* movement, *Produce Prescription Program* and other *Preventative Programs* where a strategy of providing access to fresh fruits and vegetables address poor diets, food insecurity and many specific health conditions (Downer et al., 2022; Fleming et al., 2022). Until the recent COVID-19 pandemic, many of these efforts focused more on the nutritional value of produce consumption than on the therapeutic value and benefits that can be derived from the growing process.

**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS:** For the eating component, activities may not be appropriate for individuals or populations who have swallowing, allergies, or contraindications with medication issues. Physician approval may be required where participants have serious health conditions and are exercising and eating program produce. Seating, shade, restrooms and garden accessibility in support of easy mobility should be considered. Safe food handling protocols should be planned/implemented well in advance. Sun protection is also recommended.

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** Fruits and vegetables offer vital nutrients, dietary fiber and phytonutrients that support a healthy diet to maintain healthy weight while reducing the risk of heart disease, diabetes, and other diseases. Consider dividing the garden into color zones. Red vegetables: lettuce, beets, radishes, watermelon. Yellow zone: peppers, tomatoes, summer squash, sweet corn. Green zone: spinach, kale, Chinese cabbage, broccoli, peas. Blue/violet zone: purple cabbage, purple potatoes, purple basil, purple cauliflower.

#### REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

- Downer, S., Clippinger, E., Kummer, C., Hager, K. & Acosta, V. (2022). Food is medicine research action plan. Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation. [https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Food-is-Medicine-Action-Plan-Final\\_012722.pdf](https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Food-is-Medicine-Action-Plan-Final_012722.pdf)
- Fleming, L., Zhang, W. & Nelson, K. (2022a). Horticulture for health activity in U.S. hospitals: Horticultural therapy, nutrition-led programming, gardens at hospitals, and affiliated community gardens. *Journal of Therapeutic Horticulture*, 32(1), 14-32.  
[https://www.flhhn.com/uploads/1/3/8/6/138696150/jth\\_32\\_\\_1\\_\\_horticultureforhealth\\_\\_1\\_.pdf](https://www.flhhn.com/uploads/1/3/8/6/138696150/jth_32__1__horticultureforhealth__1_.pdf)
- Fleming, L. & Morgan, S. (2022b). Plant activities using vegetables. *Digging In*, 7(2), 13-14.
- Jabbour, N. (2018). *Niki Jabbour's Veggie Garden Remix: 224 New Plants to Shake up Your Garden and Add Variety, Flavor, and Fun*. Storey Publishing.
- Kids Gardening. (n.d.). Grow a rainbow. <https://kidsgardening.org/resources/gardening-basics-grow-a-rainbow/>

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.