

Activity: Herbs Goal: Psychological Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Planting Mint or Catnip in Garden

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Planting mint & catnip in a garden, being present in the moment enjoying gardening & nature.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Learn about herbs & aggressive plants; cognitive practice of following sequential steps for propagation method specific for very aggressive spreading herbs

Physical: Expand physical skills & strength working in a plant setting

Psychological/Emotional: Practice being present in the moment; consider invasive plants akin to unhealthy human behavior

Sensory: Practice sensory integration & sensory processing

Social: Build & strengthen “can do” attitude

Materials

1 large plastic container (3-5 gallon) for each plant location
catmint or mint varieties:
rooted cuttings, 4 “ divisions,
or 4” transplants with 3 plants
per participant
hand trowels, plastic scoops
gloves, kneeling pad
garden hose with water wand,
breaker nozzle & water source
labels, markers
hand sanitizer, washing station

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Prep:** Prepare 3-5 gallon plastic containers by removing the bottoms. This can be done with a sturdy handsaw, knife or tin snips to remove the full bottom around the sides, with a jigsaw or other reciprocating saw to remove the base inside the bottom ring. Removing the bottom of the container ensures that the roots are confined by the sides of the container while water can easily drain from the open bottom to prevent excessive dampness and root rot. (For above ground container culture, cut four large drainage holes at the base of the sides.) Dig holes for bottomless containers leaving 3-4 inches of the pot above the soil surface to keep the stolons from escaping over or under the sides of the container.
2. The next steps can be done by participants or leader. Place container in hole & settle soil around it. Have 3 transplants, rooted cuttings, or divisions of mint or catnip for each container.
3. Mix 1 part compost to 4 parts high quality garden soil in a wheelbarrow. Place near the containers to be filled by participants.
4. Participants take turns scooping soil into the buried container, filling to 2-3” from the top. Gently press down on the soil to ensure that the plants are secure, supported & upright. Label plants. Water with a breaker nozzle on hose.
5. Take a break focusing on being present in the moment. Sit down, feel and smell the mints. Discuss the beauty of nature & moments of awe participants have experienced. Related discussion about unruly behavior, invasive plants & relating plant & human behavior to activity is a horizontal activity. Include positives of plant & human growth behavior too, like growing additional plants, human growth learning new things like growing plants.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: This activity is a good group activity. Allow for discussion time & options for helping each other. It lends itself to a variety of themes: taking time to enjoy the present moment, discussing unhealthy & invasive behavior – healthy behavior related to growing (new plants) or growing up, planting methods for aggressive plants like the herbs in the session. Tasks can be supervised so that all levels of intellectual abilities can participate, adjusting staff/participant ratio to suit.

For people with sensory integration & sensory processing challenges (sensory integration dysfunction (SID), sensory processing disorder (SPD), ADHD, ASD & disruptive behavior) the therapeutic goals can address how to organize planting tasks, regulating behavior & appropriate responses to direction (Camarata et al., 2020).

Accommodations for people with physical challenges could include planting herbs in raised beds using the container/containment method, task assignment of rooting cuttings, watering or appropriate functions based on physical abilities, or prep of containers cutting out bottom for people with upper body strength & arm functioning who may be paralyzed below the waist. The prep activities could be done by some participants if they are able to use sharp tools. Master gardener or other volunteers might also be involved in the activity prep.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Sun protection & gloves should be used. Adaptive tools may be appropriate. Sharp tools may not be appropriate for all populations to use, with prep being done prior to session.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Determine appropriate tasks based on functional & cognitive skills of participants. Partnering clients in two's will promote socialization, provide supportive assistance, and teach tolerance particularly if some participants have varying types of skills. Planting mints or catnip in gardens at community gardens, senior facilities or school could be a community project.



REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

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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.