

Activity: Harvesting Goal: Social Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Plums & Plum Syrup with Intergenerational Activities & Social Participation

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Materials

1 kg of fresh ume
(Japanese green plums)

1 kg (2.2 lbs.) rock sugar

Optional: a small amount of
vinegar

Toothpicks, containers, knives,
paper towel, jars

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will undertake several activities using plums including harvesting, processing, & making plum syrup. These related activities will occur over a period of months in several sessions. Refer to Plum Syrup Refreshment THAD, also written as a separate activity.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Expand understanding of sequential activities; follow sequential steps

Physical: Strengthen hands by cutting, cleaning, stirring during food preparation

Psychological/Emotional: Improve quality of life; improve mood; improve sense of connectedness within community

Sensory: Taste plums; discuss nutrition, gustatory needs & food preferences

Social: Establish social connections; interact with younger/older people in an intergenerational activity; gift or donate plum syrup to facilities & staff

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Schedule & promote session(s) for participation by elders & students. Ideally this is a 2-part activity. Refer to Plum Syrup Refreshment THAD.
2. Facilitator begins session by introducing plum focus with its 2-session plan of making plum syrup, then socializing & having a plum drink.
3. **Plum harvesting & cleaning:** Harvest plums. Select & clean the ume - choose firm, unblemished green ume. Rinse gently in water & remove any stems using a toothpick. Dry the ume, patting the plums completely dry with a clean towel. Any moisture can cause mold.
4. **Making plum syrup:** Sterilize the container. Use a glass jar with an airtight lid. Rinse it with boiling water or wipe the inside with shochu (or vinegar) to sterilize. Layer the ume & sugar beginning with a layer of ume at the bottom of the jar. Add a layer of rock sugar on top. Repeat until all ume & sugar are used, finishing with a layer of sugar. Various recipes for plum syrup are available ([Omura, 2025](#); [Martha Stewart, 2018](#)).
5. Store plum syrup in a cool, dark place. Keep the jar in a cool place away from direct sunlight. The sugar will gradually melt & extract juice from the ume. Shake daily, gently shaking or tilting the jar to mix the syrup & help the sugar dissolve evenly. Participants can assume this task or the facilitator may do so.
6. Wait patiently. After about 2–4 weeks, the sugar should be completely dissolved & the syrup rich & fragrant. Remove the ume fruits at this stage to prevent fermentation.
7. Store the syrup. Pour the finished syrup into clean bottles. Store in the refrigerator. It can last several months.
8. Part 2 of this activity involves using the plum syrup in a social setting to make refreshing drinks that are water-based with the plum syrup. Refer to THAD Plum Syrup Refreshment.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: A program focused on plums including harvesting, processing and making plum syrup was developed and delivered in Japan. Planned as a social participation program that included university students, elderly residents and senior facility staff, its multiple activities occurred over several months in two sessions. This was intentional - to use plums in a variety of ways as well as to work towards establishing social connections between participants. For the elders, improving their quality of life through these social activities was intended to also expand their feelings of satisfaction.

Multiple therapeutic goals were integrated into the two-sessions, and based on participants' functioning across health domains. For all participants, young and older, social therapeutic goals focused on establishing and strengthening sense of community and connection. During various stages of life, intergenerational relationships may be weakened, particularly for elders in care facilities, and for university students in academic settings with their attention focused on education and careers.

Research has confirmed the [health benefits of social interactions \(O'Neil et al., 2020\)](#). Therapeutic goals related to establishing and strengthening social connections can impact sense of self, sense of community, and physical functioning. Intergenerational relationships, short or long-term, can offer mutual benefits like companionship, shared learning, emotional support and knowledge transfer (Bosak, n.d.). These social connections contribute to reduced isolation, strengthening empathy, reduction in ageism stereotypes, and sharing of cultural values.

Authors Drury et al. (2017) reviewed evidence of intergenerational programs, identifying elements of successful programming. These included providing frequent contact between participants, using an extended contact as a post program intervention, choosing an activity requiring cooperation between age groups, and design activities that encourage sharing of personal information.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Safe food handling processes, consideration for participant's functionality and safety using knives or other tools is essential. Glass containers may not be appropriate for some facilities. Allergies, swallowing issues or contraindications with medicine should be addressed prior to session. Plum trees may be located on uneven or unstable ground; precautions against falls or slips during harvesting should be taken. Optionally, some, not necessarily all participants can harvest, or plums can be purchased.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Recently, the term "agriculture-welfare collaboration" has been gaining attention in Japan where social participation through agriculture/horticulture is encouraged. In other countries, promoting social participation through community gardens and care farms has existed. Implementing such initiatives in Japan, specifically Japanese residential facilities pose challenges. Factors such as staff shortages, the increasing severity of residents' conditions, and cognitive decline can be barriers to implementation. These types of activities, where horticulture is the underlying theme, are primarily implemented in day care facilities. Integrating intergenerational activities that are of interest across ages has been an element that has provided for several therapeutic goals as noted above.

Ume, or Japanese plums are ripe when the skins are yellowish peach but are typically harvested when they are bright green and firm. They are actually apricots. Japanese plum syrup is used for refreshing drinks with a citrus, apricot flavor. The method of making plum syrup varies depending on personal preference; sometimes it's made with just plums and sugar, while other times vinegar is added along with the plums and sugar. The syrup produces an aromatic fragrance as well as a refreshing drink, popular in Japan.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Bosak, S.V. (n.d.). [Benefits of intergenerational connections](#). *Legacy Project*.
Drury, L., Abrams, D., & Swift, H.J. (2017). [Making intergenerational connections – What are they, why do they matter and how to make more of them](#). Age UK.

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2025.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2025.