

Activity: Creative Expression/Arts Goal: Cognitive Populations: Senior/Dementia

TH Activity Plan – Pressing Flowers and Leaves

Text by Trish Hildinger

Photo by myxora.com



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants harvest and press flowers and leaves from living plants.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Practice responding to cues (verbal, visual, written); participate in cueing as memory prompts

Physical: Strengthen fine motor skills, strengthen hand eye coordination

Psychological/Emotional: Reminisce about past gardens, flowers, & memories this may evoke

Sensory: Compare and/or classify flowers by how they feel, smell & look

Social: Work with a partner to harvest, place & press plants, participate in storytelling about past experiences or gardens with flowers

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

Materials
Snips or scissors
Pansies, daisies, ferns or other live plant materials suitable for drying
Examples of dried plant/flower products and materials
Containers for collecting
Newspaper
Heavy books/weights
Dry erase board, pens

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Have all materials at hand. Write sequence of activity on white board prior to the session. Activity Steps: have newspaper flat, pick flower/leaf, lay upside down on newspaper as flat as possible, repeat. Some plants can be pulled apart and laid flat such as larger petals etc. Plants should not be touching each other. It is important they have space to dry. Throughout this activity take one step at a time, asking participants at each step what step they have completed and what is the next. Refer to the board or other participants who may have proceeded.
2. Facilitator begins session by introducing topic of dried plants and flowers & the activity for the day.
3. Show & pass around examples of items used with dried flowers (cards, bookmarks, candles, votives, etc.).
4. Introduce, show & pass around individual dried plants that lend themselves to pressing. Flat flowers & leaves & ones that retain their shape & color (pansies, daisies, ferns, larkspur).
5. Set the previous examples in a place where all can be seen during the activity.
6. Brainstorm with participants what plants we have in the garden that may lend themselves to being dried. Show samples.
7. Write these names down in large font & place them within view of the participants, if possible align them with the appropriate dried flowers.
8. Begin activity by either going to garden beds or passing out plants from which to harvest the flowers. Demonstrate snipping a flower with either two hands (thumb & forefinger), or using snips/scissors. If no garden beds are available, bring in fresh cuttings of plants from which to harvest.

9. Demonstrate laying the plant upside down on the newspaper, allowing plenty of space between them for proper drying. Demonstrate how bigger plants can be taken apart & dried, such as ones with big petals.
10. When participants need help remembering what to do, use the cues on the white board, the examples, as well as other participants – “look how Larry lay the flower upside down”, “we are on step number two (referring to the white board)”. If there is confusion about the project in general refer to the examples of the products & use verbal prompts “we can use these flowers when they are dry to make a card for your granddaughter”.
11. Make layers with the newspaper & plants & place heavy books/weights on top of them to ensure flat drying. Place in a dry dark area. Plants should be dry within a few weeks, depending on temperature & humidity.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: This activity allows participants to make their own choices in selecting what plants to press, where to place them on the paper, and how to use them. Some plants, such as nasturtium leaves, scented geranium leaves, and pea tendrils offer a variety of textures and shapes that can be explored using touching and vision senses by those who are unable to participate on other levels. Pressing flowers can be checked on weekly by participants, to see if they are ready, observing changes along the way. Creating larger products, such as framed art or large votive jars can take place in subsequent sessions.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Use plants that lay flat easily and are thinner than thick. Use of sharps in this activity need monitoring and may need direct hand over hand assistance, or may not be used at all, depending on the individual participants.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Use plants that lay flat easily. There may be confusion as to why plants are being cut, flowers being taken off. If this happens refer to the samples. Reassurance can be given that taking off some flowers or leaves does not hurt the plant. It may be helpful given the ability and size of the group, to have plants pre-cut and ready to press.

“Various flowers are suitable for use in pressed flower activities. Flowers with single layer petals, that are fresh and dry work well. Flowers that lay flat are preferred however, flowers with chunky thick centers can be pressed by removing and pressing petals, used without their centers.

Recommended flowers for pressing include viola, cherry blossoms (*Prunus serrulate*), Japanese maple (*Acer platanum*), sweet alyssum (*Lobularia maritima*), cosmos (*Cosmos bipinnatus*), forget-me-nots (*myosotis sylvatica*), daisies (*Bellis perennis*), anemones, pansies (*Viola x wittrockiana*), calendula (*Calendula officinalis*) and Wattle foliage (*Acacia pycnantha*). Note that the following plants are poisonous if ingested, but if there is no risk of population putting items in mouths, they may be appropriate to use: baby’s breath (*Gypsophila paniculata*), and delphinium (*Delphinium elatum*). Queen Anne’s lace (*Daucus carota*) is not poisonous but is very similar in appearance to poisonous hemlock” (Miyaki & Fleming, 2024).

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

- DelPrince, J. (2020). [Creating and using a flower press](#). Mississippi State University Extension.
- Fallat, L. (2024). [Exploring the therapeutic art of pressed flower creations](#). Arttherapy.com
- Home Depot. (2024). [How to make a flower press](#). HomeDepot.com.
- Miyaki, Y., & Fleming, L. (2024). TH Activity – Pressed flower keychains. *University of Florida Therapeutic Horticulture Activities Database*.
- Thrive. (2024). [Flower pressing](#).

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.