

Activity: Creative Expression Goal: Psychological/Emotional Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Ring in the New Year: Plant Connections

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Photo by WFAE



Materials

Paper, pencils, basket

Oranges

Optional: kumquats, peaches, apricots, orchid & bamboo plants

Container for peels & paper

Spade, recycling bin

Gloves, wipes

Optional: new year's hats & decorations

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will undertake several short tasks symbolic of renewal, recycling and positive new year beginnings, each with a plant connection.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Learn about new year's celebrations throughout the world that involve plants or gardens; use recycling concept of transforming items into useful materials

Physical: Exercise as strategy for enhancing mood; maintain hand fine motor skills by peeling an orange; write a short verse practicing hand writing

Psychological/Emotional: Practice strategies to enhance mood; use humor on a daily basis; prune out negative feelings & thoughts

Sensory: Use hands to stimulate senses; taste & smell oranges determining if these are pleasurable

Social: Celebrate Lunar New Year & customs of others; promote inclusivity by celebrating many cultures & traditions

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Research new year's customs across countries & cultures. Gather materials.
2. Facilitator begins session by wishing participants a happy new year. Describing the 3 short tasks that will be part of this session, props are brought out to spark interest: a bowl of oranges & other fruit & plants mentioned below, pruners, new year's hats/other props.
3. Plant connections to new year celebrations (see below) vary by country & culture. Share some & ask participants to share some.
4. Pruning out negative feelings & thoughts: Task 1 activity is symbolic for people using plant pruning metaphor, with each person writing a negative thought on a piece of paper, then tearing it up. Gather for recycling.
5. Peeling an orange: Task 2 activity -pass out oranges, smelling, weighing, touching outer skin as sensory engagement. Reminiscences are encouraged, with task turning to theme of recycling & renewing. Oranges are peeled with the rinds collected as garden "gold"/compost material, making something not so important transformed into something valuable. Taste oranges if participants do not have allergies or swallowing issues.
6. Walk in the garden (or indoors around facility): Task 3 activity - exercise can be a positive mood booster so this is included. Paper pieces can be placed in a recycling container; orange peels can be put into a hole dug in the garden as an easy composting method. These can become full circle moments where previous

discarded items become valuable to the garden. Encourage participants to do a new year's jig, dancing in the "moonlight" of the garden and as a reward for new efforts, new beginnings & new moods.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Using seasonal celebrations as platforms for therapeutic interventions can provide levity, change of pace and opportunities for participants to share, reminisce and laugh. New year's celebrations on the day, shortly before or after can transform moods, this an important aspect for all populations. Research has determined that positive emotions can contribute to better sense of wellbeing, reduced risk of strokes and increased longevity (see citations below). For populations that have experienced trauma, the task of pruning out old fears, habits, or thoughts can be very powerful. Using a physical manifestation, even a piece of paper, can model ways to move forward for new beginnings.

For TH programs with people living with dementia, this session can be one that accommodates the range of cognitive abilities that are typical in these groups. Some will be challenged and unable to identify something negative they want to "prune" out of their lives, and this is absolutely ok. The sensory components of peeling and eating the orange, walking in the garden, and putting items in recycling or compost piles make the activity active, often a challenge for residents in senior, memory care or other residential facilities. Exaggerate the physical exercise and the acts of composting to make it fun and silly (but with therapeutic purpose).

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Allergies, sensitivities to oranges/citrus should be identified prior to session. Substitutions for citrus can be made (apples). Be aware of participants with dementia who may become disoriented, confused or wanting to grab pruners, if these are part of the session's materials.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: New year's celebrations often use flowers and fruits for decoration and food. The Lunar New Year which is celebrated by Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese and Chinese communities have various traditions based on their climates and geography (South Coast Botanic Garden, 2024). In Chinese culture, apricot/plum (*Prunus mume*) symbolize the ability to bloom during the winter months, perseverance and hope in the face of adversity. Peaches (*Prunus persica*) represent growth and prosperity in Vietnamese celebrations, with branches forced into blooming. Mandarins (*Citrus reticulata*) and kumquats (*Citrus japonica*), native to China, are part of celebrations, used as good luck charms, and offering tasty flavors.

Korean New Year, called Seollal, celebrates with colorful items including peonies and orchids. Offering gifts of plants for the new year, like money trees (*Pachira aquatica*), bamboo plants (*Dracaena sanderiana*), and apples in Ancient Greek and Roman tradition, are quite common and tie in nicely with the theme of this session.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

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- Levy, B.R., Slade, M.D., Kunkel, S.R., & Kasl, S.V. (2002). Longevity increased by positive self-perceptions of aging. *J. Personality Social Psychol.* 83, 261–270.
- South Coast Botanic Garden. (2024). [Celebrate Lunar New Year with these 6 plants](#).

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.