

Activity: Planting Goal: Psychological Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Teacup Planting

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Materials

Teacups (optional saucer)

Drill & drill bit for ceramic
PPE

Soil

Plant material

Moss, bark or rocks for
topdressing

Gloves, wipes, safety glasses

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will create a mixed planting for themselves using a teacup as the container.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Promote creativity; learn new skills & horticultural knowledge about plants & their needs

Physical: Develop steadiness in hands (by working with small plants)

Psychological/Emotional: Develop sense of self-worth; complete assigned activity/tasks; enhance positive emotions by observing & creating beautiful plantings

Sensory: Develop greater awareness of tactile differences (smooth porcelain teacup, granular soil, rubbery jade plant leaves); touch plant textures as practice for reducing defensiveness; smell the aroma of flowers to create a relaxing sensory experience

Social: Discuss & reminisce with group about tea rituals, tea parties, family/cultural tea habits, pottery & local or international designs

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials. Teacups can be purchased at thrift shops, auctions, antique stores & yard sales. In recent years the price of teacups has risen so budget accordingly.
2. Facilitator begins session by introducing process of planting small plants in teacups, these to be taken home by the participant. A review of safety rules (wearing eye protection when drilling), instruction on using drills, and steps for completing the task are covered.
3. Participants select teacup of their choice. Where appropriate they drill drainage holes in bottom of cup. They select small plants for teacup.
4. Small stones are placed in bottom of teacup for drainage, with soil placed on top. Plants are arranged and planted, with topdressing added. Water new planting.
5. Discussion of plants, their needs and subsequent care can initiate discussions related to self-identity, empowerment, creating beauty, using creative activities for enjoyment, the value of learning new skills, spirituality and the meaning of life & one's choices.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Developed initially for women who had faced adversity in their lives, the teacup planting provided a hands-on therapeutic horticulture activity that combined gentleness and power. The women felt empowered by developing new skills and the ability to use hand drills for drainage holes in fragile porcelain teacups, this contradicting the stereotype of drilling as a man's role. Choosing the teacup and plants provided an opportunity to create beauty, a chance to express their emotions and feelings in the session, and a

way to demonstrate their identity. Discussions about these themes and the broader meaning of life and spirituality concluded the session. These same psychological elements can apply to many other populations making the teacup planting appropriate across populations. For example, bereaved individuals and the symbolic meanings and remembrances that teacups can represent (active reminder, or previously owned by their loved one) provides an opportunity for participants to can say goodbye in a creative and healing way. This therapeutic horticulture activity has also been effective for groups dealing with forgiveness, generational trauma or cultural identity.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Safety protocols for drills and eye protection should be included in session. For some populations, drainage holes should be pre-drilled and their use of drills may be unsuitable. Alternatively, using a few small stones in bottom of cup can provide some natural drainage (with attention not to overwater).

Some populations (dementia, children) may be tempted to put small items like stones for topdressing and even some of the small plants/leaves into mouths. Some facilities do not allow breakable items like teacups for activities. Museum putty can be used to attach saucer to cup if desired. Avoid plants with thorns, sap or toxicity.



NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Teacup plantings can be the platform for many therapeutic goals. The creative expression and beauty participants create allows for exploration of self-awareness, self-esteem and self-worth. Physical goals can address strengthening hand skills and steadiness by working with drills and small plants. Note that for people in early stages of substance abuse recovery, blurred vision and unsteady hands may make this activity unsuitable. This can be an appropriate activity for people with memory problems when supervised - certain cups (designs, colours, shapes) might resurface lost memories.

Accommodations can be made such as pre-drilling drainage holes. Exploring the sensory elements like the tactile differences between plants, porcelain, small stones and soil can be the focus for people in recovery and for those who have challenges with tactile defensiveness.

Plants suitable for the small teacup container include succulents, pansies, thyme (*thymus vulgaris*), daisies (*bellis perenis*), primrose (*primula vulgaris*), and moss. Plants used for terrariums can be a good source of information. Pumice as an added soil amendment can help absorb excess water. Water judiciously.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

- American Psychiatric Association. (2019). Treating Women Who Have Experienced Intimate Partner Violence. <https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Psychiatrists/Cultural-Competency/IPV-Guide/APA-Guide-to-IPV-Among-Women.pdf>
- Baldwin, DL. (2021). *Make Succulent Teacup Gardens Using Cuttings*. [YouTube]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koiBUvgoFQc>
- Beck, A. (2023). The 12 Best Terrarium Plants To Grow in Your Miniature Garden. *Better Homes & Gardens*. <https://www.bhg.com/gardening/houseplants/projects/top-plants-for-terrariums/>

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.