

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

## TH Activity Plan – Things I Love Tree

Text by Lesley Fleming, HTR & Kathy Laurenhue, MA, CHP

Photo by Artful Parent.com, V. Tyagi & S. Kim



**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Participants will make a *Things I Love Tree* using tree branches and paper leaves to express gratitude, delight & goodwill.

**THERAPEUTIC GOALS:**

**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Consciously change mood/atmosphere by expressing gratitude, delight & positive thoughts

**Physical:** Use physical activity to improve mood; maintain fine motor skills cutting, printing, attaching leaves to branches

**Psychological/Emotional:** Recognize sadness; take action to improve mood; use humor as a strategy for improving mood or boredom; focus on positives

**Sensory:** Use tactile activity to express emotions, gratitude, joy

**Social:** Participate in a group activity where each person uses creative expression for delight, gratitude, humor, playfulness

**STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:**

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Facilitator may choose to pre-cut, punch holes & string leaves depending on abilities of participants.
2. Facilitator begins session by introducing the concept of a “tree” made of loose branches which will have paper leaves attached with participants printing things they love (family, flowers, pets).
3. Optional activity – decorating branches with tempera paint or markers for a more colorful tree. As they dry, the next step can be undertaken.
4. Discussion of things that are important to each person - things that are loved - are introduced, then written on leaves that can be traced, cut & then inscribed.
5. Assembling the tree, participants gather their branches & place in the container (like placing flower stems in vase). Then each leaf is attached to the branches until all leaves are attached.
6. As a group, take time to look at and complement each tree that has been created. Facilitator can ask questions to promote sense of belonging, sense of place & common themes – Who listed their parents? Who listed a plant – which ones do you love? What activities are on your tree?

**Materials**

Branches

Paints, markers

Leaf templates, paper, pencils, string, hole punch, scissors

Containers: bottles, vases, plastic pails, metal cans

Wipes, gloves

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** This therapeutic horticulture activity is appropriate for most populations. Certified Humor Practitioner and Activity Specialist Kathy Laurenhue has [used this extensively for senior populations](#), and shares that it is able to increase energy, reduce stress, enhance creativity, facilitate communication, change perspectives, foster greater happiness and promote a more hopeful outlook. Through the hands-on activity of creating a tree that expresses personal gratitude and delight, it stimulates cognitive and

emotional self-reflection that resonates with all ages and abilities. Physical goals can include maintaining hand skills tracing, cutting and tying leaves to branches. Therapeutic goals related to mood can involve several health domains (cognitive, psychological/emotional, sensory) including recognizing sadness, undertaking activities to change mood, atmosphere and perspectives, and using humor as a strategy for self-improving mood, joy and gratitude. These can be used by individuals and as a group activity where elevating mood and working towards using more positive attitudes can be promoted through group interactions, sharing, and complimenting each other on the trees that were created.

**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS:** Some populations may be unruly with sticks; facilitator should gauge this prior to session. For facilities that do not allow glass containers (vases) substitute plastic ones. People living with dementia may need closer supervision re scissors and paints; activity can be done without these by using pre-cut leaves and natural (unpainted) branches. Remove any chipped/peeling bark to avoid these being put in mouths.

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** Creating a *Things I Love Tree* is a creative expression that involves self-reflection, emotional engagement and communication skills in a creative way. Often difficult for people to express gratitude, this activity can elicit and provide practice for emotional expressions. Some in the group may be willing to share their expressions of joy and gratitude, others perhaps not. For populations that have experienced trauma, cancer or difficult life experiences, the facilitator may need to guide them, beginning with simple pleasure ideas (hot tea, cinnamon bun, smelling fragrant hyacinths in session). Having soft, fragrant or beautiful plants at the session can stimulate the process of expressing love, gratitude, and joy while providing positive sensory engagement.

This activity can be extended by beginning the session with a walk to gather branches. Other creative ideas - use paper to make trees when branches are not available. Create a poster as a group activity using a large tree to which everyone makes and attaches their leaves (photo second from left). Create a 2-dimensional art piece with leaves and frame (photo third from left).

#### REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Laurenhue, K. (2023). *Creating Delight*. <https://creatingdelight.com/> <https://WiserNow.com>

Wright, K. (2023). 20 gratitude journaling prompts to inspire more thankfulness.

<https://dayoneapp.com/blog/gratitude-journaling-prompts/>



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.