

Activity: Planting Goal: Psychological/Emotional Populations: All

## TH Activity Plan – Tillandsia (Air plant) Terraria

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### Materials

Votives (glass/plastic)

Air plants / Tillandsia

Mosses (if indoors)

Rocks

Long tweezers

Water bath bowl

**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Participants will plant and learn how to care for air plants creating a terrarium to house their plant.

### THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Identify and maintain/care for plants

**Physical:** Use fine motor skills (using tweezers)

**Psychological/Emotional:** Reflect on safety and home as well as act of tending

**Sensory:** Activate memories by smelling mosses; use pocket rock

**Social:** Reflect on vulnerability discussing this concept in a group setting

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials.
2. Facilitator begins session with a check in: Participants will share how they identify what makes them feel 'at home' or safe in a new space.
3. Facilitator will introduce air plants/tillandsia and will discuss maintenance/care.
4. Participants will choose an air plant and will select from mosses, rocks and natural items to create a terrarium to home their plants.
5. While participants are working, air plants can be placed in water bath to demonstrate maintenance.
6. Participants can decorate their terraria with glitter or paint as appropriate.
7. Participants will (conclude) 'check out' and share on their process of creating their terrarium and how it represents 'home'.

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** This activity was originally developed to use in a residential setting with teens and adults diagnosed with eating disorders and other comorbidities. This offered a creative, regulatory, seated activity where participants could reflect on what 'home' meant to them while living in a setting that is far from home. Participants are also taught how to care for an air plant to encourage tending which is intended to be representative of tending and care for themselves. Participants can use natural items from the garden if appropriate. This activity can be done indoors and outdoors depending on the weather. Glass votives were bought from the dollar store/thrift store and these can be in different shapes and sizes. Due to issues using glass with a population that self-harms plastic options were available. Plastic Christmas ornament (purchased from Michaels) are more readily available around the Christmas holidays to create an ornament terrarium.

**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS:** Items should be inspected for sharpness (especially pebbles/rocks) when working with a population that self-harms. Glass should not be used with this population either. Some facilities restrict glass items used for programming. Rocks or pebbles can be ingested if small. None of the plants should be toxic.

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** This activity can become expensive as air plants can run \$5+ and mosses and rocks can be expensive to purchase. Cheaper alternatives can be sourced. Air plants can be tricky to care for so this should be discussed with participants in case plants die if not cared for correctly which can result in insecurity thereby defeating the therapeutic benefit.

Types of Tillandsias appropriate for terrariums: loliacea, stricta, funkiana and capitata.

Tips for caring for air plants: Terrarium should have an air vent. Consider mature size and select one that will fit terrarium. Use sand as the base to absorb excess water. Many sources suggest misting every couple weeks as the care tip but in the drier climate like California (and to prevent molding in the terrarium) removing air plants weekly/biweekly and soaking in a bowl of water for an hour then turning upside down and drying completely before returning to terrarium has been the best method of care.

**REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:**

Adams Fairacre Farms. (2022, June 3). Making an air plant terrarium.

<https://adamsfarms.com/gardentips/making-an-air-plant-terrarium/>

Holland, M (2023, July 31). A complete guide to caring for air plants. *Gardener's World*.

<https://www.gardenersworld.com/how-to/grow-plants/air-plants-tillandsia/>

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.