

## TH Activity Plan – Training Rosemary Topiaries

Text by Diane Relf & Lesley Fleming, HTR  
Photo by D. Relf



### Materials

Rosemary plants about 12" tall  
Small blunt tipped scissors  
Stakes (chopsticks, bamboo)  
Cotton string or twist ties  
Labels & pens  
Container to collect off-cuts

**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Working in teams, participants will prune & shape a rosemary plant designing it into a topiary.

### THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Practice focusing on a task; expand knowledge about topiaries & horticultural techniques

**Physical:** Practice fine motor skills; hand-eye coordination

**Sensory:** Address sensory challenges, especially tactile stimulation

**Social:** Work cooperatively in small teams, taking turns

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Preparation prior to session:** Gather materials, preparing one tree per group, with 3 participants working together training each tree.
2. Place materials on the table in front of participants & explain pruning, topiary style, using live or photo examples (at gardens like Disney or botanical gardens).
3. Demonstrate how the top foliage can be pruned into a shape.
4. Allow each group to choose what they would like the topiary to look like and make suggestions on where to make pruning cuts.
5. Participants or leader begin by pruning away the lower leaves of the main stem with hand pruners or sharp scissors. Prune the leaves or small branches as close to the main stem as possible to leave a straight, smooth, bare stem. Leave foliage on the top half or third of the stem.
6. Prune any long shoots back to encourage dense growth in the center. Topiary may be shaped to be formal, such as in cones or balls, or sheared to a more natural, loose shape (top photo).
7. Have participants place a stake into the soil about ½-1" away from the rosemary stem, tying the stem loosely to the stake with string or twist tie in several places. Another option is to use a wire shaped into heart or circle for topiary shape.
8. Label plants with the group's names.
9. Collect the clippings and dry for future use or activity.
10. Collect the scissors, wash in warm soapy water, and air dry.

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** This activity is appropriate for most populations, with some requiring closer supervision using blunt tipped scissors. Hand-eye coordination & visual acuity are required, or when working in teams, those with these skills may perform tasks requiring these. Placing stake in container or tying stems to stake may require less dexterity. Depending on cognitive functioning and age, the goal of focusing on the task at hand can be supported by verbal prompts, visual cues, and or smaller size teams (for less distraction). The

sensory elements of rosemary should be explored. Activity can be done indoors or outdoors. Design elements selecting & shaping the topiary enhance this activity.

**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS:** Use of blunt tipped scissors or pruners should be determined prior to session for safety reasons. Some rosemary will have sticky residue (non-toxic but unpleasant to some).

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** Lemon verbena, lavender, dwarf sage, scented geraniums can be substituted. Select specimens with straight tall stems. Cost of plants will be dependent on size. On-going care of topiary will be required, particularly to form a nice shape. This activity offers a multi-session approach, ideally involving participants who will continue in the program. Extended projects can include identifying herbs, decorating topiary with ornaments for many different holidays, fundraising project, reminiscing using fragrance as cue, culinary use of rosemary discussion, or training herb for more difficult shapes -cones, multiple balls, spirals, twisted or braided stems. Off-cuts can be used for other activities like propagation, sensory stimulation, herbal butter or Olympic halos.

**“Rosemary has been a significant herb since antiquity; together with ivy, myrtle, and bay, it was one of the most common plants in the Roman garden. Rosemary prospers in temperate climates cooled by sea breezes; its name comes from the Latin words *ros* and *maris*, meaning “spray of the sea’. The herb grows well in pots because the constriction of the roots keeps its fragrance strong. It is also a dependable delight in the garden, where it can grow up to eight feet...Rosemary sports light blue or white flowers that are extremely appealing to bees.....In the Middle Ages, students were encouraged to twine sprigs of rosemary through their hair to stimulate their brains; consequently the herb has come to be associated with remembrance”.**

Excerpt from Scoble & Field’s *The Meaning of Herbs, Myths, Language & Lore*. (2001).

#### REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

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Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2023.

HT Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012) & 2023.