

Activity: Plant Care Goal: Psychological/Emotional Populations: All

## TH Activity Plan – Watering Raised Beds & Outdoor Planters

Text by Diane Relf, PhD, HTM & Lesley Fleming, HTR  
Photo by D. Relf, L. Fleming, Better Homes & Gardens



**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Water raised beds and outdoor planters.

**THERAPEUTIC GOALS:**

**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Recognize plant needs & when watering is required

**Physical:** Practice standing strength & endurance; range of motion vertically & laterally

**Psychological/Emotional:** Practice care of plants & as metaphor for self-care; practice emotional connection to plants & people

**Sensory:** Practice hand eye coordination & proprioception sense; improve vestibular sense of balance

**Social:** Practice nurturing skills on plants; take turns using equipment working cooperatively with others

**STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:**

1. **Pre-session prep:** Gather materials, identify where water source is & set up work area.
2. Facilitator begins by explaining task of watering raised beds & outdoor planters. Discuss signs of water distress (too much & too little), identifying which plants/containers/beds need watering.
3. Discuss with group/individual what equipment is required & assign tasks for gathering and setting up watering equipment, along with sharing equipment if this will be necessary.
4. Test flow of water prior to watering so as not to damage plants. “Rain-like” spray is optimal. Fill hand watering cans placing them near beds if necessary for population.
5. Proceed with watering raised beds & outdoor planters, taking turns, monitoring for under or over watering, mindful of safety related to wet path surfaces & tripping hazards like hoses or equipment. Discuss these issues with populations where appropriate.

**Materials**

water source  
hose(s)  
watering wand, water can  
nozzles  
moveable hose stand with  
hose

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** This activity is appropriate for most populations. This is an effective therapeutic horticulture activity for senior & dementia populations. People living with dementia can participate fully in this activity and it provides joyful sensory stimulation. Other therapeutic goals easily integrated into the activity, and relevant to this population include maintaining & strengthening physical skills like standing (endurance, balance), range of motion – vertical & lateral (from standing, sitting or positions in walkers or wheelchairs), hand eye coordination & proprioception (how a person’s body orients itself to the world around it – knowing the location & movement of body parts without looking at them). Most populations including incarcerated, children, youth & trauma survivors may have therapeutic goals related to nurturing plants, human care & self-care & can understand metaphors using plants.

**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS:** Accommodations can include pulley system for overhead planters, fireman nozzles (where hand strength is not required), water cans half-filled for lighter weight, placement of hoses to avoid tripping & use of moveable hose reel. Potable water source should be used. Sun protection is recommended.

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** Therapeutic sessions can include discussions about the consequences of too much or too little inputs (water, fertilizer, sun) and how this applies to human needs of food, water & shelter. Topics related to this activity include xeriscape gardening, drought tolerant plants, accommodations for physically challenged people, watering cell packs or other sized containers.

**REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:**

Fleming, L. & Grimes, K. (2024). Active and passive engagement with plants: Incorporating interoception, proprioception and vestibular senses for therapeutic outcomes. *Cultivate*, 4(1).  
<https://www.flhhn.com/cultivate-epub.html>

Pathways. (2023). What is proprioception? Understanding the “body awareness” sense.  
<https://pathways.org/what-is-the-proprioception-sense/#:~:text=Proprioception%20is%20the%20body%20awareness,%2C%20pulling%2C%20or%20lifting%20objects.>

Stein, L. & Welsh, D. (n.d.). Efficient use of water in the garden and landscape. *Texas A&M Agrilife Extension*.  
<https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkind/drought/efficient-use-of-water-in-the-garden-and-landscape/>

Toth, M., Martin Palmer, L.A., Bercaw, L.E. et al., (2020). Understanding the characteristics of older adults in different residential settings: Data sources and trends. *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*.  
<https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/understanding-characteristics-older-adults-different-residential-settings-data-sources-trends-o>



Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2023.

HT Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner 2012, revised in 2023.