

Activity: Plant Care Goal: Sensory Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Weeding the Herb Garden

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Photo by UF|FAS



Smooth rattlebox weed
Crotalaria pallida var. *obovata*

Materials

Hand trowel or rakes
Gloves, wipes
Containers to collect weeds

Optional: non-toxic spray paint to mark weeds, or bright colored stakes to mark herbs so they will not be pulled

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Working in pairs, participants will weed the herb garden.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Recognize impulsive tendencies & manage these; learn about herbs, weeds & horticultural techniques

Physical: Strengthen whole body stamina required for ground level-squatting movement; strengthen hand muscles

Psychological/Emotional: Practice self-regulation & reduce impulsive behavior

Sensory: Self-select appropriate breaks from sensory activity

Social: Work cooperatively with a partner, following directions/authority of leader

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-session prep:** Facilitator determines area to be weeded, duration of session & goals (areas to be weeded different from therapeutic goals).
2. Facilitator begins session by reviewing weeds & herb identification with participants increasing their horticulture knowledge.
3. In pairs, participants mark weeds & herbs using spray paint (weeds) & colored stakes for herbs.
4. Pull weeds by hand (gloves should be worn) or use trowel to loosen soil to then pull weed.
5. Collect weeds in container for disposal or put in compost bin.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:

This activity is appropriate for most populations. Introducing weeding as part of gardening, particularly where participants will be doing on-going activities at the same site/garden will reinforce ownership, commitment to a multi-step or long term project, and pride in work. The facilitator can

provide training on identification of herbs and weeds, appropriate for age and intellectual capacities.

For populations/individuals with self-regulation or sensory processing challenges, any number of therapeutic goals can be used, these based on the individual's thresholds and challenges. Recognizing compulsive inappropriate behavior, reducing verbal or physical outbursts, or self-identifying need for a sensory break are goals that can be addressed during this activity with cueing by leader or horticultural therapist. Within therapeutic fields that treat sensory processing challenges, and unlike other treatment goals with measurable outcomes, sensory goals are more difficult to measure - most practitioners (HT, OT or PTs) do not have the capacity/equipment to measure vital signs or neural responses. Assessing and measuring outcomes related to self-regulation of behavior during this activity can include facilitator observations, discussion and self-analysis by

participant gauging their changes in impulsive actions, recognition of when such tendencies emerge and the need for sensory breaks.

This activity can be a metaphor and practice for participants working towards improving their self-regulation, managing impulsive behavior. While it may be tempting to remove all green items in the garden, without taking the time and effort to identify plants that should not be removed, this unregulated approach will not result in a garden full of produce or ornamentals. In situations where the task is assigned without a lot of supervision, where it is not obvious which plants need to be preserved, or in green areas like sidewalk beds, pathways or large areas, and for individuals with self-regulation challenges and impulsive tendencies, this activity can be challenging, productive and effective in self-identifying impulsivity and acting with a more moderated approach.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Some participants may have limited strength and physical abilities to weed – squatting to ground level, balancing, bending over etc. so this should be taken into account. Accommodations can include weeding in raised beds, limiting time spent doing this physical work, or close supervision where endurance and balance can be monitored. Participants should wear gloves and be aware of plants with thorns, stickers or sap. Sun protection is recommended.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Weeding a garden is a necessary gardening task and one that should be done on a regular basis. This activity could be an opening or closing activity as well as the main therapeutic horticulture activity. It is important to remove weeds from the garden before they mature and produce seeds. Weeds compete with the herbs for water, nutrients and sunlight. Weeds are easier to pull from soil that is moist but not wet. It is important to remove the weeds frequently, especially when they are small and their root system will not disturb the herb plant as it is pulled.

Horizontal programming topics could include composting, permaculture gardening, some “weeds” now being considered food as strategies for food insecurity, and buddy programs at schools where an older student works with a younger student doing a variety of tasks that could include garden chores.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

- ASD Clinic. (2023). Occupational therapy for sensory processing disorder. <https://www.asdclinic.co.uk/conditions/sensory-processing-disorder/occupational-therapy-for-sensory-processing-disorder.php>
- Fleming, L., Bethel, M. & Roberts, T. (2023). Self-regulation, its neuroscience foundations and horticultural therapy: Growing the connection. *Journal of Therapeutic Horticulture* 33(1).
- Mid-Florida Research & Education Center. (2023). Identifying common Florida landscape weeds by flower color. University of Florida IFAS. <https://mrec.ifas.ufl.edu/research/weedsbyflowercolor/>



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.