

Activity: Creative Expression Goal: Physical Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Xmas Ornament Walnut “Strawberry”

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will make small holiday ornament using walnuts transforming it to look like a strawberry.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Participate in creative expression using concepts of transformation & plant metaphors

Physical: Practice & strengthen hand dexterity; improve mobility of wrist & fingers

Psychological/Emotional: Consider concept of transformation (for self) using plant metaphor/ornament

Sensory: Improve proprioception sense where awareness of body (hands relative to eyes) is strengthened

Social: Make plant product for others or as community service

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Facilitator cuts & glues green felt strawberry “leaves” & jute loop onto walnuts before session. Materials are gathered.
2. Facilitator begins session by introducing theme of holiday ornaments made from natural materials. Finished examples are laid on table including the natural materials: walnuts - shelled & in shells, jute twine, spruce boughs.
3. Participants pass around walnuts in shells, feeling the texture, weight & fragrance (or no fragrance) with each person taking one to paint.
4. After putting on gloves, each person gets a plate of red paint & brush to begin painting walnut, transforming it into a strawberry. Add black “seed” dots once dry.
5. The painted ornaments are left on the plates to dry. Discussion of holiday traditions using natural products like wood, bark, pine wreaths along with cultural traditions of Christmas & other cultures’ holiday festivities enrich the session as ornaments dry.
6. Once dried, participants take their ornament with them for personal use or as gifts for others.

Materials

Walnuts in shells

Green felt, twine

Red nontoxic paint, small paintbrushes, black marker

Paper plates, wipes, gloves, wipeable tablecloth

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Making ornaments for personal use or as gifts for others can support role reversal (giving to someone instead of being the one receiving services), generosity and community service. Most populations can do the functional task of painting the walnut which requires fine motor skills. People with visual impairment, fine motor skill challenges, hand injury, arthritis or people living with dementia (with tendencies to put items in mouths) will find this activity challenging. Accommodations can be made such as: using sense of touch to paint (areas where paint has been applied will feel sticky or slick), using hand on hand painting or partner holding walnut stationary, or volunteer working one on one with person living with dementia.

Transforming a walnut into a strawberry provides a platform for discussing creative expression, personal transformations, and using intellectual skills in humorous and productive ways. This therapeutic horticulture activity can be extended by making other ornaments using walnuts like a small Christmas mouse or reindeer, gluing eyes, ears, red nose, antlers and ornament loops onto nut. Or making other ornaments made from natural materials like cinnamon sticks tied together or door swags made of pine boughs. Purchased clear plastic globes/ornaments can be decorated by inserting dried flowers or tillandsia plants (epiphyte air plants that don't require soil) making a hanging terrarium ornament (Beck, 2023). Hanging pinecones with colorful ribbon or letting participants suggest and make ornaments of their choosing with available natural items and supplies may be another option promoting creative expression.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: This activity will not be appropriate for people with nut allergies; this needs to be identified before session begins. Some people with dementia may be tempted to put ornament/items in mouth during session or when hung on holiday trees so care needs to be exercised – ornaments can be displayed in staff office where viewing it is possible without posing a safety issue. Non-breakable items should be used. Avoid sharp items.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Holiday traditions give rise to reminiscing or creating new traditions (for younger participants). It allows for learning about cultural traditions and teaching tolerance integrated into a hands-on activity. Poinsettias for example, native to Mexico, are plants that have been embraced by many countries and cultures, now a symbol of holiday time. The Christmas tree tradition is believed to have begun in Germany in the sixteenth century as are tannenbaums. The latter can be created by using a small tree or houseplant, hanging ornaments on it. Other traditions that involve plants and which may provide humor – Norway's broom and mop traditions, Ukraine's Christmas spiders, hidden Christmas pickles and Spain's Christmas log, edible or real wood (Isabelle, n.d.).

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

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