

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

## TH Activity Plan – A Sense of Place – The Carolinas

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Photos by NC Cooperative Extension Plant Toolbox



**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Participants will expand their horticultural knowledge of plants in the Carolinas.

### THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Expand horticultural knowledge; strengthen reasoning skills; match plant photos to live plants

**Physical:** Increase outdoor exercise; practice mobility & balance on uneven ground; increase intake of fresh air for improved sleep

**Psychological/Emotional:** Explore personal growth; strengthen sense of belonging

**Sensory:** Use all 5 primary senses to explore plants; improve vestibular sense of balance; attend to seated activity

**Social:** Expand social awareness in group setting; practice positive social interactions; share garden space

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

#### Materials

Garden or nature area

Plant specimens (photo above of native *Cornus*)

Flash cards or photos, handouts

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather plant examples, check outdoor space for accessibility and hazards.

2. Facilitator begins session by asking participants if plants can make them feel they are in a specific place. Can plants establish a sense of place? Prompting group – have you lived elsewhere & what plants reminded you of being here? What plants represent the Carolinas?

3. Prompting a discussion using plant samples or questions, facilitator shares some plant facts (plants can thrive in multiple zones, may be unique to some locations like bogs, forests or coastal areas, & culturally/botanically representative of specific regions). Discuss.

4. To make session more active, facilitator can lead a walk in a garden or nature area pointing out or asking group to identify plants of the Carolinas, or set up stations with different plants, encouraging participants to move around stations, discussing what plants resonate/remind them of the Carolinas, mountains/piedmont/coastal, or specific typography (do these areas have similar climate, garden zones?) Flash cards or photos can be used for a game of “search for this plant”. Working in teams can promote positive social interactions & goals.

5. Facilitator can ask for feedback from session – do participants feel a sense of place for the Carolinas? Handouts of plants, encouragement of participants to be mindful of plants & sense of place in their future walks, gardens, & travels can be an intentional technique for a TH session.

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** This TH activity is based on THAD [First Encounters with Florida Plants](#), structured as a workshop to enhance wellbeing. “This TH activity can provide multiple therapeutic goal opportunities from social interactions, physical exertion to cognitive stimulation. The primary focus though is on introducing and expanding participant knowledge of horticulture specific to the three distinct regions of the Carolinas. Other applications by facilitators, botanical garden staff, or educators can be specific to other zones, states, or regions. Wellness populations and others with medical, mobility, vision or other health challenges can

use this workshop format to focus on wellness in the outdoors, where health challenges are not overly emphasized and participation normalizes abilities, time in nature, enjoyment of plants and group activities” (Fleming, Ellis & Gibson, 2025).

“Session can also be delivered using a drop-in format. Identifying times and dates is recommended. Registration can be left open, capping participation at a set number. Alternatively, a station set up in the outdoor (or indoor space) can accommodate on-going participation. Refer to THAD [Pediatric Nature Station](#). Planting a specimen as part of the session may also provide additional enrichment” (Fleming & Bos, 2025).

**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts.** Consideration for mobility, accessibility, sun protection and hydration should be undertaken prior to session. Touching plants is not recommended for specimens that are toxic, thorny or sappy. The following plants prominent in the Carolinas are poisonous: **Black jimsonweed** (*Datura stramonium*), **Carolina allspice** (*Calycanthus floridus*), **Black Elderberry** (*Sambucus racemosa*), and **Carolina horsetail** (*Solanum carolinense*)

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** “A sense of place can be established by learning about and recognizing plants that thrive in the area. Some participants will be particularly interested in native plants, or vegetables, or showy plants. Any of these, or a combination can provide an interesting platform for educational, recreational or therapeutic sessions” (Fleming & Bos, 2025). Flower photos below are left to right in same order as table.

Flowers	Shrubs	Trees
Purple coneflower ( <i>Echinacea angustifolia</i> ) has pink flowers with nectar-rich centers.	Mountain Laurel ( <i>Kalmia latifolia</i> ), of the blueberry family, prefers the cool of the mountains or understories.	Southern Magnolia ( <i>Magnolia grandiflora</i> ) broadleaf evergreen with giant fragrant white flowers in spring.
Climbing Aster ( <i>Amelaster carolinianus</i> ), sprawls over fences and produces blue-violet flowers.	Summersweet ( <i>Clethra alnifolia</i> ) aromatic deciduous shrub draws bees and other pollinators.	Sourwood ( <i>Oxydendrum arboreum</i> ); Ornamental native blooms in summer with white racemes.
Butterfly milkweed ( <i>Asclepias tuberosa</i> ) supports many native pollinators as well as the Monarch butterfly larvae.	Highbush blueberry ( <i>Vaccinium corymbosum</i> ) requires a 5.0 pH for optimum fruiting; striking autumn leaf color.	Dogwood ( <i>Cornus</i> ) North Carolina state flower blooms in spring and feeds birds in autumn with red berries.
Carolina Lily ( <i>Lilium michauxii</i> ) Found in dry upland areas, this perennial wildflower is the only fragrant lily east of the Mississippi.	Oakleaf hydrangea ( <i>Hydrangea quercifolia</i> ) native to the Southeastern US, this plant prefers to grow near a water source.	Longleaf pine ( <i>Pinus palustris</i> ) prefers the sandy Coastal Plain and historically provided lumber, tar, resin, and turpentine.
Bee Balm ( <i>Monarda</i> ), a woodland flower with shiny stem, white flowers, & brown seed pods.	Beautyberry ( <i>Callicarpa americana</i> ) brightens autumn with purple, pink, or white berry clusters.	Redbud ( <i>Cercis canadensis</i> ) an understory tree with bright pink pea-type blooms in early spring.



#### REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

North Carolina State Extension. (n.d.). [North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox](#).

North Carolina State Extension. (2022). [North Carolina Extension gardener handbook, Chapter 12, Native plants](#).

North Carolina Native Plant Society. (n.d.). [Recommended native species](#).

Fleming, L., Ellis, N., & Gibson, S. (2025). [First encounters with Florida plants](#). University of Florida Therapeutic Horticulture Activities Database.

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2025.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2024.