

TH Activity Plan –Burdock Plant: 5 Activities

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will learn about burdock plant & do one or more hands-on activity(s) with burdock.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Expand horticultural knowledge about this specific plant

Physical: Maintain fine motor skills & physical stamina

Psychological/Emotional: Relate burdock seed resiliency to human resiliency

Sensory: Engage tactile sense handling & using burdock in several forms (seeds, small plant, roots); experience & identify positive & negative sensory inputs from burdock

Social: Share garden space with others; practice nurturing skills

Materials

Burdock seeds, live plant

Each activity will require its own materials like potting soil, containers, harvesting pruners, gloves, baskets, knives, floral containers, other flowers, peelers etc.

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials. Purchase seeds. Have small burdock plant on hand. Plant burdock well ahead of date if harvesting is one of the planned activities.
2. Facilitator begins session by introducing the live burdock plant, followed by describing the plant & it's uses (see below). Using sensory stimulation handling all parts of burdock including a "thorny" bur seed pod, participants can discuss what sensory inputs they find positive or negative (bur may be unpleasant for example).
3. Facilitator lists 5 activities using burdock, with at least one activity to be undertaken in this session (see below). This will be dependent on time of year, pre-planting that may have occurred, availability of burdock in ditches or fields on property.
4. Further discussions, depending on activity, client group & their needs or health challenges could involve dietary benefits of burdock, unusual traits (tall, burs, edible or weed perspective) relating these to human traits. Horticultural skills of planting seeds, thinning & harvesting can be the focus with or without discussion about plants & humans.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: The humble burdock plant can provide several activities that can be used in multiple sessions where a range of tasks, therapeutic goals and outcomes can be realized. Most of the activities are appropriate for most populations. The likeliest and recommended planting site (pre-planted or to be planted in session) would be farms, community gardens or urban farms where large plots of land are available and where burdock can be grown without causing unwanted and extensive seed dispersal of its burs. The plants can grow very tall and wide.

Planting Seeds – Burdock can be planted in containers or in ground. Select a site with partial shade, then water lightly and watch for germination within 7 days. For container planting, consider their large full growth size.

Thinning Burdock Plants – This should be done early in plant growth so that there is space for large plants.

Nurturing Burdock – Regular plant care will be required including watering, pest control, and thinning.

Harvesting – Burdock, a biennial plant grows extensive taproots, may be physically challenging due to extensive taproots unless stems and flowers are the only harvested parts. Burs with seeds can be harvested as well, but be cautious with burs that can be thorny and sharp.

Bouquet Arranging – Burdock provides an interesting element in any bouquet with its upright stems, purple flowers and even the distinctive seed pods/burs. Gloves may be advisable. It can be used dried or fresh.

Edible Uses - Burdock leaves, stems, seeds and root are edible raw or cooked, with stems and roots typically peeled and sliced. It is recommended that the rind be removed from the stem due to mucilage. Burdock is known within the herbal medicine world for its detoxifying properties and its fiber content from the inner bark, however TH sessions should not advise herbal remedies. Tasting burdock in small quantities after preparing plant parts may be an interesting educational component about this plant. Discussion of herbal medicinal uses and edible parts can extend this session.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Burdock is not considered poisonous to humans in typical consumption amounts however it does have mild side effects in some people including contact dermatitis and some interactions with certain medications. It looks similar to Belladonna which is poisonous. Recommended that medical advice be obtained prior to ingesting burdock in teas or supplements. Gloves are recommended for handling burs and sappy specimens.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: The scientific name of the biennial burdock is *Arctium minus* Bernh, with common names of Beggar's Button, Gobo, Love leaves and lesser burdock. Burdock flower heads are purple on tall, thick stalks that can grow 3-7 feet tall, with reddish-purple color. Their tubular florets have hooked spines surrounded by bracts that make the seed head into a bur. Its seeds are 1/4" long, grayish in color and wedge shaped, curved on one or both sides. Seed dissemination from the bur-like head spreads them far and wide. Some consider burdock a weed but others value it for its humble ability to survive and reproduce from seeds that will attach to almost anything. Its flowering period is from July to frost.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Hartzler, B., & Anderson, M. (2020). [Common burdock](#). Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.
Muis Brown, A. (2017). *Seed to Centerpiece A floral journey*. Nimbus Publishing.
Utah State University. (n.d.). [Burdock](#).



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