

TH Activity Plan – Earth Day Hanging Kokedama

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will make a kokedama based on a traditional Japanese technique of growing plants in a moss ball in celebration of Earth Day.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Learn about kokedama technique & plants suitable for the moss ball; learn about Earth Day

Physical: Strengthen spatial perception; engage fine & gross motor skills

Psychological/Emotional: Manage interpersonal relationships in group setting

Sensory: Increase tolerance for non-preferred activities; increase sensory tolerance

Social: Practice cooperative social interactions with group members; practice communication skills both listening & speaking

Materials

Sheet moss, sphagnum moss, potting soil

Whole plant or cuttings

Water, 2 bowls, twine, blue yarn

Dibble, scissors

Gloves, wipes

Optional: rooting hormone

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials. Pre-cut yarn & twine. Soak moss and soil.
2. Facilitator begins session by either prepping the moss and soil or incorporating this step into session.
3. Mix soil and sphagnum moss together, pouring on water using a 50/50 ratio to soak, not creating a puddle.
4. Prepare plant material removing from pot, removing leaves, applying rooting hormone (optional).
5. Create a ball of moist soil and moss combination. Make a hole with dibble large enough for plant to fit into. Or create a soil ball around the plant.
6. Squeeze water from sphagnum moss & create a layer around soil ball with plant inside.
7. Wrap entire sphere in sheet moss – one large sheet is easiest but can be done with smaller pieces. Use blue yarn to wrap everything together several times in several directions. Imperfect shaped spheres are likely... and natural.
8. Loop twine through the top of the kokedama for hanging it. Mist frequently & soak well once a week so the mini-Earth will thrive.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Making kokedama moss balls offers sensory elements that can be therapeutic and social. Handling wet and dry moss and soil materials, scratchy twine and yarn that becomes wet during session can address sensory defensiveness, build sensory tolerance, and provide opportunities to do non-preferred tasks like activities that require hands to get wet (gloves may be an accommodation). The physical therapeutic goals can work towards improving fine and gross motor skills handling and wrapping the twine and

moss materials, and spatial skills shaping and rotating the sphere ball during the process. Hand and finger manipulation is required so this can also be a health goal.

Most populations should be able to undertake this TH activity. Accommodations can be made for people lacking confidence, hand skills, or visual acuity by assigning a partner or volunteer. The cultural connections to the Japanese kokedama plant activity may appeal to youth, newcomers and immigrants, wellness groups and plant enthusiasts who may also have medical challenges.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Integrating Earth Day celebrations making kokedama balls provides opportunities to expand on topics that may be relevant to populations. Young people can learn about the art and horticulture technique of kokedama, celebrate Earth Day - an annual event in a new and different way, and consider tolerance of others/other ways of caring for plants, while creating living art. People with developmental delays can practice communication skills as they share materials within the group, practice listening skills as the facilitator explains the steps, and in the session or at home, verbally explain how the kokedama was made.

Kokedama tradition, considered part of bonsai techniques, is sometimes called moss ball. The plant's roots are exposed with the ball suspended in the air and sometimes in a dish.

Plants appropriate for kokedama include ferns, Norfolk Island pine, dracaena (toxic to pets), juniper, and African violet. Consideration for light exposure and where the specimen will hang may determine the best plants to use. Plants should be non-toxic so avoid pothos, philodendron, peace lily and snake plant. An added benefit of kokedama, besides the unique visual display, are indoor plants' capacity to filter and clean air validated by research.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Kidskonnnect. (2024). Earth day facts & worksheets. <https://kidskonnnect.com/holidays-seasons/earth-day/>
Nagy, K. (2015). [DIY kokedama: Japanese-style houseplant display with moss balls](#). Brooklyn Botanic Garden.
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Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2023.

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