

Activity: Nature Goal: Cognitive/Intellectual Populations: All

## TH Activity Plan – First Encounters with Florida Plants

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Photo by L. Fleming, Aloha Tropicals, Pond Megastore, Leaf Grace, Flowers of India, Better Homes & Gardens



**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Participants will be introduced to Florida plants during their first visit to Florida.

**THERAPEUTIC GOALS:**

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

**Physical:** Increase physical exercise; increase intake of fresh air; practice bending, balancing & standing skills & stamina

**Psychological/Emotional:** Practice social emotional learning; reduce negative thoughts; develop strategies for mood disruptions

**Sensory:** Use all 5 primary senses to explore plants

**Social:** Expand social interactions; practice cooperative work with group members

**Materials**

Plant specimens

Optional: flash cards,

Gloves, wipes

**STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:**

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Confirm outdoor garden is accessible, safe & available for session.
2. Facilitator begins session by having plant specimens on table or gathering spot to excite participants. The session, indoors or outdoors is an introduction to Florida plants, particularly for first-time visitors to the state. Note that plants vary by regions within the state. Ideally the workshop/session would occur in a garden or nature setting but can be adapted to indoor settings.
3. Facilitator shares some horticulture and safety points with group, then begins leading the walk outdoors. Several methods can be used depending on the group: pre-walk use of flashcards of plants with identification of these plants in garden; or engagement during the walk - asking participants to point to interesting plants (trees, shrubs, flowers) to be named/discussed during walk.
4. Conclude session by asking participants if they enjoyed session, learned some new plant information, interacted with others, felt more connected to nature from the walk, & improved their sense of wellbeing.

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** Structured as a workshop to enhance wellbeing, this TH activity can provide multiple therapeutic goal opportunities from social interactions, physical exertion and cognitive stimulation. The primary focus though is on introducing and expanding participant knowledge of horticulture specific to Florida. 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 time in nature, enjoyment of plants, and group activities.

Cognitive goals can include using reasoning skills and fostering brain development by matching photos to actual plants, strengthening language skills by describing plants, increasing knowledge and identification of plants.

Strategies for improving emotional health can be incorporated into the workshop. These can include reducing stress, being mindful, strengthening social connections and being in nature (National Institutes of Health, 2022; Hurley & Walker, 2019).

**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 of plants is not recommended for specimens that are toxic, thorny or sappy.

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** Florida, like other states and regions can provide many plants specific to the area, with interesting colors, shapes, forms, and with curious plant facts and history. The following are a few plant examples for Florida. Pictures of flowers below are in the order as listed in the table.

Flowers	Shrubs	Trees
<b>Shell Ginger</b> ( <i>Alphazero umbet</i> ) Clusters of shell-like yellow/brown/red flowers	<b>Ti Plant</b> ( <i>Cordyline terminalis</i> ) Varieties w various colors: red/pink	<b>Banyan</b> ( <i>Ficus benghalensis</i> ) Aerial roots grow down from branches; like a dense thicket
<b>Mexican Bluebell</b> ( <i>Ruellia brittoniana</i> ) Mauve & blue flowers lasting 1 day	<b>Thryallis</b> ( <i>Galphimia glauca</i> ) Bright yellow flowers on terminal spikes; attract bees & pollinators	<b>Royal Poinciana</b> ( <i>Delonix regia</i> ) Canopy of scarlet blooms in May w compound leaves
<b>Bird of Paradise</b> ( <i>Strelitzia reginae</i> ) Bracts within orange & blue sepal w blue petals, uniquely shaped	<b>Ixora</b> ( <i>Ixora coccinea</i> ) Big balls of yellow, reddish blooms	<b>Gumbo Limbo</b> ( <i>Bursera simaruba</i> ) Red/silver-red peeling bark, sometimes called the tourist tree
<b>Calathea</b> ( <i>Calathea</i> spp.) Green/pink/white patterned leaves	<b>Chenille Plant</b> ( <i>Acalypha hispida</i> ) Long strands of soft flowers	<b>Tabebuia</b> ( <i>Tabebuia caraiba</i> ) Bright yellow blossoms in spring
<b>Pentas</b> ( <i>Pentas lanceolata</i> ) Star-shaped flowers, regular & dwarf sizes, in many colors	<b>Beautyberry</b> ( <i>Callicarpa americana</i> ) Fruits turn purple, in clusters	<b>Sea Grape</b> ( <i>Coccoloba uvifera</i> ) Circular leaves w red veins, edible purple fruits & salt tolerance



**REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:**

Fleming, L. (2025). [Practitioner tool: Therapeutic horticulture goals with THAD activity examples: Cognitive domain](#). *Cultivate*, 5(1).

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MacCubbin, T., & Tasker, G.B. (2002). *Florida gardener’s guide*. Cool Springs Press.

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