

Activity: Harvesting Goal: Psychological/Emotional Populations: All

## TH Activity Plan – Harvesting Herbs Grown for Leaves

Text by Diane Relf, PhD, HTM, Lesley Fleming, HTR & Mary Predney

Photo by D. Relf & Bon Appetit.com



**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Participants will harvest herb leaves.

**THERAPEUTIC GOALS:**

**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Expand understanding of human development & growth using plant knowledge & horticulture tasks

**Physical:** Harvest herbs as part of lifestyle choices - exercise

**Psychological/Emotional:** Discuss resiliency relating the plant's ability to regrow after harvesting & as metaphor for human resiliency

**Sensory:** Improve vestibular sense of balance; familiarize self with sense of interoception (internal feelings)

**Social:** Improve communication skills during group discussion, sharing ideas & feelings re resiliency

**STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:**

1. **Pre-Session Preparations:** Prepare a harvesting kit for each participant consisting of clippers & containers. Determine how much should be harvested for session.
2. Discuss & determine if leafy herbs are ready to be harvested.
3. Demonstrate harvesting technique including how much stem & leaves to cut off.
4. Participants harvest leafy herbs with directions re amount to be harvested.
5. Gather together as a group to observe harvested bounty. Examine herbs for pests, discoloration & mold discarding damaged leaves.
6. Discuss uses for herbs (leafy & other) including culinary, craft & other uses. Compare & contrast herbs. If medicinal use of herbs is mentioned include a caveat that the therapist/program are not recommending medical usages & a doctor should be consulted prior to use.
7. Store herbs in a covered plastic container or plastic bag.

**Materials**

leafy herbs ready for harvesting  
garden clippers or safety scissors  
light-weight containers to collect harvest

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** This activity is appropriate for most populations. It can be done indoors if plants are in containers, as well as outdoors harvesting from the garden - ground level or in raised beds. The scheduling of harvesting (& planting) needs to be planned well ahead so that plants are ready for activities. This in itself could be a TH activity. Themes of resiliency including plant metaphors for regrowth (after harvesting) & examples of human resiliency, personal growth that can be forced upon individuals (plants don't get to choose to be harvested), & nutrition & healthy lifestyle choices like eating herbs can be included in session or subsequent sessions.

**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS:** Close supervision may be required for populations or individuals using scissors. Accommodations could include a partner using scissors to cut stems while participant holds stem. Or flowers can be brought inside with participants removing flowers from stems using fingers. Allergies & sensitivities to the plants should be determined ahead of session. Gloves should be available.

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** Herbs like basil, thyme, sage, oregano, chives, mint, & cilantro have leafy plant characteristics & are good specimens for this activity. The ideal time of day to harvest herbs, whether for fresh use or preserving, is in the morning. Gather herbs after the dew has evaporated but before the heat of the day. Sun and heat will wilt plants and can reduce the flavors. The best time of year to harvest herbs depends on the plant and the part that is to be harvested. If just a fresh sprig or two is needed, it can be collected at any time during the growing season. Harvest leafy herbs before they start to bloom. Once they start to produce flowers, their essential oil levels decrease, and scents and flavors are not as strong. Since most herbs lose some of these oils in the drying process, it is best to start with the highest concentrations possible.

Additional tips: When harvesting herbs for fresh use during the growing season, don't remove more than half the top growth at one time (basil, dill, parsley). Do not harvest perennial herbs during the first year so the plants will have an opportunity to establish a strong root system. After the first year, perennial herbs can be harvested in late spring (do not remove more than 2/3 of the top growth), and again in the late summer (remove no more than 1/3 of the top growth) (catnip, chives, mint, oregano, rosemary, sage, thyme). The late summer harvest of perennial herbs is best done 40 to 60 days before the first fall frost, so that the plants will have a chance to store enough food to survive the winter.

Herbal medications are prevalent in many parts of the world, less so in North America. If this topic comes up, references listed below can inform discussions. If mentioning herbs used as medicine, include a caveat that the therapist/program are not recommending medical usages & a doctor should be consulted prior to use.

**REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:**

- Babić, R., Babić, M., Rastović, P., Ćurlin, M., Šimić, J., Mandić, K. & Pavlović K. (2020 Sept). Resilience in health and illness. *Psychiatr Danub.*, 32(Suppl 2), 226-232.
- Marrelli, M. (2021 Jul). Medicinal plants. *Plants (Basel)*, 10(7), 1355.
- Verma, T., Sinha, M., Bansal, N., Yadav, SR., Shah, K. & Chauhan, NS.(2021 April). Plants used as antihypertensive. *Nat Prod Bioprospect*, 11(2), 155-184.



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.