

Activity: Nature Goal: Cognitive/Intellectual Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Ontario Wildflowers: A Sense of Place

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Materials

Plant specimens

Optional: flash cards, photos,
handout

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will be introduced to wildflowers of Ontario during a walk in nature.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Expand horticultural knowledge; strengthen reasoning skills; discuss sense of place using plant references

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

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

Sensory: Focus on visual skills & visual scanning to identify plants

Social: Expand social interactions; practice cooperative work within a group members

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Confirm outdoor area is accessible, safe & available for session.
2. Facilitator begins session by having plant specimens, photos or flash cards on table or gathering spot to excite participants.
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 nature; or engagement during the walk - asking participants to identify the wildflowers previously discussed or viewed in photos.
4. Conclude session by asking participants if they enjoyed session, learned some new plant information about wildflowers of Ontario, interacted with others, felt more connected to nature from the walk, & improved their sense of wellbeing. Did they feel a sense of place using plants as the reference? Handout recommended.






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 wildflowers in Ontario] ... Other applications by facilitators, botanical garden staff, or educators can be specific to other zones or types of plants...People 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, and increasing knowledge/plant identification.

Strategies for improving emotional health can be incorporated into the workshop. These can include reducing stress, being mindful, strengthening social connections and connecting with nature (National Institutes of Health, 2022; Hurley & Walker, 2019) ([Fleming et al., 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. Viper’s Bugloss is poisonous.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Wild flowers are plentiful in the Canadian province of Ontario. Most wildflowers are small and grow in woodland settings. A focus on wildflowers will appeal to emerging naturalists and experienced gardeners alike. The following is a sampling of wildflowers common to this province.

Wildflower		Description
	Trillium (Trillium grandiflorum , undulatum , cernuum , erectum , luteum spp.)	Each with specific shapes & colors, these perennials take up to 10 years to bloom, then bloom for a few weeks; official floral emblem of Ontario.
	Butterwort (Pinguicula vulgaris)	With violet blue color & yellow rosette leaves, this small plant has 1 bilaterally symmetrical flower on a leafless stalk. Botanic name means “greasy little one” due to shiny upper leaves.
	Hooded Ladies’ Tresses (Spiranthes romanzoffiana)	A white orchid with a “hood” over each bloom, it has inflorescence of up to 40 small white flowers in a tight spiral blooming in summer. Found in open wet areas.
	Viper’s Bugloss (Echium vulgare)	It has many common names—Adderwort, Blue Devil, Cat’s Tail—and has medium severity poison characteristics*. The nutlet looks like a viper’s head, with extended stamens & basal rosettes.
	Trout Lily (Erythronium americanum)	A solitary nodding perennial flower with petals & sepals bent backwards exposing 6 brown stamens, its brown mottled leaves are distinctive, resembling brown or brook trout markings.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

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

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

KawarthaNOW. (2021). [10 things you may not know about trilliums](#). *Kawarthanow.com*.

Newcomb, L. (1989). *Newcomb’s wildflower guide*. Little, Brown and Company.

Ontario Wildflowers. (n.d.). [Trilliums group](#). *Ontariowildflowers.com*.

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.