

Activity: Planting Goal: Cognitive Populations: Medical Condition

## TH Activity Plan – Sense of Touch Container Planting – Visual Impairments

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### Materials

Small plants, soil, containers, trays, small tools/spoons

Wipes

**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Participants will plant a small container using their sense of touch.

### THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Practice doing task relying on sense of touch considering how effective it can be; practice memory skills for plant names

**Physical:** Expand touch sensitivity & use of touch for tasks

**Psychological/Emotional:** Undertake a creative activity; address vision deficit reflecting on pros & cons; consider assistance as helpful & not a sign of weakness or disability

**Sensory:** Rely on sense of touch for accomplishing specific task; acknowledge that vision is not required for all tasks

**Social:** Work cooperatively with others including staff; ask for assistance when necessary, recognizing that it may be helpful

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Facilitator ensures facility including walkways, entrances, session room, restrooms, transportation drop-off/pick-up areas are accessible, safe & attended by staff or volunteers.
2. Facilitator begins session by welcoming participants verbally and with handshakes, guiding them to a table where they are seated. Self-introductions by other participants occurs, with facilitator calling name of each in sequence to alert participant to their turn. An explanation of the surroundings and the TH activity requires clear, explicit comments. In this case, the container planting with soil is explained in detail initially, then repeated as each step occurs.
3. Participants orient selves to their workspace, their individual tray used to contain materials & with facilitator's verbal guidance. Each participant chooses a container from several offered, using sense of touch.
4. Facilitator - one plant at a time, names & describes plant, color, shape, & care tips. Passing each plant after description to the first person, facilitator guides each person to pass to the next person to the left; person receives plant on their right. Repeat as necessary, allowing participants to engage & work together to pass plants. Participants are seated in a row or in a circle close enough to pass plants comfortably.
5. Facilitator suggests using 3 (small) plants for the container planting. Participants are asked to remember the plants they like as they were passed around group. Once selected facilitator sets plants on each person's tray. Instructions for filling container with soil, digging hole for planting, removing plant from plastic container & then inserting into container, along with light watering & bagging container for safe transportation from session takes place.
6. Facilitator asks group, one by one, to share thoughts on session, their evaluation of their work, success in using sense of touch for creative planting, & interest in participating in subsequent sessions. Usually

interested to hear other group members share their comments & express self-confidence, & enjoyment of botanical garden session/setting reinforces abilities of people with visual impairments.

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** For people with vision impairments, working towards independence, practicing asking for assistance, and accepting that help does not diminish them, can be very difficult. This is particularly so when vision impairments like macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, or injury occurs after they have had sight. Agencies like [Lighthouse for the Blind](#) and [CNIB](#) provide services and support for improving healthy functioning with vision challenges. Partnering with these types of social agencies to deliver TH has occurred, offering a different context for skill development, confidence building and sense of independence. When such TH programs occur at botanical gardens or other settings, the health outcomes can be important.

One such program delivered at the [Naples Botanical Garden](#) in Naples, Florida partnered with Lighthouse for the Blind (now called Lighthouse of Collier: Center for the Blind & Visually Impaired) and offered several TH sessions intended to increase participant attendance in public spaces, practice going out in the community (using public transportation for example), and engagement in joyful activities that developed skills necessary for healthy living. The botanical garden sought to expand stakeholder attendance, encouraging care partners and people with health challenges, in this program, people with vision impairment, to visit and enjoy their public gardens.

The facilitator and volunteers understood [how best to work with participants with vision challenges](#), having been briefed by the social agency. Adult participants were invited by the agency to attend TH at the botanical garden. Trust and therapeutic alliance between facilitator and participants were established over a series of TH sessions. One element deemed important, was inviting care partners or family members who transported participants to sessions to enjoy a guided tour of the gardens by a volunteer. The dual purpose of care partner break, and opportunity for participant autonomy and practice independence in a safe setting worked well. All aspects of accessibility were implemented to ensure safety including removal of area rugs (tripping hazards), verbal instructions for door thresholds or other changes in floor levels, accessible washrooms close-by, and use of trays for placing session materials within easy reach and orientation.

Facilitators selects plants with textural interest. Participants will have a range of vision – some will see shadows, colors and shapes ([low vision](#)), others no vision at all. Colors of plants, primarily green, but some with color, were selected so that colors were compatible. Descriptions of plants, circulated to participants to touch, smell and select for their container introduced participants to a variety of plants, horticultural facts, and importantly, using sense of touch for decision-making.

**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts.** Gloves were suggested and wipes were available. Plastic bags for transporting container plantings ensured limited spillage. Facilitator determined ahead of session, in conjunction with social service agency, cognitive/safety issues any participants might have and made alternate arrangements if necessary.

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** Small plants known to grow well in containers were selected. Several of each plant were available, none of which were poisonous, sappy or thorny. Plants recommended for container plantings with textural interest include petunias, pansies, salvias, [Lamb's ears](#) (*Stachys byzantina*), Dusty Miller, (*Senecio cineraria*), [Mexican Bush Sage](#) sometimes called velvet sage (*Salvia leucantha*), and [Irish Moss](#) (*Sagina subulata*). Herbs offering sensory qualities include basil, cilantro, parsley, dill and lemon verbena.

#### **REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:**

National Eye Institute. (2025). [Low vision](#). Nei.nih.gov.

World Health Organization. (2025). [Blindness and vision impairment](#). Who.int.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.