

TH Activity Plan –Sounds From Gardening

Text by Lesley Fleming, HTR & Kathy Carroll, MS, HTR

Photo by P. Xiaozhen



Materials

Music device, nature or bird sounds

Shovel, pruners, hammer, wood, gravel, soil, water, bird call, acorns

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will listen to & identify sounds from the garden.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Identify sounds from the garden; expand understanding of hearing challenges/disabilities/aids

Physical: Adapt auditory skills for tasks; consider a hearing assessment

Psychological/Emotional: Identify sounds that create positive moods; practice using auditory stimulation for reducing stress & anxiety

Sensory: Strengthen auditory skills; use sense of sound to identify the source of sounds

Social: Practice responding appropriately to social cues in a group setting; use humor & shared laughter as coping mechanism in group; demonstrate tolerance for hearing impairments

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials & health information (re hearing loss) for participants if appropriate.
2. Facilitator begins session by having nature or bird sounds playing as participants enter session space. Read the poem. Introduce the focus of the session as thinking about & practicing auditory skills through listening & identifying sounds made in a garden or by gardening tasks/gardening materials. Do an example - pour gravel from a bag.
3. Provide a short overview about hearing challenges ranging from mild hearing loss (due to injury, ear infections) to profound deafness (due to heredity, aging). Ask if anyone would like to self-identify or share their hearing challenges.
4. One at a time, a sound related to the garden can be made/created. Participants can take turns making a sound (pass them the shovel, soil or bird call). Participants in the group are asked to listen & try to identify the sound by writing answer on a paper quiz list, calling out idea, or raising hand. Several sounds are presented. (Creating the sound out of sight, at back of room or area can focus on sound & not sight).
5. Discussion of the sounds, differing intensity & tones, & pleasant or not as pleasant sounds can expand session where strategies for auditory stimulation (bird or nature sounds) can be coping, relaxing strategies.
6. Other topic that can be integrated into the session – being aware & supportive of people with hearing loss.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Focusing on auditory therapeutic goals including expanding an understanding of hearing loss, and strengthening auditory skills may be appropriate for a range of populations and not just those who have been diagnosed with hearing loss. Pre-session assessment or audiologist testing may provide TH facilitator with health information to best adapt and accommodate during this session. This may also guide facilitator in discussions re dealing with people with hearing loss, coping strategies, and encouragement for having hearing tested. Session adaptations can include magnifying sounds, reducing background noise, having (some) participants sit closer to where sounds are delivered, supporting participants who feel they have hearing loss and are unsettled by this during the session, and working one on one with people

who have hearing loss. Strengthening listening skills can include remaining quiet, reducing distractions, getting closer to sound source, and listening skills practice.

[Hearing loss is the third most common chronic health condition in the U.S.](#) and is considered a growing public health issue according to the American Hearing Research Foundation (2025). Hearing loss affects all ages, can occur suddenly or gradually, can be a side effect of certain medicines, or be caused by genetics, infections or exposure to noise. Fifteen percent of teens have some degree of hearing loss (AHRF, 2025). Technology is making great strides providing tools and aids to address hearing loss. An expanding understanding and body of research on the impact hearing loss has on health including cognitive function, depression, obesity, heart health are emerging including identifying populations more vulnerable to hearing loss (people with diabetes, seniors).

The ability to hear occurs “when a series of sound waves, or vibrations, pass through the outer, middle and inner ear and reach the brain for interpretation... passing through the ear canal, and causing the eardrum to vibrate. The bones of the middle ear transmit these vibrations to the inner ear” (AHRF, 2025). There are different types of hearing loss: sensorineural, conductive, and mixed hearing loss. Indicators of hearing loss can include inability to hear high-pitched sounds, asking people to repeat themselves, tinnitus ringing in ears, earache or balance problems (Cleveland Clinic, 2025). Audiologists, specialized health professionals, use a variety of tests to assess hearing loss and treatment recommendations.

Hearing therapy is delivered by certified professionals including audiologists and speech-language pathologists and can include standard auditory training, auditory rehabilitation, and auditory verbal therapy (AVT). These provide strategies for managing hearing loss that involve improving communication, enhancing hearing abilities and addressing the emotional and social consequences of hearing loss ([CADTH, 2024](#)). Interdisciplinary delivery of session involving hearing specialists may be beneficial.

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

Consideration for participants’ safety should be made re sharp objects or small items that some participants may be tempted to put in mouths.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: What types of sound can be heard or created by gardening tasks or in the garden? This will depend on where the TH session is delivered although some sounds can be created indoors and outside - pouring water onto plants or hard surfaces, pouring gravel, soil or sand from bags or containers, listening for rain or wind. Gardening tasks that create sound could include digging, shoveling, snipping small branches, building wooden garden boxes or benches, dropping bags of mulch, walking on acorns (crunching), and birds singing. It is recommended that sounds with different tones and intensities be used or simulated. Individuals, particularly people with hearing challenges will be able to hear some but not all tones.

I was raised by the sounds of the farm. The creaking of the hammock and the flickering of the sun through the tree patterns and the sound of the Bob o link and pheasant. I was raised by pebbles thrown in the creek and Ripples Of water. Of marsh grasses dancing across the water. Wings of birds in the wind. Of stepping stones and moss and clover and wild raspberries, Roses and grapevines. Lily pads, cattails. I was raised by the peace and quiet whispers of nature. Excerpted from Kathy St. Aubin Carroll

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

American Hearing Research Foundation (AHRF). (2025). [Hearing loss: An overview](#). *American-hearing.org*.
Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health. (2024). [Auditory verbal therapy for children with hearing loss: Rapid review](#) [Internet]. *Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health Health Technology Review*.
Cleveland Clinic. (2025). [Hearing loss](#). *My.Clevelandclinic.org*.

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2025.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2025.