

Garden Therapy Ideas

This reference is designed to provide your club ideas for engaging in therapeutic garden activities to serve your members and your community. The specific directions are not always provided, as many resources are already available online with the directions. If you need assistance finding them, please reach out!

- Work with a senior citizens center to create succulent gardens in old porcelain China. Teacups and tureens are wonderful choices and can frequently be found in flea markets relatively inexpensively. This activity provides a nostalgic activity for the participants, including the garden club members who facilitate the project.
- Conduct a workshop on herb container gardening for young adults who enjoy cooking, as well as for people living in spaces that do not offer yards for gardening. Activities targeted for young adults may have the added benefit of attracting new members to your club. You could potentially do this activity in conjunction with your local farmers' market and add a cooking component, to teach the participants how to make a dish with the fresh herbs they will grow.
- Sponsor a sunflower or pumpkin growing contest for local children, at a day care or summer camp, or in conjunction with a church or library. Teach them the skills to grow health plants with joy. Provide follow-up care, ideally, to help the children succeed. If possible, conduct this workshop in a way that makes it accessible to all, even those with no yards. Use one of your garden club plots, or a community garden area, if available.
- Most clubs already engage in flower arranging and taking the arrangements to shut-ins or nursing homes. This activity is always a good choice. Make the arrangements reflect the season, to help any residents with dementia. Having components that have a fragrance can be helpful, as well, such as the Easter lily or hyacinth fragrance for orienting to spring. However, check with caregivers to ensure the recipient is not sensitive to such fragrances.
- For an added benefit, instead of making the floral arrangements and taking them to the shut-ins and nursing home residents, take flowers and have THEM make the arrangements. They could potentially keep them in their own room, or even better, give them to a family member or caregiver. Many shut-ins and nursing home residents feel like they are a burden, and providing them a way to give to someone else can really boost their mood.
- A fall activity that club and community members would enjoy is to create dried flower wall hangings. Glass frames can be provided, and club members can dry flowers throughout the summer season in preparation for the activity.

- Arrange to work with a local school or daycare for the growing season. Start by reading an age-appropriate book about gardening to the children, such as the books by our former president, Brenda Moore. Have the children engage in a discussion about what type of plants they want to include in their garden. Plant the garden in an area at the center/school, or within walking distance. Have regularly scheduled times to assist the children in maintaining their plants. Gardening activities in children help them grow the ability to control their actions, teach fine motor skills, get them away from screens, provide sunlight and physical activity, and develop cognitive planning ability, to name just a few benefits! Join in with them in the joy of harvesting lettuce, of cutting flowers for their caregivers. Encourage the children to feel proud and excited to share the fruits of their labor, helping them develop empathy and kindness.
- Engage in a similar activity at a low-income housing project, creating a small garden for the residents. As above, obtain their input in the garden design. They may want only flowers they can cut and take in, or they may want fruits and vegetables they can eat. Again, schedule regular interactions to help maintain the health of the garden and encourage participation. If the garden is near a playground area, the children and teens who tend to hang out may become interested and involved. Notice who is lingering around the area and watching, inviting them to join in whenever they are ready and in whatever activity they are comfortable with. This type of program could be ideal in encouraging children and adults to interact together in the outdoors. Such housing complexes frequently have disabled adults, so find a way to include them, also. You may need to include some raised bed gardening with accessibility for those in wheelchairs or who cannot get up and down from the ground. Or, you could have the person in the wheelchair providing guidance to the younger participants. However, make sure everyone gets the opportunity to interact with the dirt and plants.
- Offer seasonal workshops on growing houseplants or gardens. Christmas cactus care, growing cold crops such as lettuce and spinach, early spring or late fall landscaping with pansies, bulbs, cabbages, and other cold-tolerant plants, amaryllis care, repotting houseplants, orchid care, etc. – the potential workshops are as numerous as the plants that can be grown. With any such workshops, decide who you want to include – just garden club members as a social and wellness activity for them, or certain populations of the community.
- Depending on your location, you may have specialty populations to engage. Prisons, psychiatric hospitals, long-term care facilities, the school for the deaf and blind in Romney, local college campuses – all provide places that gardening can be extremely beneficial. However, working with the administration is always required.
- Create a workshop to emphasize our spiritual connection with Earth. Discuss life cycles and provide plant materials at all stages of life for handling and discussion. Then, have

participants plant seeds and follow one plant through its entire life span. Ideally, they can harvest seeds and repeat, year after year, as a way to maintain their connection to Earth. This activity could be a good activity when a member of your club passes away, to provide the club members a way to honor that life and to grieve as a group. You could choose a plant that was a favorite of the club member. Remember, garden clubs must also care for their members, not just their larger communities!

- Lead a wildflower walk in your community in the spring. You could lead such walks spring, summer, and fall to watch the changing woods.
- Create a garden in your community to honor a particular population, such as a cancer garden, Alzheimer's garden, etc. Provide a bench for sitting and reflecting in the beauty.
- Design and create an accessible garden if there is not one in your town. Ideally, it will provide a place for all to interact with nature, in the planting, maintaining, and enjoyment of the space. The guidelines for an accessible garden will be available on the WVGC, Inc. Website under the Garden Therapy tab.
- Host a kokedama Japanese "moss ball" workshop. Videos with guidance are available online. A good one can be found at: <https://dennis7dees.com/diy-kokedama/>. This activity is just a fun way to interact with plants. It might even be fun and challenging enough to engage teens!
- Other teen activities might be to make pickles from cucumbers they have grown, growing any types of plants that are "snack-friendly," growing a themed garden like a "pizza garden." Science/environmentally themed/tech-involved activities are also good for teens. Take them on a hike to identify invasive species along your walking trails, using an app to find and identify them. Pollinator gardens or hydroponic growing might also be fun for them. Growing houseplants that can be placed in their rooms to create a fairy-like atmosphere, with fairy lights and mushroom-themed décor might be fun. (Just be aware of which mushrooms are not appropriate for inclusion as they might encourage inappropriate use of the fungi!)
- Any activities involving plants with scents and varied textures is very therapeutic for participants.

I hope these ideas are a good starting point for you to engage in garden therapy activities! The internet is a wonderful resource for finding ideas. Our National Garden Club and WV Garden Club websites are excellent resources. Their social media accounts also post many ideas from other clubs – make sure you are following their pages and clicking on them periodically to ensure they show up in your feed. If you oversee your club's social media, or even from your own page,

tag WVGC or send a message to have them post your club's activities. The more we share, the more we grow!
Because we are

BETTER TOGETHER

Tips for making your efforts successful

1. With all the activities that involve potting plants, make sure to do the research to find the right medium for the plants and containers you will be using. If the plants do not live, it is not very therapeutic for anyone!
2. You may also want to prepare a plant care sheet for the participants to take home.
3. Be well prepared. Having all the necessary supplies available will make things flow much more smoothly and result in a more pleasurable experience. Your goal is to gain new garden enthusiasts or reinforce the love of plants already present. You may consider having an alternative activity available in case someone is unable to do the planned activity for some reason. And, researching the people you are working with can help prevent most problems.
4. Make a conscious effort to ensure the safety of the participants. Assess presence of sharp tools, chemicals, and other items that may pose a safety risk and take care to address these. Allergic reactions are also a concern when working with plants and, potentially, around bees. Tripping hazards may also be something to take care of, especially when working with people with limited mobility.
5. Sunscreen, bug spray, heat awareness, and hydration are critical when outside. Know the signs and symptoms of hyperthermia. Cleveland clinic has an excellent article that can be printed and distributed at garden club events.

[https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/22111-hyperthermia.](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/22111-hyperthermia)

6. Make sure to demonstrate a fun and patient attitude! Let participants know that you are available to help when needed, but do not take over and do the project for them. We have all seen parents who take over their children's projects – make sure you do not engage in such behavior.
7. The more interactions with plants and nature, the more therapeutic the activity. Lectures and handouts are wonderfully helpful, but getting dirty is key!
8. When working on site with a particular population, check with administration to ensure you follow their guidelines for interactions with the people in their care. Similarly, at schools, camps, and daycares, administration must be involved in planning. If working at a local park, low-income housing, community garden etc., the “powers that be” must be consulted. I am sure you already know this, but I just had to state it!
9. New ideas and information will be posted on the WVGC, Inc. Website, by going to the Library Tab, going to Programs/Projects, and scroll down to Garden Therapy section. If you have ideas you would like to share, send them to me!

I am always glad to help come up with ideas and problem-solve. And don't forget, WVGC, Inc. sponsors a Garden Therapy award each year!

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