



## Horticultural Therapy: 'Scent ability' with herb bouquets and bundles

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James Neal and his wife have dedicated their garden to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Staff video by Suzanne Russell



August is prime time to smell, pick, snip, collect, harvest and create the most of the herb harvest the garden has to offer for use in herb bundles and bouquets

August is prime time to smell, pick, snip, collect and harvest herbs that can be made into bouquets and bundles which in turn provide enjoyment and treatment for participants in horticultural therapy programs.

These herb bundles are used for all populations in horticultural therapy programs. This includes behavioral health programs for teenagers and adults with psychiatric and addiction issue, as well as older adults in memory care, sub-acute care, and day programs add clients with dementia.

The herbs I use in horticultural therapy activities are approved in advance by treatment team clinical directors or directors of recreation and activities.

It's important to note that not everyone has the ability to smell, and that plants offer many ranges in the fragrance they emit. During group horticultural therapy sessions with individuals 18 and older, one person in 12 will have lost the ability to smell, and one person will have lost some ability to smell. If a person has no sense, or limited sense of smell, herb bundles and bouquet activities invite participation, and offer a positive connection and success with purpose and meaning. Why? Because I encourage the use of hands to feel texture, eyes to see interest, colors, and shapes, and tongue to sample.

The tip and edges of the tongue are particularly sensitive to tastes as these areas contain many tiny sensory organs called taste buds. Contrary to the theory and belief that the tastes of sour, sweet, bitter and salty are experienced in certain locations on the tongue, all tastes exist on all parts of the tongue.

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Containers of an assortment of herb plant materials are on my plant cart and passed clockwise and counter clockwise. Basil, sage varieties, thyme, lemon thyme, chamomile, lavender, lemongrass, lemon verbena, mint, and scented geranium, create an extraordinary display for the eyes to behold and/or the nose to know that something special is in the air.

“Choose the plants you like, smell and/or sample and taste them,” I encourage. Within minutes all participants are engaged collecting and sharing material, talking, and creating an herb bundle, bouquet or both, using the materials. Participants compare and contrast plant fragrances, tastes, textures, and appeal.

All participants are surprised at the result of their finished product, and how they discovered meaning on some level. Clients have said, “This collection of herbs is too pretty. I can't believe something this simple could make me feel so good. I can let all these plants dry and they will still smell great, and I can use?”

Discussion and learning about use is a natural progression. In addition to the bouquets and bundles, participants without cue, create and initiate breaking up the herbs into smaller pieces, and ask if I have a container or paper sack for them to place the material to which I reply, “Sure, would you like a paper tea sack, or sachet?”

Participants commonly ask, “Do you have ribbon to tie my materials together?” I show and share, “Lemongrass and the bark of Birch trees makes a wonderful ribbon.”

This is therapeutic success achieved by simply using the simple abundance of the August harvest.

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