



UW-MADISON EXTENSION

RELAXATION GARDENS



4-H PROJECT AREAS:

Cultural Arts, Healthy Living

LIFE SKILLS:

Stress Management, Healthy Lifestyle Choices, Managing Feelings

TIME:

20 - 25 minutes

MATERIALS:

- 1 shallow tray per person (i.e. clean frozen dinner tray, pie pan)
- Fine sand, small rocks, polished stones, smooth glass pieces, shells, or small pieces of tree bark
- 2 or 3 pronged twig to serve as a rake (other options include craft sticks, pipe cleaners, or small plastic forks)
- Zippered plastic bags (for safe transportation home)

PREPARE AHEAD OF TIME:

Create a sample relaxation rock garden (optional)

Ask

What does it mean to feel “stressed?”

What are some of the signs your body gives you when you feel stress?

What are some things you do to feel calm or to relax?

Nature can help us to feel calm inside. We will use our senses to explore objects from nature. Then we will each create our own relaxation garden from the objects we like best.

Did you know?

Relaxation gardens are also known as Japanese or rock gardens. Relaxation gardens are made with sand that is raked to look like waves or ripples in water.

These simple gardens, like water or waves, can be used to help us feel less stressed or to calm ourselves.

Investigate

Stress is often thought of as a grown-up thing, but we can all experience stress at any age.

Ask, What are some things that might cause stress?

Stress might be caused by something at school, with friends, or at home with family. Even happy things can feel stressful sometimes. Stress comes from many situations.

Create

Have each youth create their own relaxation garden:

Relaxation Garden:

1. Pour sand about half full in a shallow tray.
2. Use a craft stick or your hand to smooth the sand.
3. Arrange stones, bark, shells or other natural elements in patterns. Experiment with different designs and arrangements. Pay attention to the different textures and colors as you arrange them.



4. Use a pronged twig or simple stick to make ripple lines or “waves” around and between the stones, shells or bark.

Relationship to 4-H...

Two important ways young people learn about stress and strong emotions are through experience and by watching the adults around them. 4-H Youth Development programs encourage youth to take healthy risks by trying new things, so they may experience and learn to manage stress in a safe, supportive and caring environment. In that environment, young people spend time with adult role models who show them healthy ways of dealing with stress.

Share/Reflect

We can use a relaxation garden when we feel stressed or want to relax. Drawing patterns around the stones or other items takes our minds off things that may be bothering us and focuses our positive energy to the garden.

Ask, What was it like to create a Zen garden?

Ask, How do you feel after creating your Zen garden?

*(*Note: it is okay if they do not feel relaxed after making it. Encourage them just to notice whatever they are feeling without judging it.)*

Ask, What kinds of textures did you put in your garden?

Ask, How do you plan to use your garden?

Playing with a relaxation garden is just one way to calm ourselves down.

Ask, What are some other ways you relax?

More to explore

Guide participants through a simple meditation exercise, yoga stretch or breathing exercise.

Guide participants through a Zentangle drawing exercise. Have them share how they can use Zentangle to help them relax.

Provide participants a coloring page. Have them share how they can use this to help them relax.

Resources:

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