

# FALL SPRUCE UP – HOMEMADE COMPOST TEA

**\*Special materials budget = \$5 +tax (Does not include the Plant of the Day, fertilizer or organic potting soil)**

During this "Fall Spruce Up" class, residents will practice pruning and propagating plants, while exploring how the Fall Equinox effects the garden! Then they will make a compost tea from household kitchen scraps and learn about fertilizing plants. Eldergrow engages residents in a therapeutic and meaningful connection with nature – cognitively, socially, spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

## Activity Objectives:

Objective 1: Resident will engage cognitive stimulation (CS)

Objective 2: Resident will engage motor skills (MS)

Objective 3: Resident will engage sensory stimulation (SS)

## MATERIALS:



**Note:** This recipe makes a very weak solution. Normally you would create the tea with finished compost and aerate it for a couple of days to encourage microbial growth, which isn't feasible during our lesson. This lesson's primary focus is on residents' cognitive/sensory stimulation and evoking memories.

If your community has garden composting bins, ask to add the compost "slurry" or compost tea to it instead of straight to the garden to help create a more nutritious compost over time!

- **Kitchen scraps:** Collect banana peels, egg shells and coffee grounds (Tip: store scraps in freezer in 3 separate freezer bags ahead of time – Defrost before class.) (Alternatively dry banana peels in the sun for someone to cut into small pieces.)
  - Four ripe banana peels – as source of Potassium
  - The shells of three eggs – source of Calcium
  - 1/2 cup used coffee grounds – source of Nitrogen
- 1 Tablespoon Epsom Salt – source of Magnesium (Dollar Tree)
- Ziplock Gallon Baggies (Dollar Tree)
- 1/2 cup organic potting soil to add soil microbes (E Garden)
- 1 tsp Organic Down to Earth Vegan Fertilizer (ask for purchase approval)
- Colander, strainer, and/or cheesecloth (EE Collects or Dollar Tree)
- Measuring cup and spoons (EE Collects or ask community)
- Water (4 cups), pitcher/container to strain compost tea mixture into, measuring spoons and cups (EE Collects or ask community)
- Food handling gloves, plastic cups to propagate plants, tea towel(s) and a rolling pin(s) or mortar & pestle(s) (EE collects and/or ask community)
- Safety scissors (EE Kit)
- Talking Points: "Fall Pruning" and "Fertilizer & Compost"

## PREPARATION:

- **NOTE:** To prevent any exposure to salmonella, microwave empty eggshells for 2 minutes or boil/place in the oven for 15 to 20 minutes ahead of time. Allow time to cool.
- Move Eldergrow garden into central location so residents can gather around it - ***don't forget the brakes!***
- Put kitchen scraps on the table. Keep supplies out of reach until ready to use.

## ACTIVITY DIRECTIONS – CHOOSE 1 OR ALL 3 PARTS:

Eldergrow Lesson Plans are guides only. In order to maximize resident engagement, Educators can customize these plans to the various interests, cognitive levels and physical abilities of residents.

### 1. FALL SPRUCE UP TASKS & TALKING POINTS

- Talk about the changes in your Eldergrow Garden, or plants in your courtyard and write them down in your Garden Journal. *Does anything look like it needs parts removed that are dead or brown?* Let's review the "**Fall Pruning & Propagation**" Talking Points so we trim plants correctly. While we take pruned cuttings, we can place them in cups of water to propagate more plants and help keep our garden looking lush!
- Plant the "Plant of the Day" and discuss notable traits to help identify it. Give hints!
- *What changes in plants take place in the fall?* Read about the **Autumnal Equinox** to find out!

### 2. CONVERSATION STARTERS ABOUT SOIL & COMPOST

- Hold out a hand full of soil. *Is this dirt or soil?* Have a resident read aloud: **Soil vs Dirt Talking Points**.
  - *What can we do to make sure our soil is healthy so that we can grow strong, happy plants?* Products, like compost or fertilizer, can be added to the soil to help the growth of our plants.
- Let's learn about the essential nutrients needed for leaf growth, root development and overall plant health. Read aloud the "**Fertilizer & Compost Talking Points**. (Show fertilizer or photo example.)
  - *Have you ever made your own fertilizer or added compost to your garden before? What kind of "ingredients" would you put in compost? Where do you typically get fertilizer or how did you add it?*
  - *Do you now understand the difference between compost and fertilizer? Do you prefer something pre-made or made at home? What does it look like? How do you add compost to the garden?*

### 3: MAKING HOMEMADE COMPOST TEA

- Show each kitchen scrap bag (and Epsom salt) and share what each is/contributes to the compost tea.
- Cut up the banana peel with safety scissors & crush the pieces in the mortar. Banana peels will need to be quite ripe to crush up with rolling pin or mortar.
- You can let residents use a mortar and/or put each kitchen scrap ingredient into a Ziplock bag and cover with a tea towel. Then residents can take turns using the rolling pin. The tea towel and rolling pin are great reminiscing tools. This action alone could prompt stories of baking in the kitchen with relatives!
- The eggshells can also be ground up easily using a mortar & pestle or a rolling pin in baggy.
- Once the banana peel & egg shells are ground up enough, add the coffee grounds, Epsom salt and potting soil.
- Combine by squeezing the bag with fingers until the mix becomes a slurry (semi- liquid).
- Double bag the mixture. Due to manipulation, small puncture holes could have formed and we want to prevent leaks. Add water – the amount of water should be twice the amount of slurry. (Alternatively, pour into a plastic container with a tight lid and shake it up.)
- Tell residents that you would normally aerate the tea for a few days to make a more nutrient dense tea. So, let's add organic fertilizer to give our compost a boost! Add 1 tsp of the fertilizer and mix.
- Strain this liquid through a colander/cheesecloth into pitcher and add to the soil around the plants. (Have one resident hold the colander/cheesecloth as another pours the mixture.
- After adding the compost tea, till in with more organic potting soil and fertilizer if needed.
- Consider adding the leftover scraps to the community's garden compost bin if they have one.

## CLOSING & ACTIVITY AMENDMENTS FOR DIFFERENT LEVELS

- **Hand Support Assistance:** Breaking up the eggshells in the baggy by hand or in a mortar/pestle, using the rolling pin on the banana peel baggy, squishing up the compost tea mixture, pouring into a pitcher, and tilling strained liquid into the garden soil.
- **Use residents' names** during the activity so they feel included. Even if they aren't verbally or physically participating, they can still be engaged!
- **Give happy praise** to residents when they complete a project or given step. They may not recall the activity, but they will remember a positive connection with you and your heartfelt support.
- For higher functioning folks who are interested in the science of composting, check out the Bonus Activities for **more advanced and effective garden composting activities**. Fall is a great time to start composting so you're ready to plant next spring's gardens!
- Assist as minimally as possible to the resident's ability. This way it's a **collaboration that plays to that resident's strengths**, allowing them to be successful and fulfilled with the work they can do!
- Some residents prefer to only **assist with gross motor garden care**. One may enjoy hand tilling the soil or adding new soil around the plants. Someone else may like to water each plant to the count of three or dust off the shelves and garden structure. Having such responsibilities creates purpose! We do recommend that you read the Talking Points so that it keeps with the theme displayed on the monthly flyer.
- Do a "**Scratch & Sniff**" **sensory stimulation** with freshly picked garden herbs. Even if someone is not verbally or physically participating, they can still be engaged. See if they can "Guess That Herb!"
- Assist as minimally as possible to the particular resident's ability. This way it's a collaboration that plays to the resident's strengths, **allowing them to be successful and fulfilled** with the work they can do!
- Give everyone a round of happy applause for a job well done! **Laughter and joy** are what we are encouraging with all of our Eldergrow projects!