

WHIMSICAL HANGING AIR PLANTS & PINEAPPLES!

Residents will learn about the magical world of bromeliads and either make decorative wire sculpture holders for air plants or grow a pineapple from its top! The Eldergrow garden offers a therapeutic connection to nature where residents engage in meaningful ways with the garden – cognitively, socially, spiritually, emotionally, and physically. **This activity can be done even if you don't have an Eldergrow garden, by a window or outside.**

Activity Objectives:

Objective 1: Resident will engage sensory stimulation (SS)

Objective 2: Resident will engage spacial awareness (SA)

Objective 3: Resident will engage motor skills (MS)

MATERIALS:



• Option 1: Wire Hanging Airplants

- 5 air plants [Link here](#)
- Floral wire (Sometimes at Dollar Tree or [Link here](#)) (Cut into 1-foot increments prior to activity and bend back sharp tips using pliers) (makes 10-12 pieces)
- Twine
- Fill cute mister with water (Dollar store)
- Paper towels and bowl(s) of water for soaking/dunking air plants
- *Optional:* Clothespins to use as tool for bending wire.
- Option for window-hang: Srew-in hooks ([Link here](#))
- *Optional:* Use small rocks to attach the wire sculptures to - paint the rocks ahead of time for colorful visual appeal
- *Optional:* Use driftwood (washed) for a Tillandsia display: [Link here](#)

• And/or Option 2: Grow a Pineapple

- Pineapple (Grocery store)
- Review how to grow a pineapple video: [Link here](#)
- Food handling gloves
- Knife & plate to cut up pineapple cubes for tasting after planting top
(Keep knife wrapped up and away from residents for safety)

- Talking Points: "The Magical World of Bromeliads"
- Consider bringing in a bromeliad as your "Plant of the Day". Also some stores (like Walmart) have growing pineapple plants (with small pineapple fruits) certain times of the year.
- *Optional:* Fishing line to hang air plants for a "floating in the air" look

PREPARATION:

- If you have a garden, have residents gather around it, or at table by a window with a view of nature. Have journal ready for garden/nature observations.
- Present a finished demo or have a photo to show residents what they will be making.
- Set out materials and Talking Points to the side until ready to use.

ACTIVITY DIRECTIONS — CHOOSE 1 OR ALL 4 PARTS:

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

1. GARDEN OBSERVATIONS & "SCRATCH & SNIFF" DEMONSTRATION:

- Gather around the garden or a view of nature so residents can **make garden/nature observations and introduce the optional "plant of the day"** of a bromeliad or pineapple plant.
- Ask residents if they can **find any herbs in their garden**. Pinch off a leaf from an herb, hand to resident and ask sensory questions such as: *Can you describe this leaf? Does it have color or texture that might help identify it? What does the texture feel like? Now rub the leaf between your fingers and smell it. What does the smell remind you of? Have you ever eaten a favorite recipe with this herb?* (Feel free to share your own memories/experiences to encourage conversation.) You can also do so if any fruits are in an outside garden (and connect to pineapple).

2. CONVERSATION STARTERS & TALKING POINTS:

- Introduction to air plants, aka Tillandsias: *Does anyone recognize these plants?* Pass the air plants around for everyone to take a close look & feel. **Distribute Air Plants Talking Points and encourage conversations as residents read out loud.** If you brought in a pineapple fruit, compare it to the bromeliad's features.
- **See if residents can match** any of the Common Tillandsias on 3rd page with your air plants! Or if you have a bromeliad in your Garden, see if they can find it (remove the plant label for an extra challenge!).
- *Optional:* Use **magnifying glasses** for closer observations.

3. CARING FOR AND DECORATING AIR PLANTS

- **Air Plant Care Instructions:** Place air plants in a bowl of water & dunk under to get thoroughly soaked.
 - Air plants DON'T like to sit too long in water; they grow on tree branches not in soggy soil, so take them out of water after all leaves have gotten wet (several minutes).
 - Water them with the spray bottle at least once a week. Let them dry out between waterings so they don't rot.
 - The more light they get, the more likely they will flower. So let's hang them in the Garden where it's bright! If you hang them at a bright window, you'll want to take them down to water (to spare your window washer).
 - Have residents practice dunking the air plants for their monthly bath, then spray them for their shower!
- **Decorating and Hanging Instructions:**
 - Ask residents: *Do we want to hang the air plants with different lengths of twine/fishing line to add interest? Should we create holders for the air plants with the floral wire? Or should we make fun shapes like hearts out of the floral wire instead?* Get creative! Have residents pair up to strategize methods.
 - String the twine around the back ledge of the Eldergrow garden roof if you have one, or make loops for hooks in a window, and have each plant hang down individually.
 - Hand each resident a length of floral wire and show them how they can make different shapes using the wire. Create sculptural shapes **to hold/cradle each air plant** or just pretty shapes to hang from the twine between the air plants. Consider hanging faux flowers as well for color.
 - After each plant has been given a wire holder and attached to twine/fishing line, ask some of your more able-bodied residents to help you hang the air plants in the light in a design agreed upon by the group.
 - You could also set up an assembly line to accomplish the same tasks: First group makes the holders and designs out of wire, second group adds plants to wire holders and attaches the twine and the third group hangs the plants from the garden. There are plenty of ways to get everyone involved!

4. PINEAPPLE TOP PLANTING

- Review how to grow a pineapple video: [Link here](#)
- Choose an evenly ripe fruit with a nice and healthy set of green leaves at the top.
- Slice off the top close to the crown of the fruit, and cut away the rind and the remaining fruit.
- Pull off some of the lower leaves from the stalk to expose around an inch of bare, leafless stalk.
- Water the stalk lightly. You can use a spray bottle, as it is more than enough. Moisten soil as well.
- "Screw the leafy top" into the garden soil. Water it only when it is dry, just to keep it moist enough.
- Do not use fertilizer yet at this stage because it needs to make roots and establish for a long while.
- Cut up the rest of the pineapple to share a fun treat! (**Keep sharp knife away from residents**)
- After around 1-3 months, the plant will make roots. You can test its progress by gently wiggling the crown in order to see if it took hold in the soil. Do not pull very hard, or you will break the young roots.

CLOSING & ACTIVITY AMENDMENTS FOR DIFFERENT LEVELS

- Higher acuity folks and those with less fine motor skills/lower vision, **may need hand over/under hand assistance** to bend the wire and dunk the air plants in the water.
- **Minimize confusion** by offering higher acuity folks a **choice of two options**: *Which of these two air plants would you like to make a wire sculpture for? Would you like to shape a heart or a spiral?*
- They may only choose the plant or item to use **indicated by their glance at it** which can then be handed to a higher functioning resident to assist with.
- 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!** This may require you to ensure a staff member can work with a particular resident during the activity so they are still included and supported.
- Changes in the garden and nature can help stimulate short term memories, so do encourage residents to make these observations as well as reflect back on previous observations so they can see how their **garden is changing over time**. Some people like to write the "plant of the day" on a chalkboard or piece of paper for residents to read about in the future (and to use when creating the plant labels). Consider adding a couple of noteworthy aspects of your choice plant for them to continue to learn and remember about their garden's plant collection. Tape copies of the talking points around the room after class for future reference.
- **Assist residents with walkers or wheelchairs** to the garden or outside to make observations, and tend to the plants. Or bring over the bowl of pruned plant parts for them to explore!
- 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.
- 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!