RESULT 5 · ACTIVITIES FOR SENIOR & INTERGENERATIONAL GROUPS

Pocket Garden & Seed Swap



Fold newspaper pots, sow quick-growing herbs and salad, design your own seed packets and run a lively seed swap, so everyone leaves with a tiny garden and a reason to come back.

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ACTIVITY 14 · MAKING · NATURE · WELLBEING

14

Pocket Garden & Seed Swap



Fold newspaper pots, sow quick-growing herbs and salad, design your own seed packets and run a lively seed swap, so everyone leaves with a tiny garden and a reason to come back.

FORMAT	TIME	GROUP
Making · nature · wellbeing	60–75 min	6–30 · tables of 4–6
LETTERS G · O	**YOU NEED** Seed packet templates and plant care cards (Printable M), old newspapers, peat-free compost, seeds (cress, salad, herbs), trays, small watering cans or spray bottles, gloves, pens, glue	

THE ACTIVITY IN PLAIN WORDS

You do not need a garden to grow something. A windowsill, a balcony or a kitchen table is enough. In this activity, participants fold small plant pots from old newspaper, sow fast-growing edible seeds such as cress, salad leaves or herbs, and take home a "pocket garden" with a care card. In the second half, the room turns into a seed market. People design and fill their own paper seed packets, with seeds they brought from home or from a shared tin, and swap them using "seed money". Growing and sharing seeds is an old tradition in Portugal, Poland and Estonia.

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You will need

- Seed packet templates and plant care cards (Printable M)
- Old newspapers (not glossy magazines) cut into strips about 10 cm wide, or empty toilet-roll tubes or egg boxes
- A glass jar or a small tin can to shape the newspaper pots
- Peat-free multi-purpose compost, kept slightly damp, in a bowl or tub on each table
- Seeds of easy, edible, safe plants: cress, rocket, lettuce, radish, basil, parsley, chives, coriander, pea shoots, nasturtiums
- Trays or old baking tins to carry the pots home, spoons for filling, labels or lolly sticks
- Small watering cans, jugs or spray bottles
- Gardening gloves, damp cloths and a hand-washing station (soap, water, paper towels)
- Glue sticks, coloured pens, a stamp or stickers for decorating packets
- "Seed money": ten paper tokens per person (on Printable M)

Before the session

- Cover tables with old newspapers or plastic sheets. Put the compost out at the start of the session, already damp, so there is little dust.
- Check every seed packet. Use only seeds of edible, non-toxic plants that you can name. Avoid seeds coated in bright colours, which are often treated with chemicals.
- Ask participants a week before to bring seeds saved from their own plants or leftover packets, in a labelled envelope. Have a shared tin of shop-bought seeds for those who bring none.
- Print the seed packet templates and care cards, ideally on coloured paper.
- Make one newspaper pot yourself so you can demonstrate.

OPENING LINES · READ ALOUD

"Welcome to our pocket garden. Today we are going to grow a garden small enough to carry home on a tray. You will make your own pots from yesterday's newspaper, sow seeds that you can eat in a few weeks, and then become seed traders at our market. Some of you have been saving seeds for decades, and some of you have never sown one. Both are perfect. By the end, every person here will leave with something alive, and a few seeds to share with a neighbour."

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How to run it

1 Seed stories — 5 min

Go round the tables. Each person says one plant they remember from childhood, a parent's garden, a balcony or a school project. Ask: "Who has ever saved seeds?" Invite the experts to say how.

2 Fold the pots — 10 min

Demonstrate: roll a strip of newspaper around the jar, leaving about 3 cm sticking out at the bottom. Fold that part in to make a base, press it firmly, then slide the jar out. No glue needed. Each person makes three to five pots. Toilet-roll tubes and egg boxes work too.

3 Sow the pocket garden — 15 min

Put on gloves. Fill the pots with damp compost using a spoon, not by pouring from the bag. Sow seeds following the plant care card: cress and rocket on the surface, lightly pressed; radish, basil and lettuce about half a centimetre deep. Water gently. Label each pot with the plant name and the date. Wash hands.

4 Design the seed packets — 10 min

Each person cuts and folds two or three seed packets from Printable M. They draw or write on the front: the plant name, a picture, and a "secret tip" from their own experience. On the back: when to sow, how deep, sun or shade, when to harvest.

5 The seed market — 15 min

Fill the packets from your saved seeds or from the shared tin. Each person has ten seed tokens. Rules: you can buy a packet with one or two tokens, but the seller must explain how to grow the plant in one sentence. Rare or home-saved seeds can cost three tokens. Ring a bell when the market closes. The trader with the best stories, not the most tokens, wins "Seed Keeper of the Day".

6 The care promise — 5 min

Everyone fills in the plant care card: where the pot will live, when they will water it, and who they will show it to. Agree a date to meet again, for example in four weeks, to compare the harvest.

EXAMPLE

At a seniors' club in Faro, Manuela (73) brings coriander seeds saved from her balcony in an old envelope. Her table partner, Diogo (20), a student volunteer, has never sown a seed. Together they fold five newspaper pots and sow cress, basil and Manuela's coriander. Diogo designs a seed packet with a cartoon of a coriander plant in sunglasses and the tip "Sow again every three weeks or it bolts in the heat", which Manuela dictates. At the market, Manuela's coriander is the most popular stall, and she trades it for nasturtium seeds from Helena, who tells her the flowers are edible in salads. Four weeks later, Diogo sends a photo of his first cress sandwich.

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KEY IDEA

Growing even a few plants at home brings people into contact with nature, which research links to better mental and physical wellbeing, and flowering plants such as nasturtiums and herbs can also feed pollinating insects. Peat-free compost protects peat bogs, which store large amounts of carbon. Simple hygiene keeps gardening safe: wear gloves, keep compost damp so it does not make dust, open bags away from your face and wash your hands afterwards. Sources: WHO Regional Office for Europe, Urban green spaces and health: a review of evidence (2016); Royal Horticultural Society, Minimising health risks in the garden; European Commission, EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.

Debrief

1

What happened?

What did you learn from someone at your table? Which seed or tip at the market surprised you?

2

So what?

Why does it feel good to grow something, even something tiny? What do we lose when we only buy food and never see it grow?

3

Now what?

Where will your pocket garden live? Who will you give your spare seeds to?

Make it work for your group

- **Limited mobility, sight or hearing:** Work seated at tables of a comfortable height. Use large seeds (radish, peas, nasturtium) that are easy to handle and see. Large spoons and wide pots are easier than tiny ones. Use the large-print care card (at least 14 pt). Pre-made pots are fine for anyone who finds folding difficult.
- **Mixed-age (intergenerational) version:** Young people are "pot makers" and "packet designers"; older people are "head gardeners" who decide what to sow and share growing tips. At the market, pairs run a stall together.
- **No-device version:** This activity needs no device.
- **Online or hybrid version:** Send a materials list in advance (newspaper, a jar, compost, one packet of cress). Everyone sows at the same time on camera. For the market, people "show and tell" their seeds and post packets to each other afterwards.
- **Short (20-min) version:** Skip the seed market. Fold one pot each, sow cress, fill in the care card and take it home.

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WATCH OUT

Only use seeds of plants you can name and that are safe to eat. Do not use or swap seeds of sweet peas, lupins, foxgloves or the castor oil plant, which are toxic, and never eat seeds straight from a packet. Some shop seeds are coated with treatments: wash hands after handling them and keep them away from children and pets. Compost and potting mix can contain bacteria, so wear gloves, keep it damp, do not open bags with your face over them and wash hands before eating or drinking. People with a weakened immune system (for example during cancer treatment) should ask their doctor before handling compost, or let someone else fill their pots. Cover any cuts. Seed swaps between neighbours are a long tradition; if you plan to sell seeds, check your national rules.

OWN IT

Look after your pocket garden for four weeks and eat or share the first harvest. Then give one seed packet to someone who has never grown anything. For example: "I will keep my cress on the kitchen windowsill, water it every morning after breakfast, and on Saturday the 14th I will give my spare radish seeds to my neighbour's grandson."

Related: Nature and biodiversity close to home · G-PRO cards: KN-16 Food on a Windowsill, KN-04 Growing Your Own Food, KN-21 Soil Is Alive, KN-18 A Small Wildflower Patch

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