



Learning, Leading, Living

Relaxing Your Way to Healthy Living

Mission Mandate/ Project

Connection:

Healthy Living

Topic:

Relaxation as part of a healthy life style

Life Skills:

Stress Management

Audience:

4-H members of all ages

Length:

20 minutes

Materials Needed:

- Small jewelry box lid (one per participant)
- Sand (to fill lids)
- Three small, smooth stones
- Plastic forks to use as rakes (one per participant)

Rake (optional)

- Thin dowels
- Flat toothpicks
- Tacky Glue (fast hold)

Advance Preparation:

Consider making a sample rake

Link to Zen Garden tutorial:

<http://www.crizmac.com/artandscout/index.php/2011/02/26/make-a-zen-garden>

Link to Rake Instructions:

<http://www.instructables.com/id/Make-a-Zen-Garden-Rake-for-your-Ashtray/>

Source:

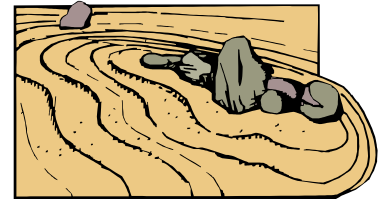
Barbor, C. (2001). THE SCIENCE OF MEDITATION. *Psychology Today*, 34(3), 54.

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Background

Researchers studying the effects of meditation have found that relaxation techniques do indeed affect the brain. Specifically they found that during relaxation there was an increase in the secretions that work with the autonomic nervous system to calm the body. And it also worked the other way, too -- the body produced less STRESS hormones. So more calming, less stress!



So learning to relax can be a good thing for your body! But how do you do that? People have discovered lots of great ways to meditate that involve zen, yoga, and everything in-between. How do you know if what you are doing works? One psychologist said that if you feel better after your meditation, you are probably doing it right.

Zen Gardens have long been touted as providing a meditative experience. There is supposedly something soothing and calming about raking the sand in graceful patterns and positioning the rocks. In this activity, participants will make their own meditative mini Zen Garden.

Do the Activity

Anticipatory set:

- What are some things that you do when you need to relax...after a long day at school or doing your chores?
- What might knowing how to relax have to do with being healthy?

Making the Zen Garden:

There are many sites on the web that give you ideas on how to make a mini-Zen Garden. Here are instructions to make the components of a basic model:

- Choose box lid
- Fill box with sand
- Choose 3 – 4 rocks and place in garden.

- Choose a plastic fork or make a wooden rake using the instructions in the link in the sidebar.
- Rake in a pleasing pattern that inspires meditation.

ENCOURAGING YOUTH LEADERSHIP: Youth leaders can work directly with younger members to provide individual support in this activity, especially with the construction of the rake.

TALK IT OVER:

Reflect:

- What was your favorite part of making your Zen Garden?
- How do you think that you might use your Zen Garden to relax?

Apply:

- Why do you think that relaxation is important?
- What are other things that you can do that will help you relax?

ENHANCE OR SIMPLIFY

- Begin the session with an exploration of one or two Yoga positions.
- Play meditation music in the background as the youth make their Zen Gardens.
- Simplify for younger 4-H'ers by supplying small plastic forks for rakes.
- Check out this link for inspiration on fancy miniature Zen Gardens:
<http://www.squidoo.com/miniaturezengarden>

