

Centerpiece Construction

From "A Different Visit: Activities for Caregivers and their Loved Ones with Memory Impairments"

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This activity consists of creating an attractive centerpiece for display in your home. Whether home is an apartment, house, or nursing home, it is nice to give it a personal touch.

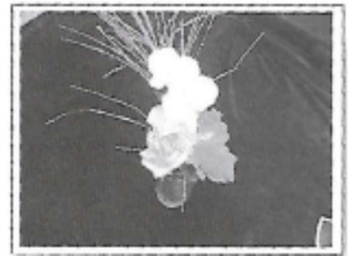


HOW TO:

1. **Decide what type of arrangement you are going to make.** Give your family member a few options to choose from. Our suggestions: peacock feathers, plastic fruits and vegetables with stems, greenery, or flowers. We suggest only using the vegetables and fruits with someone who would not think they are real and attempt to eat them. If that is a possibility, go with the other choices.
2. Once you and your family member made a decision, **go shopping for supplies** at a local craft store, or even dollar stores have these types of materials.
 - a. **A vase.** If you are interested in using a glass vase, and your loved one lives in any type of facility, ask permission to use glass first. You can also use a plastic vase. Regardless of what kind you choose, a smaller vase will keep the scale of the project reasonable.
 - b. **Something to hold your arrangement in place.** We suggest colored marbles or stones in the bottom of the vase, preferably not clear or white as these colors may be more difficult to see. If your family member can help choose the marbles or stones, that's a bonus!
 - c. The next step is choosing the **items that will make up the arrangement**. We would suggest getting about eight items, but not necessarily using all eight. It is good to have a few extra materials available in case you want to practice before constructing the final product.
 - d. **A container or a plastic bowl** to place your marbles or stones in.
3. You are now ready to **begin setting up**. To prepare for the first step, pour the marbles into a plastic container or dish. Place the container or dish of marbles on the left and the vase on the right since your family member will be working from left to right.
4. There are really only a couple of steps to this activity, but you should still have your family member **do only one step at a time**. The first step is to **fill the bottom of the vase** with the colored marbles. Before asking your family member to start filling the vase, be sure to **demonstrate first**. It is probably not necessary to use your full bowl of marbles, but there needs to be enough marbles to hold your feathers or fruits, or whatever material you use, securely in place. Allow your family member to use as many marbles as they want, but if it seems to be too little, encourage them to add a few more.



5. Once they have filled the bottom of the vase with marbles, it's time to **work with the feathers, greenery, fruits, flowers, etc. in front of them.** Once again, **demonstrate** the next step. It is particularly important to demonstrate here because you need them to push the feather (for example) down into the marbles to secure it in the vase. Once you have demonstrated, allow them to choose where the feathers go, unless they ask you for some assistance. This is their arrangement, so we need to refrain from dictating too much where things go unless they need the instruction.
6. The next step is to **make sure that your loved one continues to experience that proud feeling of creating their centerpiece.** We suggest creating a tag to put in the centerpiece that says "Made together by ___ and her daughter (son, grandson, etc), ___", or compose your own message for the tag together. Your family member might help by lettering the tag. Make sure that your tag is clearly visible (large, dark writing on a light background). You can attach it to a rod of some kind (possibly a wooden rod or chopstick). This way, your family member will have bragging rights to that centerpiece for months to come!
7. Finally, **display the centerpiece.** How wonderful if your family member lives in a nursing home to have their centerpiece prominently displayed on their table in the dining room! Everyone at that table and all walking by will be able to see the work of your family member. Note: If your loved one lives in any type of facility, seek permission first, of course.



TIPS

- Be aware! You are working with some potentially problematic materials here: colored marbles, possibly glass, and artificial fruits and vegetables. If you think that a glass vase is not a good idea, or your family member may put either the marbles or the fruits or vegetables in their mouth, do not use these materials. You can use plastic vases or baskets for the centerpiece. Use colored sand at the bottom of the vase instead of marbles (use a funnel when pouring the sand into the vase). You can also choose peacock feathers or greenery or flowers instead of the fruits or vegetables. You can also choose your own material to make the centerpiece or anything you think would work well and that your family member would enjoy.
- Make sure that nothing sharp is at the bottom of the items that you chose for your arrangement. In other words, make sure that there is no floral wiring hanging out, etc. If there is, you need to fix that or use something else.

ADAPTATIONS

More Challenging:

- Make your arrangement larger. Use a bigger vase and more materials. Remember, if at first you are not confident that your family member can work with a larger arrangement, build up to it instead.
- You can also increase the challenge by having them create additional centerpieces that they can give as gifts. This way, your loved one also experiences the joy of giving to someone else.



Less Challenging:

- Go smaller. Use a single bud vase and only one feather, flower or other material you choose.
- You can do the actual construction of the arrangement and your family member can hand you the feathers or greenery.
- Your family member can watch while you physically construct the arrangement. Ask them their opinion at every step. "Do you like this flower or this one?"
- Find a bridal or decorating magazine and look at centerpieces or bouquets together.