



Garden Club

Created: 11/2025 by the National FFA Organization

Description of Lesson: *Students will explore the benefits of therapeutic gardening by learning about one FFA member’s service-learning SAE and how they could create their own version.*

Student Learning Objectives:

- After completing these activities, students will ...
- 1. Analyze a successful service-learning SAE.
 - 2. Identify the benefits of therapeutic gardening for people of all ages and abilities.
 - 3. Design a service-learning project based on therapeutic gardening.

Suggested Grade Level:

Grades 9 and 10 (This lesson is written so instructors can scale up or down based on class needs.)

Suggested Time: 60 minutes (*Time requirements may vary based upon student understanding and class schedule.)

Resources/References:

- 1. Video: “Gardening Club SAE,” <https://vimeo.com/showcase/11832322?video=1108190681>
- 2. Website: “Therapeutic Gardening” (2022), https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/pubs_ext_vt_edu/en/HORT/HORT-66/hort-66.html

Related Resources:

- 1. SAE for All Service-Learning resources, <https://FFA.box.com/s/nue8iqenzgboo03qvkeuu96kog46l9ih>

Equipment and Supplies Needed:

- 1. A copy of the “Garden Club” worksheet for each student
- 2. Internet access to play the video in real time or embed it in a PowerPoint ahead of time

Vocabulary:

- 1. Container garden
- 2. Elevated bed
- 3. Horticulture therapy
- 4. Raised bed
- 5. Service-Learning
- 6. Therapeutic gardening

Cross-Curricular Connections:

English/Language Arts
Research horticulture therapy.
Develop a project plan for a service-learning project based on horticulture therapy.

Student Activity Sheets:

Direct access to student activity sheets without lesson plan or answer key for easy upload to a learning management system or printing for classwork.

<https://ffa.box.com/s/dbfz984necv768obp6ufdp5qj5su0jrl> (Word)

<https://ffa.box.com/s/cw5gk029blmoyli68p4954gpp4hbkwe9> (PDF)

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BbcUaVtmQdp2d0a2cagCcQwMPwJHPHtbu8zZOmbOSw/copy> (Google)

These Activities Are Aligned to the Following Standards:

FFA Precept

- FFA.PL-A.Action A1. Work independently and in groups to get things done.
- FFA.PL-A.Action A3. Plan effectively.
- FFA.PL-A.Action A4. Identify and use resources.
- FFA.PL-C.Vision C1. Contemplate the future.
- FFA.PL-C.Vision C2. Conceptualize ideas.
- FFA.PL-D.Character D6. Value service to others.
- FFA.PL-E.Awareness E1. Address issues important to the community.
- FFA.PL-F.Continuous Improvement F1. Implement a leadership and personal growth plan.
- FFA.PL-F.Continuous Improvement F5. Acquire new knowledge.
- FFA.PG-I.Professional Growth I1. Plan and implement professional goals and priorities.
- FFA.PG-J.Mental Growth J1. Think critically.
- FFA.PG-J.Mental Growth J2. Think creatively.
- FFA.PG-J.Mental Growth J3. Practice sound decision-making.
- FFA.PG-K.Emotional Growth K2. Live a compassionate and selfless life.
- FFA.CS-N.Decision Making N1. Demonstrate the decision-making process.

Common Core – Reading: Informational Text

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper).
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.7. Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

Common Core – Writing

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization and analysis of content.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.8. Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-12.9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research.

Next Generation Science

- Practice 3: Planning and Carrying Out Investigations. Plan an investigation or test a design individually and collaboratively to produce data to serve as the basis for evidence as part of building and revising models, supporting explanations for phenomena or testing solutions to problems.
- Practice 6: Constructing Explanations and Designing Solutions. Apply scientific reasoning, theory and/or models to link evidence to the claims to assess the extent to which the reasoning and data support the explanation or conclusion.

AFNR Career Ready Practices

- CRP.06. Demonstrate creativity and innovation.
- CRP.07. Employ valid and reliable research strategies.
- CRP.08. Utilize critical thinking to make sense of problems and persevere in solving them

Partnership for 21st Century Skills

- Civic Literacy
- Information Literacy
- Initiative and Self-Direction
- Think Creatively

Lesson Plan:

1. **Bell Ringer:** Think about the last time you helped someone older than you (like a grandparent, neighbor or other community member). What activity did you do together? Did it bring this person joy? Explain.
2. **Introduction:** *Gardening is more than just planting seeds; it can also be a powerful tool for improving health. Today, we are going to learn about a service-learning SAE where a middle school agriculture student created a gardening club at a local nursing home. You'll also learn the benefits of therapeutic gardening and begin planning a similar project for yourself or your FFA chapter.*
3. **Activity:** Each student needs a copy of the worksheet "Garden Club."
 - a. **Part 1:** Direct students to view the [video](#). Have them complete Part 1 as they watch the video. You can choose to show the video to the entire class or have students view it individually on their own devices.
 - b. **Part 2:** Students will read the Virginia Cooperative Extension article "Therapeutic Gardening," and complete the chart on garden adaptations. They will learn details such as height, depth, uses and advantages from the article. Then, they will review the elderly person's mini profile and determine which type of garden would be most appropriate and explain why.
 - c. **Part 3:** Using what they learned from the article in Part 2, students will brainstorm their own therapeutic gardening idea for a person or place in their community. They will complete a project plan that can be implemented individually or with their FFA chapter.
4. **Follow-up:** Students can swap project plans and give each other feedback. The class could vote on the best one and then complete the project as a class.
5. **Optional – Extended Learning Opportunities (Not factored into time requirement):**
 - a. Have students research the needs of their community and explore other service-learning projects that could meet those needs.
6. **Exit Ticket:** Write one sentence explaining the importance of a service-learning SAE.

Name: _____

Garden Club

Aligned to the following standards: FFA.PL-A1; FFA.PL-A3; FFA.PL-A4; FFA.PL-C1; FFA.PL-C2; FFA.PL-D6; FFA.PL-E1; FFA.PL-F1; FFA.PL-F5; FFA.PG-I1; FFA.PG-J1; FFA.PG-J2; FFA.PG-J3; FFA.PG-K2; FFA.CS-N1; CCSS.ELA-RI.9-10.1; CCSS.ELA-RI.9-10.4; CCSS.ELA-RI.9-10.7; CCSS.ELA-W.9-10.1; CCSS.ELA-W.9-10.2; CCSS.ELA-W.9-10.4; CCSS.ELA-W.9-10.7; CCSS.ELA-W.9-10.8; CCSS.ELA-W.9-12.9; CRP.06; CRP.07; CRP.08

Part 1

Directions:

Answer the questions below as you watch the video “Garden Club SAE,” available at <https://vimeo.com/showcase/11832322?video=1108190681>.

1. Describe Carson’s service-learning SAE in two or three sentences.	2. What state is Carson from?
3. What type of garden is outside of the facility?	4. What does Carson do with the residents inside?
5. What is the safety priority when working with the residents?	6. What is the main lesson that Carson has learned from this project?
7. Who helps Carson with his project?	8. How did Carson start his SAE?
9. What is Carson’s advice for an agriculture student who is still searching for the right SAE?	10. How will this project help Carson in the future?
11. Why do you think gardening is a good activity for nursing home residents?	12. How does Carson’s SAE demonstrate leadership and service?

Name: _____

Part 2

Directions:

Learn more about how gardening can be used as a great therapy technique for people of all ages and abilities by reading an article from Virginia Cooperative Extension and filling in the chart below.

Article: https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/pubs_ext_vt_edu/en/HORT/HORT-66/hort-66.html

Introduction	
1. Describe the benefits of gardening physically and emotionally.	3. List the groups of people that therapeutic gardening can benefit. • • • • • •
2. What is another term used in place of therapeutic gardening?	
History	
4. What are the three notable times in history that horticulture therapy is referenced? • • •	5. Describe horticulture therapy today.
Challenges	Rewards
6. List four examples of challenges to gardening from the article. • • • •	7. List five examples of rewards from gardening that are found in the article. • • • • •

Name: _____

Adapting the Garden	
8. What does the phrase “the garden needs to be adapted to the gardener” mean in your own words?	9. List three ways gardens can be adapted. • • •
Raised Beds	
10. When are raised beds the best garden option to use?	
11. Low Raised Beds • Height: • Used for: • Can be combined with:	12. Draw a picture of a low raised bed:
13. Deep Raised Beds • Height: • May have what to sit on: • Used for:	14. Draw a picture of a deep raised bed:
15. Elevated Beds • Height: • Especially good for: • Depth: • Used for:	16. Draw a picture of an elevated bed:
Containers	
17. When are containers the best garden option to use?	
18. Name two advantages of using containers: • •	

Name: _____

19. Planting Bags Two advantages of planting bags:	20. Draw a picture of a planting bag:
21. Hanging Baskets Two advantages of hanging baskets:	22. Draw a picture of a hanging basket:
23. Straw Bale Garden Two advantages of straw bale gardens:	24. Draw a picture of a straw bale garden:

25. Which type of garden did Carson use for his SAE? Why do you think he chose this?

26. Read the four profiles and determine which adapted garden would be best for each person.

<i>Mrs. Jenkins is 82 years old and uses a wheelchair full-time. She loves growing herbs to cook with. She has limited strength in her arms and tires easily when reaching.</i> Which type of garden would work best and why?	<i>Mr. Garcia is 76 years old and has arthritis in his knees and struggles to bend down. He enjoys growing tomatoes and peppers for homemade salsa and has a large sunny backyard.</i> Which type of garden would work best and why?
<i>Ms. Carter is 79 years old and recently moved into a retirement apartment with only a small balcony. She wants to grow colorful flowers, but she can't stand for long periods of time.</i> Which type of garden would work best and why?	<i>Mrs. Lee is 90 years old and is still active but tires when walking long distances. She enjoys caring for plants daily and likes growing new varieties. She needs something low-maintenance and close to her porch.</i> Which type of garden would work best and why?

Name: _____

Part 3

Directions:

Now that you have seen a great therapeutic gardening SAE and read more about horticulture therapy, let's brainstorm your own project idea. Think about a local retirement home, children's hospital, elderly neighbor or another location or person that could benefit from horticulture therapy. Design a simple garden plan for the facility or person. This could be your next service-learning SAE!

Step 1: Who Can You Help?

Write down and describe the local place or person that you can help with this project.

Step 2: Choose a Garden Type

Circle the type of garden(s) you will use:

Low Raised Bed	Deep Raised Bed	Elevated Bed
Planting Bag	Hanging Basket	Straw Bale Garden

Step 3: Explain Why

Why is this type of garden the best choice for your project? (Be sure to use details you collected from the article.)

Step 4: Connection to Health

How could this garden improve their physical health?

How could this garden support their mental or emotional health?

Name: _____

Step 5: Plan the Plants

What plants will be included in your garden? List at least three plants and explain why.

Reflect

1. The article mentioned adapting the gardener, the garden and the plant material. Which one of these is most important in your design? Why?
2. What challenges might come with your garden choice? How could you solve these challenges?
3. Do you think this project is realistic for you or your FFA chapter? Why or why not?

Name: _____

Aligned to the following standards: FFA.PL-A1; FFA.PL-A3; FFA.PL-A4; FFA.PL-C1; FFA.PL-C2; FFA.PL-D6; FFA.PL-E1; FFA.PL-F1; FFA.PL-F5; FFA.PG-I1; FFA.PG-J1; FFA.PG-J2; FFA.PG-J3; FFA.PG-K2; FFA.CS-N1; CCSS.ELA-RI.9-10.1; CCSS.ELA-RI.9-10.4; CCSS.ELA-RI.9-10.7; CCSS.ELA-W.9-10.1; CCSS.ELA-W.9-10.2; CCSS.ELA-W.9-10.4; CCSS.ELA-W.9-10.7; CCSS.ELA-W.9-10.8; CCSS.ELA-W.9-12.9; CRP.06; CRP.07; CRP.08

KEY: Garden Club

Part 1

Directions:

Answer the questions below as you watch the video "Garden Club SAE," available at <https://vimeo.com/showcase/11832322?video=1108190681>.

1. Describe Carson's service-learning SAE in two or three sentences. He gardens with a local nursing home and does activities with their gardening club. They work outside and inside.	2. What state is Carson from? North Carolina
3. What type of garden is outside of the facility? They have a tomato garden.	4. What does Carson do with the residents inside? They do cool and safe activities with the residents.
5. What is the safety priority when working with the residents? No tripping hazards that residents could fall over.	6. What is the main lesson that Carson has learned from this project? He has learned how much the residents love gardening.
7. Who helps Carson with his project? His agriculture teacher, his mom and the activities director help him.	8. How did Carson start his SAE? He started by participating in example SAE activities in class.
9. What is Carson's advice for an agriculture student who is still searching for the right SAE? His advice is to pick an activity that you can show creativity in and it's best for you. If you like it, go for it!	10. How will this project help Carson in the future? The skills he's learned will help him get a good career.
11. Why do you think gardening is a good activity for nursing home residents? Answers will vary.	12. How does Carson's SAE demonstrate leadership and service? Answers will vary.

Name: _____

Part 2

Directions:

Learn more about how gardening can be used as a great therapy technique for people of all ages and abilities by reading an article from Virginia Cooperative Extension and filling out the chart below.

Article: https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/pubs_ext_vt_edu/en/HORT/HORT-66/hort-66.html

Introduction	
1. Describe the benefits of gardening physically and emotionally. Gardening helps maintain physical and emotional well-being.	3. List the groups of people that therapeutic gardening can benefit. - The elderly and infirm - The mentally ill - The developmentally disabled - Substance abusers - Public offenders - The socially disadvantaged
2. What is another term used in place of therapeutic gardening? Horticulture Therapy	
History	
4. What are the three notable times in history that horticulture therapy is referenced? - In early Egypt - In the US in early 1800s - Following both World Wars I and II	5. Describe horticulture therapy today. Horticulture therapists use plants to provide a powerful form of therapy for patients with emotional and physical disabilities.
Challenges	Rewards
6. List four examples of challenges to gardening from the article. - The usual garden design of long rows at ground level - Garden tools with heavy, long, hard handles - Problems with manual dexterity, such as weak grip or arthritis, carpal tunnel syndrome, etc. - Lack of confidence and knowledge and declining visual acuity	7. List five examples of rewards from gardening that are found in the article. - Good exercise - Improve communication and social skills - Confidence and self-esteem - Feelings of well-being - Nutrition knowledge and enjoyment
Adapting the Garden	

Name: _____

8. What does the phrase “the garden needs to be adapted to the gardener” mean in your own words? Answers will vary.	9. List three ways gardens can be adapted. • Planters • Containers • Raised beds
Raised Beds	
10. When are raised beds the best garden option to use? When the gardener struggles to get down to the garden.	
11. Low Raised Beds • Height: 8-10 inches • Used for: deep rooted plants or plants that will be tall • Can be combined with: a trellis to add vertical gardening	12. Draw a picture of a low raised bed: Answers will vary.
13. Deep Raised Beds • Height: high enough for easy access from a sitting position • May have what to sit on: a border or edge • Used for: annual crops and compact crops	14. Draw a picture of a deep raised bed: Answers will vary.
15. Elevated Beds • Height: 30 inches is usual • Especially good for: chair-bound individuals • Depth: 8 inches deep • Used for: annual vegetables and flowers	16. Draw a picture of an elevated bed: Answers will vary.
Containers	
17. When are containers the best garden option to use? They are best in areas where plants would not otherwise grow. 18. Name two advantages of using containers: • Answers could include the wide choice of plants, mobility of the garden, fewer problems with soil borne diseases, drain well, warm quickly, produces early crops and can be started inside. •	

Name: _____

19. Planting Bags Two advantages of planting bags: Can be placed anywhere and easily moved	20. Draw a picture of a planting bag: Answers will vary.
21. Hanging Baskets Two advantages of hanging baskets: Pulley system can make it easy to raise and lower, and they can grow compact vegetables.	22. Draw a picture of a hanging basket: Answers will vary.
23. Straw Bale Garden Two advantages of straw bale gardens: Can be used as a garden or as a seat in the garden	24. Draw a picture of a straw bale garden: Answers will vary.

25. Which type of garden did Carson use for his SAE? Why do you think he chose this?

Elevated bed

26. Read the four profiles and determine which adapted garden would be best for each person.

<i>Mrs. Jenkins is 82 years old and uses a wheelchair full-time. She loves growing herbs to cook with. She has limited strength in her arms and tires easily when reaching.</i> Which type of garden would work best and why? Answers will vary.	<i>Mr. Garcia is 76 years old and has arthritis in his knees and struggles to bend down. He enjoys growing tomatoes and peppers for homemade salsa and has a large sunny backyard.</i> Which type of garden would work best and why? Answers will vary.
<i>Ms. Carter is 79 years old and recently moved into a retirement apartment with only a small balcony. She wants to grow colorful flowers, but she can't stand for long periods of time.</i> Which type of garden would work best and why? Answers will vary.	<i>Mrs. Lee is 90 years old and is still active but tires when walking long distances. She enjoys caring for plants daily and likes growing new varieties. She needs something low-maintenance and close to her porch.</i> Which type of garden would work best and why? Answers will vary.

Name: _____

Part 3

Directions:

Now that you have seen a great therapeutic gardening SAE and read more about horticulture therapy, let's brainstorm your own project idea. Think about a local retirement home, children's hospital, elderly neighbor or another location or person that could benefit from horticulture therapy. Design a simple garden plan for the facility or person. This could be your next service-learning SAE!

Step 1: Who Can You Help?

Write down and describe the local place or person that you can help with this project.

Answers will vary.

Step 2: Choose a Garden Type

Circle the type of garden(s) you will use: Answers will vary.

Low Raised Bed	Deep Raised Bed	Elevated Bed
Planting Bag	Hanging Basket	Straw Bale Garden

Step 3: Explain Why

Why is this type of garden the best choice for your project? (Be sure to use details you collected from the article.)

Answers will vary.

Step 4: Connection to Health

How could this garden improve their physical health?

Answers will vary.

How could this garden support their mental or emotional health?

Answers will vary.

Name: _____

Step 5: Plan the Plants

What plants will be included in your garden? List at least three plants and explain why.

Answers will vary.

Reflect

1. The article mentioned adapting the gardener, the garden and the plant material. Which one of these is most important in your design? Why?

Answers will vary.

2. What challenges might come with your garden choice? How could you solve these challenges?

Answers will vary.

3. Do you think this project is realistic for you or your FFA chapter? Why or why not?

Answers will vary.