

# *Geranium Cake: From the Garden to the Table*



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# Activity, Time and Materials

## ACTIVITY:

This is an activity that involves the participants in actually preparing the ingredients for and baking a cake in a Bundt pan lined with the leaves from a geranium plant. For this reason, it's a good summer activity with an outdoor component; the geranium leaves can be selected from plants growing outside in a flower bed. It would be a good idea to have one or two participants with accompanying family members work together, and, if the kitchen allows, several cakes can be baked at one time. It would be very satisfying for the participants if the cakes were served at a special occasion, such as a Fourth of July celebration.

## TIME:

Two hours and fifteen minutes over one session. (Selecting and washing the geranium leaves, thirty minutes. This can be done a day ahead of time, as long as the cleaned leaves are wrapped in a damp paper towel and placed in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. Assembly of the ingredients and mixing of the batter, forty-five minutes. The cake bakes for fifty to sixty minutes.)

## MATERIALS:

- A rose-scented geranium plant is nice, but any geranium plant will provide the fragrance this cake needs (Eight to ten leaves are required for each cake.)
- Spray cooking oil
- Bundt cake pan or any tube pan
- Electric mixer and bowl in which to prepare the cake batter
- Rubber spatula
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Oven
- Cooling rack
- The book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*

### **“THREE PLAGUES” (LONELINESS, BOREDOM, HELPLESSNESS):**

The kitchen is such a comforting place for many folks, and the participants will experience renewed feelings of familiarity and competency based on their prior life experiences. They will not feel helpless, but rather a renewed sense of worth and usefulness. Both men and women will enjoy being invited to gather the geranium leaves and clean them, and then mix and bake the cake, whether they do the work or simply watch and visit. The socializing aspect over the course of this activity will help to eliminate both loneliness and depression. Remember that “watching” is a form of participation, and that all the participants will enjoy being in the kitchen together, where there is no room for loneliness or boredom. Encourage the participants to actually do the work of measuring and mixing, as using motor skills can help to strengthen their overall physical function.

### **ASSOCIATED MEDICAL STUDIES:**

Rebecca Whear et al. sought to “examine the impact of gardens and outdoor spaces on the mental and physical well-being of people with dementia who are resident in care homes and understand the views of people with dementia, their carers [sic], and care home staff on the value of gardens and outdoor spaces. . . . Fourteen databases were searched from inception to February 2013. . . . Seventeen studies were included: 9 quantitative, 7 qualitative, and 1 mixed methods.

“The quantitative studies were of poor quality but suggested decreased levels of agitation were associated with garden use. The

views and experiences of the garden are discussed in relation to themes of how the garden was used, nature of interactions, impact/effect of the gardens, mechanisms/how the garden was thought to have an effect, and negatives (such as perception of the garden as a hazard and the limited staff time).

“[They concluded that] there are promising impacts on levels of agitation in care home residents with dementia who spend time in a garden. Future research would benefit from a focus on key outcomes measured in comparable ways, with a separate focus on what lies behind limited accessibility to gardens within the residential care setting.” [Abstract]

*--Whear, Rebecca, Jo Thompson Coon, Alison Bethel, Rebecca Abbott, Ken Stein, and Ruth Garside. “What is the Impact of Using Outdoor Spaces such as Gardens on the Physical and Mental Well-being of Those with Dementia? A Systematic Review of Quantitative and Qualitative Evidence.” JAMDA: The Journal of Post-acute and Long Term Care Medicine 15 (2014): 697-705.*

“As we move toward the new millennium, 76 million Baby Boomers are on the brink of retirement. For some seniors, long-term care will be a necessity. Older adults value independence, physical activity, intellectual curiosity, caring, and spirituality. The long-term care culture is being revolutionized by The Eden Alternative, which strives to decrease loneliness, helplessness, and boredom by developing healthy habitats in a home-like environment. Three key components are children, plants, and companion animals that provide variety and spontaneity in life.” [Abstract]

*--Tavormina, C.E. "Embracing the Eden Alternative in Long-term Care Environments." Geriatric Nursing 20, no. 3 (May-June 1999): 158-161.*

*Cover photo: Geranium cake baked by Lila Hauge-Stoffel. (Image courtesy of Troyd Geist, North Dakota Council on the Arts.)*

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# Activity Plan

## SESSION 1 (2 HOURS AND 15 MINUTES):

**1.** The activity director should explain that those in attendance will participate in making a special kind of cake that is also artistic. During each step of the process, encourage the sharing of memories of family occasions when a cake was prepared. Ask questions to elicit the participants' responses, such as "What is your favorite cake?" or "When did your family have cake for special occasions?" or "Did you make decorative cakes for birthdays, Easter, or Christmas? If so, how were they decorated?"

To the participants, read aloud and show the pictures from pages 286-287 of the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers*. Read the captions from each picture as the images are shown to the group. Explain that it is this cake that they will make, and that they must first collect the most important ingredient for the cake—leaves from a geranium plant. The geranium leaves can be selected from plants growing in pots inside or preferably from plants growing outside in a flower bed. Gathering the leaves from plants growing outside in a flower bed is a fun, goal-oriented reason to encourage participants to move around and to go outside and enjoy a sunny day.

Note: Sometimes it is easier to do things for the participants, rather than taking the time and giving the assistance and encouragement needed for them to do it themselves. Resist this temptation. Encourage and assist their active involvement in each

step of this activity.

**2.** Take participants outside to cut leaves from the geranium plants for use in the cake. A scissor works well, and the leaves can be collected in a bowl or basket. Some participants may need help from staff or a family member, but seek the active inclusion of the participants as much as possible. While gathering the geranium leaves, discuss memories of harvesting plants from home gardens. The person directing this activity and those assisting should encourage the participants to share memories of their home gardens and the crops that were harvested. Ask participants if anyone they know has ever used parts of a plant to add flavor to a cake. Ask if anyone ever belonged to a garden club. Encourage the participants to share their personal stories. Remember, the best way to get others to share is to share things yourself. So, the person directing this activity, as well as those assisting, should talk about their personal experiences and memories with the elder participants.

**3.** Back inside, wash the leaves and blot them on a towel. Remove the stem with a scissor. Staff and other people assisting may need to help if a participant is struggling with the task. If collected a day ahead of time, wrap the clean leaves in a paper towel and place them in a plastic bag to be refrigerated until used. Prior to using the leaves, use the back of a spoon or a cup to press the leaves flat. This releases the aroma and oils from the leaves. Again, refer to the

photographs of this process on page 286 of *Sundogs and Sunflowers*. Assign these various tasks to different people based on their interests and capabilities, so that everyone who wants to can be involved. A couple people might be assigned to wash the leaves, others to dry them, others to remove the stems, while still others can help to press the leaves flat.

4. Prepare the Bundt cake pan by spraying it with oil. Also spray BOTH sides of each leaf before pressing it against the inside of the Bundt pan. Space the leaves evenly around the inside of the pan and set it aside until the batter is ready. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Again, assign these various tasks to different participants so they are actively involved.

5. Make the cake batter according to the recipe listed on page 287 of *Sundogs and Sunflowers*. Measure the dry ingredients into a bowl. This is a very good activity for the participants, as it requires fine motor control. Invite participants to do the measuring with help from staff members. Reassure participants, especially those who may have difficulty or who are shaky, to not be concerned about making a mess. Make the activity fun, and if a mess is made, make it part of the fun to take the stress and anxiety away from shaky hands or self-consciousness. However, staff members will want to guide the use of the mixer as the butter, sugar, and vanilla are placed in the mixing bowl and creamed until fluffy.

Scoop the batter into the prepared Bundt pan, carefully keeping the leaves in place. Bake the cake for fifty to sixty minutes,

until a toothpick inserted comes out clean. Place the baked cake on a cooling rack for ten to fifteen minutes. The aroma from this cake while it's baking is wonderful and it will draw folks into the kitchen to see the cake come out of the oven.

6. Loosen the cake from the pan by slowly tipping it from side to side. Place a cake plate on top of the cake and tip everything upside down to remove the cake. While the cake is still warm, remove the geranium leaves. An imprint of each leaf and the geranium fragrance will create a terrific sensory experience for all the participants. Encourage the participants to remove the geranium leaves so they can enjoy seeing the patterns made by the leaves. Staff members should invite everyone to enjoy the aroma of the freshly baked cake, especially those that have been a little reserved during the process.

7. Slice and serve the cake with or without ice cream. This cake has a great fragrance and is not typically served with frosting. While enjoying the eating of the cake, encourage conversation about the process by asking the participants such questions as: "What did you enjoy most about this activity? Do you have experience baking cakes? Do you enjoy the aroma and fragrance the geranium leaves give the cake? What does the taste of this cake remind you of? Do you like the taste of this cake?"

Note: This activity is a perfect time to invite family members to join in the process and to attend a special dessert and coffee visit.

### **AUTHOR • LILA HAUGE-STOFFEL:**

Lila is a retired professor of art education currently living at Lake Lida, Minnesota. An avid gardener, she enjoys using plants from her garden in cooking for her family members and friends. She grows many herbs and vegetables, which she dries and freezes in the fall so that they can be enjoyed all winter long. Her family traditions are very important to her. This recipe for geranium cake, for instance, is something she learned as a child from her Grandmother Martha Reule. Lila has worked with the North Dakota Council on the Arts' *Art for Life Program* since it first began, in 2001. She has conducted workshops for health-care providers and has designed and conducted residencies for the elderly across both North Dakota and Minnesota. As a result of these experiences, Lila has observed the positive effects involvement with the arts can have on the elderly. As an artist, she is a weaver of cloth and willow baskets, and enjoys both watercolor painting and drawing. Lila exhibits her artistic works throughout the region.