

DIY Mini Zen Garden Workshop

[Stephen B. Luce Library SUNY Maritime College](#)

Young Adult

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Adults

DIY Mini Zen Garden Workshop

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\$1-50

\$

Byline

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At the Stephen B. Luce Library at SUNY Maritime College, I'm always looking for creative ways to engage students. Midterms and finals can be especially stressful, so I introduced this activity as part of our "Wellness Wednesdays" series. Alongside the program, students also had the chance to mix and take home their own custom aromatherapy blend for a little extra relaxation.

Advanced Planning

My goal was to create a fun and unique program centered on mindfulness and relaxation to help students de-stress during midterms and finals week, while giving them a creative activity they could take back to their dorm rooms.

I started planning in January for the late March program. I had interested students register as supplies were limited.

The unexpected challenge I had was that I had more students interested in the program than I had supplies for.

Marketing

I created a flyer in Canva and had student assistants hang the flyer around campus. I also advertised via Instagram and digital signage throughout the library.

I had students announce the program at their Student Government Association meeting. I also made a Mini Zen Garden and had it on the circulation desk and placed by the flyer. Every time a student would come to the desk, they would play with the zen garden, prompting our student assistants to let them know they could make their own!

Budgeting

The library already had acrylic markers and essential oils, and I used sand leftover from a home project. In hindsight, many items purchased on Amazon could have been found at Dollar Tree, which may be more cost-effective. The library's total cost for the program was under \$50.

Note: Acrylic markers, essential oils, and fairy garden accessories are optional—these are just add-ons that make the program more engaging. The Zen Garden can be created with just trays, sand, rocks, and rakes.

Supplies Purchased

From Amazon:

- OIKIT 20 Pack Wood Canvas Panels (6 x 6 x 5/8 inch) – \$22.99 (wood trays)
- 10 pcs Mini Zen Sand Bamboo Rakes – \$8.28 × 2
- Dracarys Selected 100 pcs Fairy Garden Accessories – \$13.91
- 30 Colors Dual Tip Acrylic Paint Markers – \$12.98
- Essential Oils Set – Top 15 Scents – \$12.98

From Home Depot:

- Sandkrete 50 lb Play Sand – \$6.78

From Dollar Tree:

- Bag of Rocks x 2 × \$2.50
- Shovels- x 2= \$2.50
- Plastic basin-x \$ 1.25

If starting from scratch, the total cost for all supplies is \$91.00. However, you can run this program for just \$48.83 by using only the wood trays, one lavender essential oil from Dollar Tree, one bag of rocks from Dollar Tree, rakes, and sand. Participants can personalize their trays with regular markers.

For an even more budget-friendly option, plastic trays can be used, or trays can be DIY-built from craft popsicle sticks, which significantly reduces the cost.

Day-of-event Activity

I ran the program with help from a student assistant, and setup was straightforward. We organized each part of the Mini Zen Garden on different tables: one for trays and acrylic markers, another for sand with shovels, rocks, décor, and rakes, and the essential oils on a separate table.

The only unexpected challenge was preparing the sand. I hadn't realized how many small rocks were mixed in, so I spent extra time sifting them out. I used a sieve from home for this. It was time-consuming but worth it for the final result. Having plastic tablecloths on both the essential oil table and the student work tables would definitely make cleanup easier.

Program Execution

The program was a success. Each time I ran it, I limited it to the number of trays and rakes I had. The first time I ran it, I limited it to 20 students since we had purchased 20 trays and had full participation. Each component was arranged on separate tables, and I guided students through the process of making the mini zen garden step by step.

Students started by selecting a wooden tray to decorate using acrylic paint markers, glue, and beads and other decorative elements the library had on hand. Once decorated, they added a drop or two of their chosen essential oil, which would release a fragrance whenever the sand was moved.

Next, they added sand to the tray, followed by rocks. I instructed the students to choose rocks, each representing a personal challenge or issue to reflect on while raking the sand. Students then chose an additional decorative item to further personalize their garden. This additional item was varied and from the fairy garden decor accessories.

Finally, each student selected a rake, and I gave a brief demonstration on different ways to move the sand to create calming and beautiful patterns. I also played a YouTube video while they were making the zen gardens of a large zen garden in Japan with music.

Advice

The trays are the most expensive item, and they don't necessarily need to be wooden. Finding low-cost alternatives would be ideal. The bag of sand lasts a long time since only a little is needed to fill the shallow trays.

I plan to run this program again since it reaches full capacity every time. Participants really enjoy being able to take their Mini Zen Garden with them to their dorm rooms, but make sure you let them know that. I had two participants leave their zen garden because they thought the library would keep it.

Since Programming Librarian published this article, our readers have tried the program at their own libraries! Here's what they have to say:

Feedback

The Mini Zen Gardens program was a tremendous success as we took it on the road to two local senior housing apartment complexes, two senior centers in our county, and a skilled nursing facility. We served 65 participants, and the response was overwhelmingly positive. Patrons thoroughly enjoyed creating their own Zen Gardens, and many expressed enthusiasm for participating in more hands-on, creative programs like this in the future. Thanks for the great idea!

— Krisene Watson
Krisene Watson, Outreach Manager, Campbell County Public Library, Gillette, Wyoming

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Supporting Materials

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