

# The Smell and Reminiscence of Fall's Bounty: The Quilted Pantry



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# Activity, Time and Materials

## ACTIVITY:

Fabric representations of canned garden produce, as well as food collected in the wild, will be made into a wall-hanging quilt (or quilts). The activity includes the sharing of experiences and knowledge in regards to fall harvest, gathering, and canning. The activities will be held in small groups, so intimacy will be established and people will be heard and encouraged to share. Pickles, preserves, jellies, and jams will be made available as visual artistic cues, as well as for tasting. These foods, through taste and smell, are to aid in triggering food memories, imaginings, and to foster conversation. The elder care facility activities coordinator should work in tandem with a traditional quilter(s) or quilting guild. The various aspects of the plan should be divided between the activities coordinators, volunteers, and quilters according to their professional and artistic strengths. (This plan was inspired by the art of Amy Hansen, a quilter and activity coordinator at Valley View Heights Assisted Living in Bismarck, ND.)

## TIME:

Three hours and ten minutes over three sessions and one pre-session (the time required for the quilter post-session is dependent on the size and number of quilts to be made).

## MATERIALS:

- Lots of scraps of brightly colored, pre-washed fabric of various colors and prints (in advance, ask volunteers, quilters, or local quilting guilds to donate scraps that are each at least 6" x 8")
- Ziploc bags (to store sorted fabric)
- Small sandwich bags (to store designs of jars and lids cut by each participant)
- Post-it notes (to write on and place inside the sandwich bags)
- Fine-tip permanent markers
- Scissors (spring-loaded scissors might be helpful to someone who has grasping issues but not motor skill issues)
- Mason-jar templates of thick stock paper or cardboard (Multiple versions of these should be made by quilters, activities coordinators, or volunteers in advance of the second session. Different shapes and sizes should be made, but no template should be greater than 4" x 6". Make different shapes and sizes of "jars" that would be used to pickle things like cucumbers, or "jars" traditionally used to can jellies, jams, and preserves.)
- Mason-jar-lid templates of thick stock paper or cardboard (Multiple versions of these should be made by quilters, activities coordinators, or volunteers in advance of the second session. Different shapes and sizes should be made appropriate to the size of the Mason-jar templates.)
- Jars of pickles and jams (for visual inspiration, as well as to smell and taste to trigger memory, imagination, and physiologic responses.

Homemade is best!)

- Napkins (to clean hands after sampling food)
- The book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*

#### **MATERIALS FOR QUILTER(S):**

- Pins
- Sewing needles
- Cotton thread (color to be determined when the quilt is assembled)
- Cotton batting (amount dependent on the size and number of quilts being made)
- Fabric for backing (amount dependent on the size and number of quilts being made)

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

The sharing of food is central to many social gatherings. It helps people become better acquainted with one another. Social interaction and conversation address both loneliness and boredom. The fabric used is brightly colored, so those with poor eyesight can better visualize the materials and participate in the project, thus addressing helplessness. The quilted “jars” do not need to be precise. In fact, sometimes a little imprecision can add to the beauty of the artwork. This, too, alleviates the pressure on those who may have various physical challenges, and encourages them to participate. This is designed to address a sense of helplessness. The use of smell, taste, and visual examples are to aid in triggering food memories, imaginings, and the fostering of both conversation and creativity.

### ASSOCIATED MEDICAL STUDY:

“An important feature of olfactory perception is its dependence on respiratory activity. By inspiration, olfactory information ascends directly to olfactory-related limbic structures. Therefore, every breath with odor molecules activates these limbic areas associated with emotional experience and memory retrieval. We tested whether odors associated with autobiographical memories can trigger pleasant emotional experiences and whether respiration changes during stimulation with these odors. . . . Findings showed that autobiographical memory retrieval was associated with increasing tidal volume and decreasing respiratory frequency more than during presentation of control odors. Subjective feelings such as emotional arousal during retrieval of the memory, arousal level of the memory itself, or pleasantness and familiarity toward the odor evoked by autobiographical memory were more specific emotional responses compared with those related to control odors. In addition, high trait anxiety subjects responded with a stronger feeling of being taken back in time and had high arousal levels with tidal volume increases. We discussed assumptions regarding how deep and slow breathing is related to pleasantness and comfortableness of an autobiographical memory.” [Abstract]

The researchers “posit that autobiographical pleasant memories associated with slow and deep breathing may consolidate tightly during slow-wave sleep and be stored in long-term memory. If so, associating slow breathing with feelings of pleasantness related to

odor-evoked autobiographical memory can be an efficient way to feel comfortable or relaxed in various stressful and negative situations.” (Masaoka et al., 2012: 387)

The researchers “examined only the link between an odor-evoked autobiographical pleasant memory and respiration in this study. It might be argued that odor-evoked autographical unpleasant memory and respiration should be tested. [They] paid careful attention if the odor identified by subjects caused retrieval of an unpleasant memory, with concern about possibly triggering symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder.” (Masaoka et al., 2012: 387)

*--Masaoka, Y., H. Sugiyama, A. Katayama, M. Kashiwagi, and I. Homma. “Slow Breathing and Emotions Associated with Odor-induced Autobiographical Memories.” *Chemical Senses* 37, no. 4 (May 2012): 379-388.*

**Cautionary Note:** Consult with medical staff and participants with regard to allergies or other such adverse effects associated with smell and taste activities. Perhaps enlist the help of medical staff with this activity plan.

*Cover photo: Food pantry or canning quilt by Amy Hansen, Bismarck, ND.*

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# Activity Plan

## SESSION 1 (1 HOUR):

**I.** Arrange the participants in small groups around work tables; perhaps five participants per table. Have at least one volunteer, care facility activity coordinator, or artist at each table, if possible, to help direct the activities. Participants should be grouped and arranged in such a way as to encourage discussion and sharing. There should be a variety of canned or jarred foods available to look at for visual inspiration, as well as some on plates for snacking and to smell, which will help to trigger food memories, imaginings, and to foster conversation. Many studies indicate the potent role smell plays in initiating physiologic responses and memory. Having jars of pickles, jellies, jams, and preserves on the table should thus be used in an effort to elicit active discourse. Encourage participants to taste and smell the food. **(It is important, however, to talk first with the care facility medical staff to be aware of any allergies on the part of the participants.)**

Have fun with this part of the activity. Hide the jars from sight, at first, and ask individual participants to close their eyes. Hold a jar of canned food (for example, pickled cucumbers, beets, or watermelon rinds; strawberry, rhubarb, chokecherry, or wild plum jelly; peach preserves; or candied apples) under their noses and ask them to smell what it is. Keeping their eyes closed, ask them to describe the smell. What might some of the ingredients be? Ask them to explain what is going through their minds at this moment—any images or memories,

or whether they are experiencing any sensations like salivation. Ask the participants to guess what it is they are smelling without opening their eyes. For other participants, ask them to close their eyes and with one hand hold their noses shut. Ask them to taste what is given to them and guess what it is they are eating. (Smell helps one taste. If the food cannot be smelled, one's sense of taste is often affected.)

Then, to further break the ice and begin the conversation, read the folklore beliefs about plants and planting on pages 153 and 156 of the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers*. Ask the participants if they or someone they know has ever grown a garden. Ask them what they grew, when they planted, and if there was anything special they did to make sure their garden produced a bountiful harvest. The person directing this plan should share what he or she knows, so that it becomes a conversation.

Expand the conversation by reading “Saskatoon Berries” from page 277 and “A Little Here and a Little There” (also show the pictures) from page 285 of *Sundogs and Sunflowers*. Have a discussion about gathering berries and other wild foods from nature. What did people gather and pick—asparagus, mushrooms, chokecherries, wild plums? Where were they found? When is the best time to gather them? How were they prepared?

Finally, begin a discussion about food preservation, asking if anyone cans or has ever canned food. Does anyone have a friend or family member who cans or canned food? When and what do they can? What kinds of vegetables, berries, and meats are canned? What kinds of jams and jellies were made? Who taught them these food preservation methods? Did they write their recipes down or did they make them from memory? Are there any tips or tricks?

2. Now tell the participants they are going to create “jars” of canned goods from fabric that, when arranged and composed, will be the basis of a “quilted food pantry.” Explain that the first step involves the selecting and sorting of material that could be representative of a certain kind of canned or jarred food—representative by its color and/or print. Place a pile of scraps of brightly colored fabric in the middle of the table. Based on the conversations, ask participants to sort through the material, selecting fabric that reminds them of a certain canned good. Did someone mention candied apples? Perhaps red cloth or cloth with apple prints on it reminds someone of candied apples or applesauce. Purple/maroon-colored cloth might remind someone of pickled beets or chokecherry jelly. A green cloth

with swirled designs might remind someone of pickled cucumber relish. A cloth with red and green colors might remind someone of sweet pickled watermelon rind, an especially tasty ethnic treat. A print with strawberries might remind someone of strawberry jelly. A print with chickens on it could remind someone of canned chicken, a print with cows of canned beef, or a print with pigs of ham hocks. Ask the participants to also look for material that would be good representations to make jar lids. Yellow, white, or copper-colored material might well be selected. Sort the material accordingly. Place the groupings in separate bags labeled by their associations: applesauce, pickled watermelon, pickled cucumbers, peach preserves, jar lids, and so on.



*Note how the print, design, and color is used to suggest the canned or pickled foods. Also, see the brand name of the jars: Atlas Mason, Ball, Golden Harvest, and Kerr. Labels with frayed string provide a nice touch. Different sizes and shapes of jars are used, depending on what is being canned or pickled.*



3. Tell the participants that in the next session they will use the material they sorted and selected to create “jars” of canned goods. Set a place and time for the second session. Leading up to that session, give repeated reminders to the participants of the date, time, and subject.

### OPTIONAL PRE-SESSION FOR SESSION 2

#### (10 MINUTES):

1. While this activity is optional, it very much is encouraged since Session 2 will involve the use of scissors and other equipment. The person leading the activity, but preferably the care facilities physical therapist, should direct this pre-session, which is designed to gently stretch and exercise the hands of participants before manipulating the necessary materials and equipment. Refer to the exercises illustrated and described in the activity plan entitled “In My Hands: Therapeutic, Self-Help, Hand Exercises for Strength and Dexterity,” by Parul Gupta, M.D. The plan is included in this compilation.

#### SESSION 2 (1 HOUR):

1. As was done in the first session, arrange participants in small groups at work tables. Begin by recapping the first session. Briefly remind participants of what was talked about and what was done. Explain how material was sorted by color and print. Show the assorted bags of cloth and read aloud what their associations are. For example: applesauce, canned chicken, watermelon pickles, pickled cucumbers, peach preserves, and so on. Explain that they will use these materials to create “jars” of canned goods.

2. Again, have the real jars of canned goods on the table for visual cues. Try to have an assortment of jars at each table: those with jelly, jam, pickled beets, pickled cucumbers, etc. Give samples of the canned or pickled foods to the participants to enjoy during the discussion. Ask participants what brand of jars they used or know are used to can and preserve food. They may respond with Ball, Atlas, Golden Harvest, Kerr, or some other. Ask them to describe the jars, using their memories, imagination, or by looking at or feeling the real jars of canned goods on the table. What do they look like? Shape, size, design, and so on? Are they square or round? Are they smooth or do they have raised patterns? Ask what shape and size of jar would be used traditionally for different kinds of canned goods. Show the jar templates. Ask participants to identify each shape and what it might be used for. For example, what shape and size of jar would likely be used for jam versus one for pickled cucumbers? Distribute the jar and jar-lid templates.



*Jelly and jam jars are smaller and shaped differently. The strawberry jam and chokecherry jelly jars are embroidered with cross-hatch to suggest the decorative designs of some jars.*

3. Ask the participants what canned good they would like to make: strawberry jam, pickled watermelon, pickled beets, canned pears, or something else? Or ask them to just select a piece of material they find appealing and would like to use to create a fabric representation of a jar of food. Ask what kind of food could the fabric represent? What food association do they receive from the material selected?

Ask them what kind of jar they would use to can or pickle that particular food association or item. Instruct them to draw, with a fine-tip permanent marker, the shape and size of that jar on the back of the material selected. For example, they might select a small jar if they are making a jar for chokecherry jelly. Suggest that the participants should not draw anything bigger than 4" x 6". Ask them to cut along the lines using spring-loaded scissors. Explain that the drawings do not have to be sketched, nor cut, perfectly to look nice.

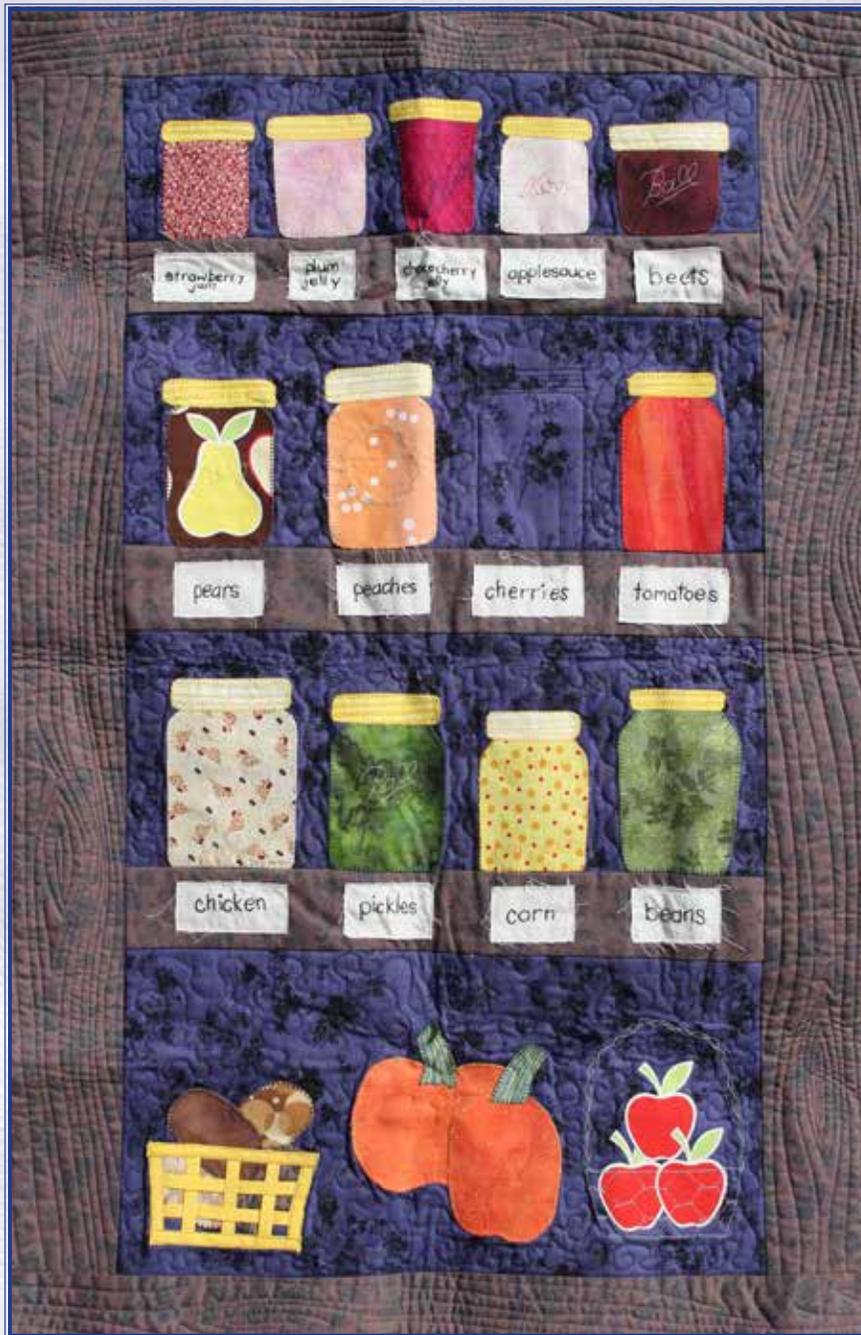
If the participants would rather use the templates, let them choose which template they prefer according to whatever canned good they are making and the shape and size of the jar to be used. Do stress, however, that there are no wrong choices. On the back of the fabric, lay the jar template and hold it down while tracing around its edges with a fine-tip permanent marker. Have the participant cut the pattern out with spring-loaded scissors.

Then the participants should be allowed to select material to be used for the lid of the jar. Instruct them to draw a lid on the back of the material or use a lid template to trace the shape of a lid with a permanent marker. Then cut it out. The participants may make as many jar and lid combinations as they would like to.

4. Clear each table, except for the jar and lid designs made of cut-out fabric by each person at his or her own respective table. Inquire if the participants or someone they knew ever had a food pantry. With what kinds of foods was it stocked? Ask the people at each table to arrange their fabric jars into a pleasing artistic composition. Encourage them to arrange and rearrange the fabric into rows and columns like shelves in a pantry. How would they arrange their pantry to look nice? Encourage the participants to consider size, shape, and color when developing the arrangement. Would the shelves of the pantry be horizontal or vertical? Again, there is no wrong answer or bad design. Afterwards, store the jar and lid fabric cuttings from each individual in small sandwich bags with a Post-it note placed inside that indicates the canned or pickled food represented.

5. Explain that the cut pieces of fabric will be collected to be arranged by the quilter(s) to create a wall-hanging “food pantry quilt.” Inform everyone present that the quilter(s) will take into consideration the participants’ different compositions. The food pantry quilt could be either horizontal or vertical. The size of the quilt(s) will depend upon the number of individual “jars of canned goods” used. One or multiple quilts could be made of varying sizes.

Inform the participants that after the quilter(s) has completed the quilting work, a reception will be held and the quilt(s) will be unveiled. The care facility activity directors should discuss with the participants and the artists what they would ultimately like to do with the quilt(s): raffle it as a fundraiser to continue to support art projects at the care facility, donate it to a needy family or charitable organization, or keep it on permanent display at the care facility.



*“Food pantry” or “canning quilt” (21” wide x 33” tall, cotton material) made by Amy Hansen, an activities coordinator at Valley View Heights Assisted Living in Bismarck, ND. She writes, “[I] can see using the pieces that I create as a way of fostering conversation with the tenants of the facility. Oftentimes, especially in the case of people with dementia, having an item for people to see and touch will prompt conversation that would never have otherwise occurred. Learning the folk art of quilting could become a new way of reaching out to the people I work with.”*

*“I never had the chance to see my grandma’s cellar. Her canning days were over long before I came along, but I always heard stories of the bounty that came from that magical place. Each fall as my grandma and I conversed about what was growing, or not growing, in my garden or what was currently in my canning kettle, she would inevitable ask, ‘Did I ever tell you about the summer that I canned over 700 quarts!’*

*I made this quilt as part of a folk art quilting apprenticeship through the North Dakota Council on the Arts. With the guidance of instructor Linda Suchy, I explored the realm of using fabric to tell family stories. This quilt is a testament to the countless hours my grandma spent carefully nurturing seeds into plants and preserving the fruits of her labors to feed her family through each Minnesota winter. You’ll notice that there are no cherries on the shelf. That is because my dad ate them all!”*

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## POST-SESSION FOR ARTISTS/QUILTERS:

(Time is dependent upon the number of quilters involved and the size and number of quilts to be made. Consult the quilter(s) with whom you are working.)

1. In conversation with the care facility activity coordinators, the number and size of quilts to be made should be agreed upon. Set a deadline date for its/their completion. The quilters should sew a background that resembles a shelf and arrange the jar and lid fabric cuttings into a pleasing design. The quilter(s) should consider enhancing the artwork with woodgrain quilting designs around the “shelf.”

2. Use information from the participants’ discussion to enhance the artwork by embroidering different brand names on the jars. Perhaps embroider designs on the jars like those sometimes used on small, decorative jars for jams and jellies. Beneath the jars and on the shelf, use embroidery labels to identify the different canned goods. Use the labels in the small sandwich bags to do so correctly. The quilter(s) should use his or her discretion to include a few other details, if he or she so wishes. (See images throughout this plan as references.)



*See the woodgrain quilting pattern on the right side of the pantry shelf.*

### SESSION 3 (1 HOUR):

I. Have an event unveiling the quilt(s). Invite everyone who participated, as well as their family members, care facility staff, and other individuals at-large. Promote the reception and unveiling to family members of the care facility residents. Repeatedly notify the participants of when and where the event will be held.

### OPTIONAL SUGGESTION:

I. Think about connecting this plan to the quilted greeting card activity plan. The image on the cover of the card could be a fabric representation of a canned good, whether it be pickled watermelon or chokecherry jelly. The recipe could be written on one of the inside pages while an invitation with date, time, and location for the social event to unveil the quilt could be written on the other. Then encourage the participants to send their cards to family and friends.

### AUTHOR • TROYD GEIST:

Troyd is the state folklorist with the North Dakota Council on the Arts who is charged with encouraging the preservation and continuation of folk and traditional arts, heritage, and culture. He holds a Master of Arts degree in Sociology/Anthropology from North Dakota State University, and has participated in and conducted projects involving the impact of folk art and folk traditions on personal health and well-being. Those efforts include traditional storytellers working with fetal alcohol research and prevention programs, Bell's palsy as viewed and treated in traditional cultures, familial Alzheimer's disease tracking using anthropological methods, and the use of culturally infused narrative and traditional music for guided imagery. He directed the original *Art for Life* pilot project in 2001-2003, which measured the effects of long-term folk arts and artist interaction on combating the negative impact of the "Three Plagues" (loneliness, boredom, and helplessness) that many residents in elder care facilities experience. Subsequently, he developed the *Art for Life Program*. With Dr. Timothy J. Kloberdanz, Troyd co-edited, co-compiled, and co-authored the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*.

*(All artwork by Amy Hansen. All photos courtesy of Troyd Geist, North Dakota Council on the Arts.)*

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