

# Using Montessori Materials with Older Adults

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Engaging, beautiful and purposeful, Montessori materials are great for everyone. Just as Montessori classroom teachers guide and support students instead of lecturing to them, Montessori trained healthcare staff guide and support older adults instead of doing everything for them. Staff and elders work shoulder to shoulder as equally valued members of a shared community. Older adults and people with dementia are invited to take on leadership roles in their areas of interest, such as leading a book discussion group or planning the menu for a holiday meal. Montessori materials for these activities are neatly organized and physically accessible all throughout the living area. Staff guide elders with these roles and activities until they build new routines, and their skills improve to the point that most are able to enjoy these activities on their own.

So, what do roles and activities for elders look like?

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## Plant Care

Once learning that an elder enjoys gardening, we may invite her to take on the role of watering and caring for the houseplants in the community. This role allows her to make a meaningful contribution to the community, while also encouraging her to move freely and maintain her balance, allowing her to work on fine and gross motor skills, and participating in something familiar. In addition, staff may introduce this elder to other related activities, such as flower arranging or using nomenclature cards with images of flowers.

## Nomenclature Cards

Nomenclature cards are Montessori materials that are often used with children for building vocabulary and concepts in all subject areas. Also known as 3-part cards, this Montessori material helps elders to maintain their ability to read, identify and name objects, and sequence the steps of an activity. We like the nomenclature cards from [montessori-images.com](http://montessori-images.com) because they are especially designed for older adults.



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## Metal Insets

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Metal Insets, a cornerstone material in Montessori classrooms, can also be enjoyed by elders. In tracing the various stencils, elders practice their fine motor control, hand eye coordination, concentration, and sequencing. The artistic component of creating different designs with the stencils, drawing lines, and shading is a creative outlet. Elders often use the metal insets to design stationary to use for correspondence with family and friends, and can build the skills necessary for more sophisticated art projects, as well as maintaining independence with activities of daily living that require fine motor control, such as buttoning and spooning.



## Using Tools

A gentleman in need of stronger fine motor skills for buttoning his shirts – and who previously enjoyed carpentry – may be invited to assemble wooden birdhouses for others to paint or assist the maintenance staff replacing switch plates. Using a screwdriver strengthens his finger muscles, improves hand eye coordination, and allows for focused attention. At the same time, it provides the opportunity to practice a previously enjoyed hobby, socialize with others, and make a meaningful contribution to the household.

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The Montessori Philosophy for adults gives older adults the opportunity to grow, engage, love—and most importantly, live.

Dr. Maria Montessori wrote that “joy, feeling one’s own value, being appreciated and loved by others, feeling useful and capable of production are all factors of enormous value for the human soul”. Montessori is more than an educational model; it is a philosophy of life for people of all ages.