

Aromatherapy & Essential Oils

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What is Aromatherapy?

Aromatherapy is the name given to a unique branch of herbal medicine that uses the medicinal and therapeutic properties of the oils found in various plants. These special oils are called **essential oils** and are incredibly potent. The name “aromatherapy” is actually a little misleading, because it implies that the “aroma” of essential oils is the primary healing agent. Actually, essential oils can be used in many different ways: “The real beauty of aromatherapy is that the essences work on a cellular and physical level, and also in the emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic areas of your life” (Fitzsimmons & Bousquet, pg. 7).

It’s difficult to pinpoint the official “start date” of aromatherapy, because plants and their essential oils have been used for their therapeutic properties for centuries. “Anthropologists speculate that primitive perfumery began with the burning of gums and resins for incense....From 7000 to 4000 BC, the fatty oils of olive and sesame are thought to have been combined with fragrant plants to create the original Neolithic ointments” (Keville & Green, pg. 2). It’s well known that ancient Egyptians used essential oils for all sorts of things, including ritual preparation and performance, and embalming. Greek soldiers carried herbal ointments into battle help treat wounds and restore their spirits. And the Roman historian Pliny, in his 1st-century work Natural History, “mentions 32 remedies prepared from rose, 21 from lily, 17 from violet and 25 from pennyroyal” (Keville & Green, pg. 4).

Today, the word “aromatherapy” can be found in just about any health food store and in many supermarkets and retail stores, as well. A “buzz word” for our times, it is often attached to items like scented candles, room fresheners, bath salts, and other household and personal care items. While this certainly increases the general public’s awareness of aromatherapy, it very arguably “dumbs down” the healing modality, in essence using the label as a sellable fad rather than portraying it as a dynamic and viable alternative healing technique. Indeed, this is one of the things with which trained Aromatherapists must contend as they practice their craft in an ever-commercializing world.

What are Essential Oils?

As stated above, “essential oils” are the therapeutic, volatile oils that come from plants. In aromatherapy, the word “volatile” is not meant as “explosive” or “inconsistent.” Rather, this refers to the meaning: “evaporating readily at normal temperatures and pressures...[an oil that] changes readily from solid or liquid to a vapor [as in] ‘it was heated to evaporate the volatiles’” (<http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=volatile>). Essential oils may be found in leaves, rinds of fruit, seeds, bark, heartwood of trees, flowers, and any other part of a plant, so long as the extracted oil has medicinal or otherwise therapeutic use.

It is theorized that the extraction of essential oils was discovered by Persian and Egyptian alchemists, who boiled the aromatic plant materials in closed flasks, allowed it to cool, and then collected the thin layer of essential oil that floated on the surface of the water. Modern extraction processes are not much different, actually, though better results are obtained by passing steam over the plant material rather than boiling it in water. “A condensing pipe is used to cool the resulting vapor, and the essential oil can be collected off the surface of the resultant liquid” (Bowles, pg. 14). Essential oils can also be extracted with chemical solvents, though some speculate that this may alter the chemical structure of the plant’s volatile oils. Where citrus oils are concerned, they are usually extracted by squeezing the fruit peel between rollers in a process known as “expression” or “cold pressing.”

As with its close relative Herbology (also called Therapeutic Herbalism), it is important to recognize that *just because a remedy is “all natural,” it is not necessarily nontoxic or harmless.* This is especially true of essential oils, as they are extremely concentrated chemical compounds. “Most of them are 50 times more potent than the herbs from which they are derived. In her book *Aromatherapy: The Complete Guide to Plant and Flower Essences for Health and Beauty*, Daniele Ryman states that one drop of essential oil often represents the potency of one ounce of plant material” (Keville & Green, pg. 29). Some oils can burn if applied directly to the skin, for example, and that’s anything but a healing experience!

Beyond skin irritation, another reason to keep essential oils’ potency in mind is that they have a remarkable ability to cross the skin barrier and enter the bloodstream, affecting a person’s body within minutes. Indeed, studies show that, if applied to the skin, chemical compounds from some essential oils can become detectable in the blood in their highest concentration after only 20 minutes (Keville & Green, pg. 10). Apparently, a safe experiment used to prove how essential oils travel in the body is to rub garlic on your feet...and then to later smell it on your breath!

When using essential oils, you will almost always dilute them using something called a **carrier oil**. (To my knowledge there are only two essential oils that are safely applied undiluted to the skin. Called “neat” oils, these two are Lavender and Tea Tree. More on these oils later.) Carrier oils are sometimes also called “base oils.” They are used to dilute essential oils before they are applied to the skin.

The name “carrier oil” comes very reasonably from its job: it *carries* the essential oil onto the skin. Carrier oils do not contain a concentrated aroma, unlike essential oils, nor do they evaporate like them. Some very common carrier oils include: Grapeseed, Sweet almond, Aloe vera, Jojoba, Sesame, Wheat germ, Apricot, Olive, and Avocado. As a rule of thumb, a safe and effective dilution tends to be 2 percent, translating to 2 drops of essential oil per 100 drops of carrier oil. While this may seem an incredibly weak solution, it only underscores the potency of pure essential oils. According to *Aromatherapy: A Complete Guide to the Healing Art*, “there is no need to go beyond a 3-percent dilution for any purpose. In aromatherapy, more is not better; in fact, ‘more’ may cause adverse reactions” (pg. 22). The same guide suggests that a 1-percent dilution would be appropriate for children, elderly, and pregnant women.

When purchasing essential oils, it is of paramount importance that you select oils that are pure

and undiluted. If the bottle does not contain the words “pure essential oil” you should look elsewhere. Bottles labeled as “therapeutic blends” are *not* pure essential oils, but rather, blended with a carrier oil (and usually otherwise diluted) and intended for immediate topical application. While this isn’t necessarily a problem, you will get more for your money and retain a great deal of creative license if you purchase your pure essential oils and carrier oils separately. Though it takes a discerning nose, tainted essential oils may have a slight petroleum scent to them. When you find a reputable company that sells 100% pure essential oils, stick with it! Most essential oils are sold in dark glass bottles. This helps them retain their therapeutic essence. Keep them out of direct sunlight and in a cool (preferably dark) place. Different oils will have different shelf lives; do your research before purchasing an essential oil that you may not use before its shelf life passes.

How Are Essential Oils Used?

As mentioned earlier, there are several ways to use essential oils. Indeed, depending on how creative you are, you can find enough ways to use them to substantially change the way you do just about anything: cleaning, treating ailments, decorating, relaxing, grooming, spicing up relationships, etc. Most people, when they think of aromatherapy, immediately think of how things smell. Well, this makes sense; not only is the word “aroma” right there in the technique’s name, but the essential oils are often very strongly scented due to their high concentration. But some of the ways to use essential oils rely more on their chemical properties than on their scents. Here, we’ll explore a few methods including diffusion, topical uses, baths, and ingestion.

Diffusion/Vaporizing

This is probably the best-known method of using essential oils. This is simply “diffusing” the essential oil into the air by warming it (diluted with water using the 2 – 3% rule above). Most diffusers/vaporizers that I have seen use tea light candles, but there are some that are electric or which are designed to fit around a light bulb, which warms it when turned on. Commercial aromatherapy diffusers are very easy to find and can be fairly inexpensive. (I’ve purchased several for \$1 each at local “dollar stores.”)

Diffusion is a great way to use the oils, because you benefit from them in multiple ways. First, the scent fills the room, and can help create an intended atmosphere. This becomes especially important when you’re trying to affect the overall mood of a space. Some essential oils will promote calm, tranquil feelings. Others will help to energize and invigorate. And yes, sometimes all it takes is the appropriate scent in the air!

Second, the “aroma” of aromatherapy is a bridge to very physiological responses. When you breathe in a scent, your olfactory nerve cells send an electrical message to the brain. This information from the olfactory nerve cells is processed by the limbic system, “an area of the brain that initiates mood and memory formation” (Bowles, pg. 12). Apparently, it may also affect our immune response: “There is new evidence that we may exercise direct control over health and disease through the hypothalamus [part of the limbic system]. The way the immune system and the central nervous system operate is only vaguely understood, but researchers know that

they do communicate with one another. Specific odors provide a pathway through the central nervous system that activates the immune system's protector cells" (Keville & Green, pg. 10).

Third, diffusion is a great way to get some of the more potent, medicinal essential oil vapors into our systems. For example, as we breathe in diffused Eucalyptus oil (which has strong decongestant and antiseptic properties...more on that later), it goes directly into our lungs, where it can start to work its magic, calming inflammation, helping to soothe congested airways, and fighting infection. Add that to the fact that it smells therapeutic (who doesn't have memories of camphor-like smells surrounding muscle rubs, vapor rubs, cough drops, etc.?) and you have a body/mind therapy at work: physically affecting the ailment as well as boosting your mental association to healing. Great stuff!

Topical Applications

Yes, you can apply essential oils directly to the skin, but as mentioned above, you need to be careful with this approach for several reasons, the most immediate of which is simply that you may very well burn yourself! There are a few oils that can be applied undiluted to the skin. These are called "neat" oils. The vast majority of essential oils, however, need to be diluted to use them safely, especially on the skin. Once you understand how to properly dilute essential oils for topical use, you can go several directions: making massage oils, home blends for case-by-case use, and adding them to personal care products like shampoo and lotion.

To really drive in how important it is to dilute the oils, I'm going to sacrifice some pride and give you two "real life" experiences from my own history:

1. When I first started investigating essential oils, I had no idea what I was doing and didn't do enough reading before trying my hand at some (very foolish) applications. On one occasion, I diffused straight peppermint oil – 20 to 30 drops of it – directly into the air, no water added. I didn't think about diluting it, because I thought that would make it weaker and I wanted a good, strong scent in the air. The result? An entire house full of people had to step outside for a while, because all of us were experiencing tearing eyes and burning lungs. I was prompted to do a bit more research and have never made that mistake again...
2. I thought that I'd concoct a home-made deodorant, but I didn't really have a good recipe and didn't know enough about blending to know what I was doing. I ended up putting very poorly diluted Peppermint essential oil (you can tell that's one of my favorites) directly on my underarms. Wow! It took about 5 seconds to go from cooling to burning and I could not wash it off fast enough. The "icy-hot" sensation lasted the rest of the day and was pretty darn uncomfortable...even though I did smell good.

So, let's talk about diluting. The first way is to use water. If using a diffuser, this is the best way to dilute the oils (carrier oils are not meant to be diffused). Add 2 – 3 drops of essential oil to about 100 drops of pure water. Light the candle (or plug the diffuser in) and you are good to go. If you're adding oil to water for topical use (such as in a spray bottle to spritz your skin), you'll have to shake the bottle before each use, because even with the miracle of aromatherapy, oil and water still won't mix.

For most topical applications, however, you'll probably want to use a carrier oil. These range in thickness and texture and have different uses. In general, you'll want to research or ask someone knowledgeable in aromatherapy to guide you in making your carrier oil choices. Here's a small example of what to be aware of:

Grapeseed oil is very light and non-greasy; it's good for skin that does not absorb other oils quickly.

Sweet almond oil, however, is lubricating but not easily absorbed by the skin, so it makes a good massage oil base.

Jojoba is actually a liquid wax (not an oil), but it penetrates the skin rapidly. Therefore, while it isn't ideal for massage, it's excellent for nourishing the skin, healing inflamed areas, and skin problems like eczema and psoriasis.

You can see that it becomes important to have the appropriate carrier oil for the task at hand. Once you have that oil, again, add 2 – 3 drops of the essential oil to every 100 drops of carrier oil. This counting of drops can be tedious – holding a bottle upside down and counting 100+ drops of oil can take some time. This is why essential oil blends are sold commercially; it's one more way to take the work out of something. While I suggested above that you buy undiluted, unblended oils, it really is up to you. There are some fine pre-blended oils ready for topical application available. (Massage therapists, for example, buy blended oils; they do not often have the luxury of time necessary to create their own.)

Here are some very general guidelines:

For Massage Blends

Sweet almond oil makes a great base as does extra virgin olive oil. Add 2 – 3 drops of essential oil per 100 drops of carrier oil. If you have several hundred drops of carrier oil, consider mixing several different essential oils in it. (Aromatherapy “recipes” will be given later.)

For Home Use

For other uses, such as treating wounds or burns, consider adding a drop or two of an antiseptic or antibacterial essential oil to some Aloe vera gel. This will penetrate the skin, providing valuable nutrients and promoting cell repair. Another idea: try adding a drop or two of Lavender or Eucalyptus essential oil to the rinse cycle of your washing machine.

In Personal Care Products

Adding a few drops of certain essential oils (such as Rosemary) to a shampoo base is useful for scalp conditions. Also, an excellent way to introduce essential oils to the skin is to “add a few drops to your usual lotion or moisturizer and then rub it into the affected area” (*Enhancing Your Mind, Body, Spirit*, 1:2).

In the Bath

Because oil and water don't mix, the best way to use essential oils in a bath is to add them (again 2 – 3 drops) to a small amount (say, ¼ – 1 cup) of milk or cream. This acts as an emulsifier, allowing the oils to blend better with the bathwater, plus the milk (or cream, if you use it) softens

the skin. Using essential oils in the bath is a great way to absorb their therapeutic compounds, as your pores are wide open, increasing your skin's ability to let in the oils.

The Ingestion Debate

Is it okay to ingest (swallow) essential oils? That's a great question and a tough one to answer. There are strong opinions on each side of this debate and each has its reasons and a history of safe and effective essential oil usage. Here, I'll break the two opinions down for you:

NO

The "No camp" (with a stronghold in the United Kingdom that has spread into aromatherapy theory and practice in the United States), maintains that "some oils are toxic and taking them orally could be fatal" (The University of Maryland Medical Center; (<http://www.umm.edu/altmed/ConsModalities/Aromatherapycm.html>)). Keeping in mind that essential oils are basically distilled "plant power," having isolated the therapeutic essence from the rest of the plant's components (fiber, water, etc.), essential oils are like unbuffered chemicals and act more strongly on the physical body. For example, peppermint leaves, if applied directly to the underarm won't readily burn the skin, while Peppermint essential oil certainly will! (Ahem...)

One of the best arguments against ingestion of essential oils can be found here: <http://www.aromamedical.com/articles/internal.html>. Written by certified Medical Herbalist (UK) Martin Watt, one of the strongest suggestions is simply that not all essential oils are as pure as they could be; ingesting them may be introducing any number of other chemical pollutants into the body.

Usually, anyone who discourages ingestion will use the words, "unless you are under the guidance of a skilled, experienced Aromatherapist." (Is this a slight yield to those who argue it can be done therapeutically?)

YES

The "Yes camp" (originally hailing from France, as far as I can tell) maintains that the ingestion of therapeutic-grade essential oils is a highly effective way to harness the power of essential oils (<http://www.therealesentials.com/whatandhow.html>). Indeed, there even exists a cook book specifically for cooking with essential oils (*The Essential Oil Cookbook* by Menkit Prince). This book was given high praise by one medical doctor:

"This book is a global contribution! It will create a revolutionary breakthrough in North America by demonstrating that essential oils can be ingested safely and beneficially in food. Even without essential oils, these recipes keep toxic intestinal bacteria to a minimum. But adding essential oils purifies the body, generates endorphins (mood elevators) and enhances the immune system. Some people may be surprised at the idea of ingesting essential oils. Yet it is a fact that in thousands of food and hygiene products in the United States, essential oils are the key ingredients for aroma, flavor and even antiseptic qualities. Unfortunately, commercial-grade essential oils are typically diluted and adulterated. A degree of

aroma or flavor is preserved, but in most cases the therapeutic value is lost.”
(Daniel Péroël, M.D., *Natural Home Health Care Using Essential Oils*;
<http://www.therealesentials.com/cooking.html>).

Yet another testimonial from Dr. Phillip Minton (USA) suggests that “eating pure essential oils can improve circulation and oxygenation and protect against heart disease, dementia and cancer” (<http://www.positivehealth.com/permit/Articles/Aromatherapy/zinovieff67.htm>).

Anecdotally, I have a colleague who uses essential oils very regularly and who has some training in their usage. She was actually the one who introduced me to the idea of ingesting the oils, as I watched her tip her peppermint oil bottle and tap a drop straight on to her tongue! I admitted that I was shocked, but not so much so that I didn’t want to try it, having noticed that she didn’t sputter, gag, or otherwise meet an untimely demise. So, she tapped a drop onto my tongue as well. The result was an interesting coolness that quickly spread across my tongue. It didn’t burn, nor did it seem to do any harm. And the flavor stayed with me for some time.

Additionally, I know of a company that, as part of its 14-day detoxification, used to include a bottle of essential oil. The instructions were to put 2 – 3 drops in a small glass of pure water and sip it throughout the day. I tried this, both with Peppermint and Sweet Orange essential oils and found it rather unpalatable, but not harmful so far as I could tell, and certainly not deadly. It is interesting to note, however, that the company no longer creates, sells, nor markets these essential oils, though they do still sell the 14-day detoxification product without the oil.

In response to the argument that some essential oils can be especially toxic, proponents maintain that it would take a very high amount (somewhere around 100 ml, as compared to a few drops) for toxicity to result from ingestion. This complaint, then, is like suggesting people refrain from taking certain vitamins, which in large doses can be toxic. It becomes a matter of proper usage.

Another worry is that essential oils build up in the liver. To answer this:

“Can these toxic compounds accumulate in the body? The majority of oil molecules are terpenes and terpenoids, which are multiples of five carbon fragments. Since the body can only use food that can be broken down into two carbon fragments, oils must be excreted by the body. Since they are not water-soluble, they are made more water-soluble by various enzymes found in the liver. From there they are excreted by the kidney via urine. However, if an essential oil component is introduced to the body at a faster rate than the liver can convert it into a water-soluble form, liver toxicity can result. This could happen even if the mode of entry were not ingestion. (There have been reported cases of serious liver damage resulting from excessive skin application of eucalyptus oil.) Again moderation is the key.”

(<http://www.positivehealth.com/permit/Articles/Aromatherapy/zinovieff67.htm>)

My Ingestion Conclusion

I am not in a position to tell you whether or not to consume essential oils. And in fact, because of the serious nature of the debate, I am inclined to “play it safe” and suggest to you that you stay

away from the practice, “unless you are under the guidance of a skilled, experienced Aromatherapist.” (Consider this: Applying the oils topically using a good carrier oil is just as effective as ingestion as far as introducing the oils’ chemical compounds into the body. Remember that essential oils’ chemical compounds can be detected in the blood 20 minutes after application. If it’s in your blood, it’s certainly making a difference to your body...)

10 Useful Essential Oil Profiles

The following ten essential oils are both easy to find and easy to use. We’ll explore specific aromatherapy “recipes” in the next segment. For now, we’ll simply look a little closer at each of the oils, highlighting their specific properties and applications.

Tea Tree

“Tea Tree” is the name given to a large number of swamp-growing trees throughout Australia and New Zealand. “The name comes from the fact that the trees grow in or near water that is usually a clear brown tea color due to the tannins from the leaves and twigs that fall into it” (Bowles, pg. 108). Not surprisingly, native Australians were the first to discover the medicinal properties of the tea tree. Among other uses, the aborigines made a tea from its leaves to build and strengthen the immune system. Today, primarily because of its potent antiviral properties, Tea tree oil is a favorite among most Aromatherapists.

Tea tree oil – also known and sold as “melaleuka oil,” from its binomial *Melaleuca alternifolia* – is quite unique in that it is one of the very few “neat” oils (which can be used undiluted on the skin) and simultaneously, one of the most powerful therapeutic essential oils available. It can counteract bacteria, fungi, and viruses, and can be used to eliminate parasites. It also inhibits inflammation, protects the skin, and eases pain. Of note is that the oil “has also been shown to penetrate the outer layers of the skin and attack infections, helping to heal wounds” (*The Complete Guide to Natural Healing*, 3:15).

The oil – similar in scent to camphor – is extracted through steam distillation and should be a clear, colorless to pale yellow liquid. According to Bowles, “the darker the yellow, the more likely the oil is either old or oxidized” (pg. 109). Yellowed Tea tree oil can still be used, but it is more likely to be irritating.

More than 50 rare, natural substances have been isolated from the essence of Tea tree leaves. “Because Tea tree oil kills viruses, bacteria, and fungi, it can heal internal and external infections, including athlete’s foot and fungi that affect the nails” (*The Complete Guide to Natural Healing*, 3:15). It can also be used to alleviate rashes and irritated skin, and can aid coughs, bronchitis, arthritis, rheumatism, constipation, and many other ailments. (Special precautionary note: Yes, Tea tree is a “neat” essential oil, but you should never apply it undiluted near the eyes.)

Lavender

Lavender may be the best-known essential oil on the market today. The most potent form of lavender is the oil, which contains high concentrations of its active ingredients. According to *The*

Complete Guide to Natural Healing, “The finest oil is distilled from *Lavandula officinalis*, a variety of lavender that grows only at altitudes above 3,000 feet and is particularly resistant to heat and cold” (3:5). Where this particular kind of Lavender oil is concerned, the herb’s flower buds are harvested by hand at midday, when the oil content is highest; the essential oil is then extracted using steam distillation.

One of the “issues” with Lavender oil, which is clear and usually colorless, is the cross-fertilization of species to form hybrids; the odor of the oil from each hybrid can vary markedly. There are also two related oils to be aware of. One is called “Spike Lavender” and originally comes from Spain. The other is called “Lavandin” and it is coarser and used primarily in candles, soaps, and detergents. These are not as therapeutically active as pure Lavender essential oil, and in fact, because pure Lavender is more expensive than either of the others, “sometimes unscrupulous producers blend the two to increase their profit margin. If the oil smells at all like Eucalyptus oil, it is probably such a blend” (Bowles, pg. 102).

The name “Lavender” comes from the Latin word *lavare*, which means “to wash.” Accordingly, Lavender oil is cleansing and deodorizing, and on a more emotional level, can be either stimulating or calming, depending on how you use it. You might find that strange, but “Lavender is one of the essential oils that is an adaptogen, meaning its properties adapt to your needs” (Fitzsimmons and Bousquet, pg, 120).

The best-known active components in Lavender oil are *geraniol*, *cineole*, and *coumarin*. These three compounds act strongly as cleansing and germicidal agents. It is believed that they are particularly valuable for the treatment of inflammatory conditions and pain. And as you’ve likely heard, Lavender oil has many uses: “It is a powerful antiseptic containing more than 200 compounds that are active against fungi, viruses, and other microbes” (*The Complete Guide to Natural Healing*, 3:5). Lavender can be used to relieve nervousness, anxiety, difficulty in falling asleep, stomachaches, middle-ear infections, burns, eczema, insect bites, and other skin inflammations, among its many, many uses (Ibid.).

Peppermint

Another well-known oil, Peppermint is actually a hybrid of two mint species, *Mentha aquatica* and *Mentha spicata*. Somehow, this translates into the binomial *Mentha x piperita*...though most essential oil suppliers will simply label it as *Mentha piperita* (Bowles, pg 116). The peppermint plant has been popular since the 17th century, and used for its pungent flavor and its curative powers. The oil is distilled from the leaves (before the plant flowers), and is colorless and clear.

“In all its uses, Peppermint oil is refreshing to the mind, body, and spirit” (*The Complete Guide to Natural Healing*, 3:14). It is especially well-known for its use to improve concentration and focus. (This works, because the scent triggers the hippocampus, a part of the brain linked to memory.) It’s also quite effective for easing colds, sinus infections, bronchitis, fever, coughs, bad breath, headaches, intestinal cramps, diarrhea, and mental exhaustion.

Peppermint’s cooling, fever-reducing and antiseptic properties are largely due to its high levels of *menthol*, which is antibacterial and anesthetic. The essential oil is especially potent; a little

goes a long way. Additionally, one source warns that “peppermint is not recommended to use with homeopathic treatment,” though no specific reason is given (Fitzsimmons & Bousquet, pg. 141). Another thing to keep in mind is that Peppermint may irritate mucous membranes such that it may be contraindicated for people with hay fever.

Caution! Do not treat children with Peppermint oil, since the high menthol content can irritate sensitive mucosa. If you have chills, avoid Peppermint oil, because of its intense cooling properties. Keep your eyes tightly shut when inhaling Peppermint oil, as the vapors can irritate them. The oil may also irritate sensitive skin. Pregnant and nursing women should avoid using the oil altogether. (The Complete Guide to Natural Healing, 3:14)

Eucalyptus

The *A to Z of Essential Oils* states that “there are over 500 species of Eucalyptus indigenous to Australia, and several of these were cultivated in other countries such as China, Spain, and South Africa” (pg. 88). Of all the species, *Eucalyptus globules* is the one most commonly used for its essential oil. This clear and relatively colorless oil is extracted from the leaves and twigs by steam distillation. It takes some 110 pounds of plant to produce about 2 pounds of Eucalyptus oil (The Complete Guide to Natural Healing, 3:8)! Another little-known fact is that the tree’s roots secrete a strong oil that inhibits the growth of other plants in the immediate vicinity. Fitzsimmons and Bousquet suggest that “the branches of the tree are shaped like a human lung, and this is the area of the body that eucalyptus is most effective in treating” (pg. 22).

The principal active ingredient in Eucalyptus oil is *eucalyptol*, which has strong germicidal and disinfectant properties. Not so commonly known are its functions as a diuretic, and an agent to lower blood sugar. “Eucalyptus oil is an effective analgesic and is often used in preparations designed to relieve muscle, nerve and joint pain” (The Complete Guide to Natural Healing, 3:8). On an emotional and mental level, it can help to combat exhaustion and sluggishness.

Most people are familiar with this oil’s scent, because it is frequently used in decongestant products. Aromatherapists recognize its value as an expectorant and will traditionally use it to help treat respiratory infections, “because it reputedly thins the mucous and...[helps] people cough up excess mucous” (Bowles, pg. 89). It can also be used as a rubifacient, alleviating aches and pains with its warming ability.

Take Care! Too much Eucalyptus oil can potentially irritate the skin, so be sure to use the exact amount specified in an aromatherapy recipe. Combining Eucalyptus oil with massage oil reduces the chance of irritation. Keep Eucalyptus oil away from children under the age of 6. (The Complete Guide to Natural Healing, 3:8)

Cinnamon

Cinnamon is one of the most commonly used spices in the world today; it’s been an ingredient in both Indian and Arabic cooking for centuries. It was probably first used medicinally in Egypt,

and is medicinally active because of its volatile oil, which is extracted (usually steam distilled) from the bark and leaves of the cinnamon plant, and has antiviral properties.

There are actually two different kinds of Cinnamon oil: that from the bark, and that from the leaves. Though both oils have similar properties, it is commonly suggested that the bark's oil is particularly good for diffusing, while the leaf's oil is best used in topical treatments. *The Complete Guide to Natural Healing* states that "the primary components of Cinnamon oil are *eugenic acid* and *cinnamic aldehyde*," and that "these constituents are highly antiseptic and have a warming, stimulating effect on both body and mind" (3:9).

Cinnamon oil is traditionally used to help alleviate muscular pain and joint problems (including arthritis). It is also effective as a repellent for head lice, for battling colds, and stimulating circulation. On an emotional level, Cinnamon essential oil can be used to "calm your anxieties and strengthen self-confidence...[and is] useful for instilling emotional strength" (Ibid.).

***Take Care!** Cinnamon oil should only be used sparingly for topical applications. Even when diluted, it can irritate the skin if the amount is too high. As with most volatile oils, Cinnamon oil is always diluted first with a carrier oil. Oil extracted from the bark of the cinnamon plant is suitable only for use in a diffuser or simmer pot. Don't use more than 3 drops, since its high potency may cause headaches.*

Lemon

Like other essential oils in the citrus family, Lemon oil comes from the peel of the fruit, not the flesh. It has been used in laundry and cleaning products because of its clean and healthy smell. The oil can be extracted by steam distillation or cold pressing, "although cold pressing yields the more natural-smelling oil" (Bowles, pg. 68). It takes approximately 200 pounds of lemon peel (or 1,500 lemons) to produce a single pound of the essential oil (*The Complete Guide to Natural Healing*, 3:21). And the pure essential oil has a short shelf life, so purchase it in small quantities (*Enhancing Your Body, Mind, Spirit*, 1:30).

One should not confuse lemon juice with Lemon oil, as the two are dissimilar. For example, there's no vitamin C or citric acid in Lemon essential oil – both of which come from the juice of the lemon, not its peel. Bowles writes that "lemon juice has many more reported medicinal applications than Lemon oil – as an astringent and an antibacterial agent, for example" (pg. 68), but I wonder whether that is simply because lemon juice has been used in more studies and trials than its essential oil counterpart...

Fitzsimmons and Bousquet suggest that "both the smell and appearance of lemon point to its strengths: concentration, cleansing, and mental warming" (pg. 36). Indeed, Lemon essential oil is most commonly used in aromatherapy to uplift and focus the mind. It's also used as an aerial disinfectant. Lemon oil contains such active ingredients as *terpenes* and *citronellal*, which have a strong germicidal and antibacterial effect. This makes it particularly useful for treating colds, flus, and other infections. Lemon oil can also positively affect varicose veins, poor appetite and exhaustion (*The Complete Guide to Natural Healing*, 3:21).

***Take Care!** When the skin is exposed to intense sunlight, Lemon oil has been known to cause pigment spots. Therefore, do not use Lemon essential oil or toiletries containing citrus essential oils or citrus perfumes within 6 hours of exposure to the sun. (Ibid.)*

Clary Sage

Most people are unfamiliar with Clary sage essential oil, not knowing where it comes from, what it is, what it smells like, etc. Yet this remains one of the favorites used by many Aromatherapists, particularly for women's issues. Clary sage oil comes from the clary plant (*Salvia sclarea*). It is related to lavender, thyme, and lemon balm and, though native to France, Italy, and Syria, it is now cultivated worldwide for its medicinal use. In fact, it has quite a history of therapeutic use: "Derived from the Latin *clarus*, for 'clear,' clary sage was a medieval remedy for blurred vision and eyestrain" (*The Complete Guide to Natural Healing*, 3:25).

Clary sage essential oil comes from the furry leaves of this plant; there are primarily two ways of getting the oil – solvent extraction and steam distillation. Aromatherapists only use oil that has been steam distilled. Solvent-extracted oil tends to get used as a flavoring agent for tobacco and in some muscatel wines (Bowles, pg. 143).

As an essential oil, Clary sage has antiseptic, deodorant, antispasmodic and anti-inflammatory properties (Fitzsimmons and Bousquet, pg. 72; *The Complete Guide to Natural Healing*, 3:25). It has been widely used as a natural treatment for eczema and psoriasis, as well as for minor cuts and wounds. Clary sage oil is also estrogen stimulating; "the oil's ability to balance fluctuating hormones makes it a highly beneficial remedy for PMS, painful menstrual cramps and the hot flashes and migraines associated with menopause" (*The Complete Guide to Natural Healing*, 3:25). Apparently, the oil has even been used during pregnancy to help minimize labor pains.

Clary sage oil is comprised of such therapeutic components as *linalool*, *sclareol*, *monoterpenes* and *tannins*, which give it its therapeutic qualities. Its range of uses is wide, but it seems to be most commonly used for muscle aches and tension, labor pains, menstrual cramps, psoriasis and acne, dandruff, dry hair, melancholy, and depression. Emotionally, it is useful when dealing with fear, stress, and anxiety (Fitzsimmons and Bousquet, pg. 72).

Clove

Cloves are a traditional holiday spice, used in baking during the cold fall and winter months. Probably all of us are familiar with the warm, sweet scent of cloves, which are the dried flower buds of the clove tree, native to the Molucca Islands of Indonesia (*The Complete Guide to Natural Healing*, 3:50). That's right, cloves are the flower buds – they rarely get to flower, because the buds are harvested as soon as they turn pink. You have probably seen dried cloves – they have the look of tiny dark brown nails. In fact, the word "clove" comes from the Latin *clavus*, which means "nail."

Cloves and clove oil have been enjoyed for thousands of years for their therapeutic qualities. Today, whole and ground cloves are used most often in cooking, but the herb has not lost its therapeutic value! Its oil is extracted primarily through steam distillation. It is spicy, warm and sweet and “possesses antispasmodic, antiviral, and antiseptic effects” (*The Complete Guide to Natural Healing*, 3:50). It also has analgesic qualities – generations have used it topically, for example, to treat toothaches. On an emotional and psychological level, clove oil “is a mental stimulant...and helps romance” (Fitzsimmons and Bousquet, pg. 192).

Clove oil’s mild anesthetic properties come from its *eugenol*, *acetyleneugenol* and *oleanolic acid*. These components in particular also make the oil a good treatment for disinfecting canker sores and wounds. In general, aromatherapists use clove essential oil to treat headaches, muscle pain, gum inflammations, stomachaches, gas, and diarrhea.

Take Care! *There are three different types of clove oil: clove-bud oil, clove-stem oil, and clove-leaf oil. Buy only clove-bud oil, which has the lowest eugenol content and is the safest; clove-stem and clove-leaf oils are too strong. Use clove oil sparingly and only when diluted, because it may irritate the skin. Also, avoid it if you’re pregnant, since it can trigger contractions. (The Complete Guide to Natural Healing, 3:50).*

Yarrow

This is an oil that most people are not familiar with, though it has a long list of uses and strong healing power when applied appropriately. Those most familiar with the oil know that it actually comes in a range of colors “from dark blue to pale yellow depending on the country of origin” (Bowles, pg. 44). The yarrow plant has quite a distinguished history including its use in ancient China as the sacred plant from which the 50 wooden sticks were made for the *I-Ching* ritual. The Chinese felt the yarrow plant was “the perfect unification of yin and yang, since the hard, strong stem is filled with a soft substance” (*The Complete Guide to Natural Healing*, 3:27). Additionally, yarrow’s binomial – *Achillea millefolium* – honors Greek hero Achilles, who was said to have used the plant to heal his injured tendon. This, from a plant that you can find growing wild alongside roads and in fields all across Europe and North America!

Yarrow essential oil lives up to its powerful reputation. The flavanoids present in the oil “dilate the peripheral arteries and induce sweating, while alkaloids help to lower blood pressure” (*The Complete Guide to Natural Healing*, 3:27). In addition, its *tannins* give it astringent properties, and the compounds *cyaniding*, *azulene*, and *salicylic acid* make it an anti-inflammatory. But wait – there’s more! “Yarrow oil also contains the volatile oils *borneol*, *camphor*, *isoartemesia ketone*, *cineole*, and *terineol* as well as amino acids, lactones, saponins, coumarins and sterols” (Ibid.). What this means for us is that yarrow essential oil possesses valuable laxative, analgesic, antispasmodic, carminative, expectorant, stimulant and antiseptic properties.

The traditional usage of yarrow oil has been to treat cuts and abrasions; its anti-inflammatory and antibacterial properties make it a good choice for this. However, a truly versatile oil, it can also be used to relieve muscle pain, stomach cramps, flatulence, painful menstruation, irregular

menses, sinus congestion, fevers, skin inflammation, stretch marks and varicose veins, and it can be used “to support meditation and strengthen intuition” (Ibid.).

No wonder it made it on my list!

But do use it with caution, because – like most essential oils – it is strong enough to cause skin irritation in people with sensitive skin. It can also cause an allergic response in some people so “spot testing” is definitely the way to proceed with this oil.

Sandalwood

The sandalwood tree has a sacred history in its native India, Tibet, and China, where its wood has been used for centuries to protect religious carvings in temples and monasteries. Originally, sandalwood essential oil was only taken from the wood – not the leaves or flowers – of trees that were at least 30 years old, but “sustainable management practices were not implemented in time” and as a result, “demand outstripped supply, and [India’s] plantations can no longer meet the world’s requirement for pure sandalwood oil” (Bowles, pg. 144). Another tree, native to Australia, produces oil that is similar to the Indian sandalwood oil. Both types are used the same way.

Sandalwood essential oil contains a high percentage of terpene-containing alcohols, primarily *alpha-santalol* and *beta-santalol*; these compounds give the oil its antispasmodic, germicidal, and expectorant effects. However, it must be said that the oil’s best-known use is more emotional in nature: “You can use the healing aroma of the sandalwood tree to promote feelings of peace and serenity,” (*Enhancing Your Body, Mind, Spirit*, 1:42) or use it as an aphrodisiac for “its highly relaxing and erotic effects” (*The Complete Guide to Natural Healing*, 3:28).

The oil is thick and yellow and is steam distilled from the heartwood of the tree. As such, it has a warm, balsamic, woody scent that both mellows and becomes more complex as the oil matures. It has been used as spiritual protection, by Aromatherapists who work on that level. And, as suggested above, is traditionally “associated with male energy and is used as an aphrodisiac for men” (Bowles, pg. 144). Other medicinal uses include treating respiratory and urinary-tract infections, skin blemishes, dry skin, eczema, tension, depression, and anxiety (*The Complete Guide to Natural Healing*, 3:28).

Caution! Research has shown that sandalwood oil can be toxic if taken internally and in high doses. The essential oil can cause inflammation of the skin and damage to kidney tissue. (Ibid.)

Fun, Easy, Helpful Aromatherapy Recipes

Most of the recipes that you’ll find in aromatherapy books and guides will have you mixing several oils in order to get the desired blend. Some of the blends I’m going to suggest are similar. Other times, a single oil can be used with remarkable results. Below, we’ll explore a few “recipes” that have a good track record. I’ve tried to limit the recipes here to those that contain

only the oils we have listed above, but you'll find that a few do contain others. If you don't have the necessary oils to complete the recipe, feel free to get them! You'll be expanding your palette of available recipes with each new oil that you obtain.

The following aromatherapy recipes come from: *Aromatherapy Through the Seasons*, *The Complete Guide to Natural Healing, Enhancing Your Body, Mind, Spirit* and *Aromatherapy: A Complete Guide to the Healing Art*. (For a more complete reference, please refer to the first segment of this mini-course.)

Lemon Gargle – Good for sore scratchy, throats and for those times when you can “feel something coming on.”

2 drops Lavender
2 drops Lemon
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon baking soda

Mix all ingredients into a glass of warm, filtered water. Gargle until it's all gone.



Blemish Blocker – Try a little dab of this on your next pimple; you'll be able to feel it going right to work! (This may sting when you apply it, and don't use it too often as it may dry out your skin.)

10 drops Lavender
10 drops Lemon
10 drops Tea Tree

Mix all the oils together and store in a dark glass container. Use the end of a cotton swab to apply tiny amounts to blemishes on your skin. (Note: Although Lemon is not a “neat” oil, in the base of Lavender and Tea Tree, it is safe in this preparation for this particular “spot-treating” purpose.)



Antiseptic Spray – Try this to take advantage of the antibacterial, antiseptic, and anti-microbial properties of the following oils.

1 drop Eucalyptus
2 drops Lavender
3 drops Lemon
2 drops Tea Tree

Add to 3 cups of water. Use as an air spray or as a surface disinfectant. Don't forget to spray telephones, too! (If using in a spray bottle, be sure to shake the bottle well right before spraying; remember, oil and water don't mix!)



For Cuts and Wounds

2 drops Tea Tree
5 drops Lavender

Put the 7 drops into 2 cups of warm water to bathe the wound.



Concentration Spray

3 drops Lemon
2 drops Peppermint
3 drops Rosemary

Add oils to 2 cups water. Spray around your work area when you find your mental energy flagging or for that after-lunch sleepiness.



Headache Remedy

1 drop Lavender

Massage one drop into your temples. Put your feet up for a few minutes, and envision yourself in a quiet, calm, refreshing place. Let the essence of Lavender take you and the pain away!



Children's Cold Cure

10 drops Eucalyptus
10 drops Lavender
10 drops Tea Tree

Mix all oils together. Use in any or all of the following ways:

- Put 3 drops in a diffuser at bedtime.
- For heavy congestion during the night, put 2 drops of the mixture on a piece of cotton and tuck it inside the child's pillowcase.
- Put 2 – 5 drops in a bath. Not only will the steam help clear nasal passages, but the properties of the oils will help your child rest.



To Release Sexual Energy

2 drops Sandalwood

2 drops Jasmine

2 drops Rosemary

In a diffuser or simmer pot, combine 2 teaspoons of jojoba oil with the 6 drops of essential oil.



Comfort the Bereaved

5 drops Sandalwood

3 drops Rose-Otto

A massage with these oils blended into 2 teaspoons of jojoba oil helps console the grief-stricken.



For Muscle Aches & Pains

10 – 15 drops Eucalyptus

Mix the essential oil with 2 oz. of sweet almond or grapeseed oil. Massage into sore muscles.



Nix the Lice

4 drops Cinnamon

To repel head lice, add the essential oil to 1 tablespoon of jojoba oil. Rub the mixture into the scalp daily until the lice are gone. Be extremely careful to avoid the eyes!



Strengthen the Gums – to help firm up the gums and prevent gum disease.

1 drop Cinnamon

Add the essential oil to 1 teaspoon of vodka and 2 tablespoons of water. Shake the mixture well, and swish your toothbrush in it. Brush your teeth as usual.



Gentle Wart Removal

1 drop Lemon (per wart)

Apply the essential oil undiluted directly to the affected area several times a day for at least 4 weeks. If used regularly, this treatment will help the wart recede and may also prevent future outbreaks.



Fatigue Fader

2 drops Lemon
2 drops Peppermint

Mix the essential oils in a small bowl. Dip a cold, moist linen cloth into the mixture. Lie down and drape the compress across your forehead and temples. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Within 30 minutes or so, you should begin to feel refreshed and renewed.



Lower Blood Pressure

2 drops Clary-Sage
1 drop Ylang-ylang

To make use of clary-sage's blood pressure lowering properties, place the 3 drops of essential oil on a tissue and inhale. This will help settle the mind and restore emotional equilibrium.



De-Cramper

2 drops Geranium
2 drops Chamomile
2 drops Clary-Sage

Fill a bowl with steaming water and add the essential oils. Dip half of a large cloth into the water; fold the cloth and apply the warm compress to the abdomen, with the oil-soaked side away from the skin.



Toothache Relief

1 drop Clove
1 drop Myrrh

Mix the essential oils with 1 teaspoon of vodka. Put the mixture on a cotton ball and use it to gently swab the gum that surrounds the painful tooth.



Bye-Bye Bugs

3 drops Clove

Thoroughly mix 3 drops clove oil in a bottle of unscented lotion and apply it to exposed skin several times a day.



For Skin Conditions

5 drops Yarrow

5 drops Lavender

4 oz. Springwater

Combine all ingredients and use as a facial toner. (Alternately, add the essential oils – without the springwater – to a simple lotion or moisturizer.)



For Stretch Marks

3 drops Yarrow

Mix the essential oil with 1 teaspoon of an appropriate carrier oil and rub on the affected areas daily.



Stomach Massage

2 drops Cinnamon

6 drops Mandarin

4 drops Peppermint

Mix oils with 2 tablespoons of carrier oil and massage into stomach for indigestion relief.



For Rheumatism & Arthritis

3 drops Yarrow

3 drops Lavender

3 drops Eucalyptus

3 drops Chamomile

Add the essential oils to 8 ounces of sweet-almond oil and massage in into affected areas.

References

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