

The Therapeutic Value of Essential Oils

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Today essential oils are commonly used as aromatherapy. You can freshen a room by lighting a scented candle. Massage therapists use them to create a relaxing atmosphere. According to "The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Essential Oils," "The word aromatherapy can be misleading because it suggests that it is a form of healing that works exclusively through the sense of smell and on the emotions. This is not the case, for apart from its scent, each essential oil has an individual combination of constituents that interacts with the body's chemistry in a direct manner, which then in turn affects certain organs of systems as a whole".

Essential oils have a long history of being used therapeutically for body, mind and spirit. In ancient times, aromatic plants and oils were used as incense, perfumes and [cosmetics](#) as well as in medicinal and culinary applications. Hippocrates, the "father of medicine", prescribed a concoction made from Myrrh, Cinnamon and Cassia that was used as both a perfume and a remedy for skin inflammation and battle wounds as early as 460 BC. In early Jerusalem, Frankincense and Myrrh were used for their antifungal, antimicrobial and antibiotic properties. They purified the air to stop the spread of disease among the masses that visited the temples. In the Vedic literature of India, dating back to 2000 BC, substances including Cinnamon, Ginger, Myrrh, and Sandalwood were used for both their liturgical and therapeutic purposes. During the same time period in China, the "Yellow Emperor's Book of Internal Medicine" cites essential oil of Ginger as a supplement to the practice of Acupuncture. One of the most famous uses of aromatic materials occurred in the ancient Egyptian civilization. Papyrus manuscripts circa 2800 BC speak of medicinal herbs and fine oils used in the temples to please the gods. Aromatic gums and oils of Cedar and Myrrh were used in the embalming process. Frankincense was used cosmetically for its ability to reduce wrinkles. In the East, sprigs of Juniper are burned in Tibetan temples as a form of purification and are still used today.

Modern aromatherapy came to light in 1928 when a French chemist, Rene-Maurice Gattefosse, became fascinated by the therapeutic value of essential oils. While working in a perfumery, he suffered a serious burn. Instinctively, he placed his arm in a liquid he thought to be water. The container held Lavender oil and it prevented him from suffering with a serious scar.

There are three key ways to use therapeutic grade essential oils: direct application, diffusing, and as dietary supplements. Applied to the most highly absorbent parts of the body, the soles of the feet or the palms of the hand, oils are absorbed into the body and circulated throughout. Since some oils such as Oregano or Cinnamon can irritate the skin, they should be mixed with any pure vegetable oil before application. The longer an oil stays in contact with the skin, the more it will be absorbed. Lotions such as beeswax and vitamin E can be layered on top of the oils to maximize their effects.

Cold air diffusion is the best way to keep the therapeutic benefits of essential oils. Heating oils in or above a candle changes the chemical composition and can therefore reduce their effectiveness. Lemon, Patchouli and Citronella are disinfectant, antibacterial, antiseptic and antiviral when diffused or applied directly to the body. By placing a few drops on the hands, holding over the mouth and inhaling deeply, you can obtain the same benefits as diffusing.

Grapefruit, Orange, and Tangerine oils are most effective when taken orally. These oils have been labeled Generally Regarded as Safe (GRAS) by the FDA for internal use. All are indicated for aiding digestion. Grapefruit and Tangerine oils help to dissolve fat. Orange oils soothe general indigestion and promote appetite. Tangerine also promotes liver function and soothes chronic digestive disorders. In general, citrus oils should not be applied directly to the skin that will be exposed to UV light within 72 hours since changes in pigmentation can result.

There are many brands of essential oils out on the market that range in price. Less expensive oils are usually cut with alcohol and other additives to make them marketable to the general public and extend their shelf life. Brands such as Aura Cacia are labeled "100% pure". This is not indicative of the therapeutic value of that oil. Gary Young ND, noticed that the benefits of oils were not always consistent. When doing research in his clinic in Mexico, he discovered that oils of the same plant have different chemical make-ups that affected their healing properties. These inconsistencies were due to factors such as soil arability, harvest conditions and the time elapsed from harvest to distillation. He also found

that the most prominent Lavender fields in France were within a two-mile radius of a Nuclear Power Plant.

Great oils to have handy for the summer months are Lavender, Peppermint, Jasmine and Lemongrass. They can be used in several combinations. Equal drops of Lavender and Peppermint placed on the back of the neck help to relieve heatstroke. This combination can be diluted with almond oil and used to soothe sunburn. Jasmine can be used to treat dry skin and has a beautiful summer fragrance. Lemongrass with 2 parts Lavender in a carrier oil can be applied to a sprain to reduce inflammation and speed along the healing process. Peppermint mixed with 3 parts Lemongrass will act as a mosquito repellent. Some oils are contraindicated for pregnancy and other medical conditions. Please consult your health care practitioner before incorporating oils into your health regime.