

Essential Oils:
A Guide to Natural Healing

The Basics



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Essential oils are more than just pleasant scents. Historically used as therapeutic remedies, pure essential oils serve to calm the mind and body through their aromas and healing properties. Use this eBook to learn how essential oils are made, and how you can use them for your own natural healing practices.

A History of Fragrance

It's been discovered that as early as 2697 B.C.E., people were using aromatic herbs for healing in medicinal texts. Throughout time, plants and herbs were used for ointments, creams, salves, oils and spiritual practices. By 1867, the Paris International Exhibition exhibited perfumes in the pharmacy section, giving way to essential oils' use as cosmetics. While essential oils were being used primarily for perfume after this, in 1928, their focus returned to medicinal uses. When French chemist René-Maurice Gattefossé plunged his burnt hand into a container of lavender oil, he found it healing very quickly and with minimal scarring. After this discovery, he reclaimed these oils as healing remedies and coined the term aromatherapy.

What is an Essential Oil?

Don't get confused between essential oils and fragrance oils. While aromatherapy refers to the use of all types of fragrant products, essential oils are the only ones that are truly extracted from plants.

While these aromatic substances are still in the plant, they are called the essence.

Essential oils are extracted from the roots, flowers, leaves, bark and seeds of a plant. Their aroma is stored in tiny glands, sacs and hairs in the plant.



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Did You Know?

It would take 60,000 roses just to yield one ounce of rose essential oil.



Essential oils have been used for generations across the world for their uplifting and healing properties, including:



Relaxing and de-stressing



Alleviating pain



Healing skin and wounds



Supporting the immune system



Balancing hormones



Improving digestion



Enhancing skincare



Cleaning your home

What is the Role of Essential Oils Within Plants?

1

To attract pollinators.

Plants use their scent, generally in the flower or fruit, to attract insects for pollination. Not all plants have scents, though.

2

To defend against predators.

If a plant carries its scent in the root, leaf or bark, it is usually for defense purposes against insects and animals. The plants may also use chemical compounds to defend against organisms in an antifungal and antibacterial manner.

3

To compete with other plants.

This is known as allelopathy, and it occurs when plants release chemicals that prevent other plants from growing within the same area.

Essential Oils: Organic vs. Non-Organic

You'll find that there are generally two types of essential oils available in the retail market: organic and non-organic. Rarely, you'll find wild crafted essential oils, which means that the plant from which the oil came was found growing naturally in the wild or cultivated per certain criteria.

» Organic Essential Oils:

The term “organic” has different interpretations across the world, but an essential oil that is labeled as organic must meet the following criteria:

- Be extracted from a plant that was grown and farmed organically
- Follow the guidelines of the organization granting the organic certification, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Organic Program (NOP)

» Non-Organic Essential Oils:

Even though these oils are non-organic, they are still considered pure essential oils. These oils often meet the following criteria:

- Are grown and farmed with pesticides or chemical fertilizers
- Are less expensive than organic options

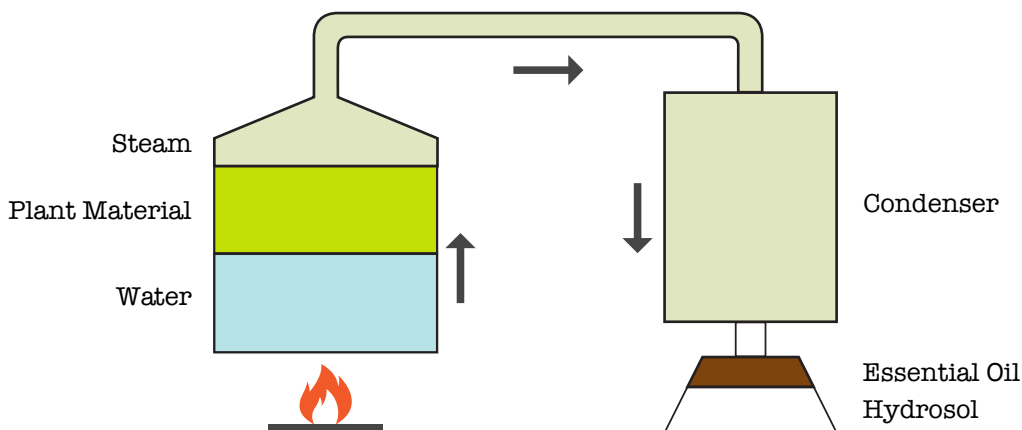
How to Extract Essential Oils

Ever wonder how companies get the essential oils they sell? Well, depending on the plant, they can use a few different methods to get the most oil out. Here are a few common methods of essential oil extraction.



Steam Distillation

Most essential oils are extracted using distillation—either steam or water. Steam is more common, and the difference between the two is that, in steam distillation, the plant material does not make direct contact with the boiling water in the still. Here's how it works:



The plant material is placed above boiling water, allowing the steam to carry the volatile (easily evaporated) substances from the plant into the condenser. Once the distillate is cooled, it will be made of two liquid layers: the liquid essential oil layer and the watery layer, called the hydrosol. From there, the essential oil can easily be separated from the hydrosol and drained into a separate container.

What is Hydrosol?

Hydrosols have grown in popularity as they've become valued for their therapeutic properties. They've come to be known as the by-product of distillation, but this aromatic water product still provides excellent use. Due to their less potent nature, hydrosols are well-suited for skincare, children and the elderly.





Cold Pressing

Also known as “expression,” cold pressing is a method of extracting essential oils by squeezing or crushing the peel of citrus fruits. There is little to no heat used in this method, and the essential oils extracted from cold pressing are generally composed of the same chemical components that make up the plant.

Did You Know?

Essential oils that are cold-pressed generally do not have a very long shelf-life. You may find that they go cloudy easily, although this does not mean they have gone bad. Watch out for grapefruit (*Citrus x paradisi*) essential oil—it has the shortest shelf-life of them all!



Solvent Extraction

There are some flowers that are too delicate to be used in the heat of distillation, so their essential oils are extracted using a solvent compound that is poured over the flowers buds and petals. From there, the essential oils dissolve into the compound.



Carbon Dioxide

This less common, but quite expensive, method of extraction is gaining more traction. Carbon dioxide used at high pressure and low temperatures causes the essential oils to be extracted from the plant. It's even considered to yield a more 'pure' essential oil than distillation.

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