

# Your Simple Guide to Aromatherapy

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<http://www.aromatherapy4healthyliving.com>

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## **Section 1**

### **Introduction- A Quick History**

Like acupuncture, aromatherapy, the use of Essential Oils for healing, has been in use for more than 6,000 years. Its origins aren't completely documented, but there is enough evidence to show that aromatic essences have been used for healing over many centuries.

It's possible it all began in Australia with the aborigines over 40,000 years ago, but they weren't known for keeping records. Much of their history has been passed along orally from generation to generation, much like that of the native tribes everywhere, including the native North American Indians, whose history also is rich with the use of fragrant oils for religious and therapeutic purposes.

However, the Egyptians, with their use of stone tablets inscribed with stories of their culture, are generally credited with being the first to establish the use of aromatic or essential oils. Later, the Greeks learned from the Egyptians, and still later, the Romans learned from the Greeks. At the same time, fragrant oils and plant essences were being explored in ancient China.

Meanwhile in India, the traditional practice of medicine, known as Ayurveda practiced for more than 3,000 years, also used essential oils in their therapeutic massage.

By the first century A.D., fragrances were used in religion, health, beauty, “hygiene” and entertainment. Hygiene in those days consisted of bathing in perfume or slathering one’s body with fragrant oils. Much later, even Queen Elizabeth I is said to have used such fragrances in her *annual bath*, “whether she needed it or no.”

While it may have been the Egyptians who popularized the uses of fragrances and essences, other cultures were by then using them also.

Two major changes took place in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century:

**First**, the use of fragrances split into two camps: 1. perfumery and cosmetics, and 2. pharmaceuticals.

**Second**, essential oils suffered a huge setback in understanding as well as acceptance and use, because of the discovery of the ability to formulate synthetic copies of almost any chemical. A copied molecule of a vitamin is not the vitamin. Similarly, a copy of a plant oil is not the same as that plant’s essence. No longer, then, could perfumes be used medicinally.

Synthetic copies are mere shadows of the original and usually are weaker and ineffective, or even worse, they can be toxic. Unfortunately, this reputation has flowed on to the authentic essential oils in the modern medical community and so they are regarded as ineffective and inferior to accepted medical formulations, or drugs. Ironically, however, many of today's drugs were originally derived from plant sources.

It wasn't until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the use of essential oils began its re-entry into the world of therapeutics. The term "aromatherapy" was coined by French chemist Rene Maurice Gattefoss somewhere between the 1920s and '30s. His interest is reputed to have begun when he burned himself in a laboratory explosion at the family perfumery and he reflexively plunged his arm into a handy vat of lavender oil for relief. Later, he was so amazed at his painless recovery, with no scarring, that he did further experiments with the oil.

Currently, aromatherapy is mostly used by massage therapists as well as alternative health disciplines. Its modern use derives from methods developed in the 1950s by Marguerite (Margaret) Maury, a French biochemist, and an associate, Micheline Arcier (or Archer) who collaborated with Maury as she established clinics in Europe for the use of oils as treatment for specific ailments. Much research was done in Europe before aromatherapy was brought to America.

Aromatherapy was finally introduced in America in the 1980s in California, where it was embraced by health food outlets and alternative health practitioners.

## Aromatherapy Disclaimer

The oils derived from plants and used for therapeutic purposes can have amazing, as well as devastating effects, though most results occupy a wide spectrum somewhere between these extremes. There even is a movement to create licensing and standards for aromatherapy practitioners because a proper education in the use of these oils is essential to protect users and those who dispense and recommend them.

It's important to exercise caution and discretion in the use of true aromatic oils and essences, as they have the potential to cause complications due to their complex chemical natures and because they are extremely concentrated and volatile. Always consult with a qualified practitioner and follow accepted safety guidelines.



**Two well-known essences**

## Section 2

# What Essential Oils Can Do For You

**Essential oils act on many different levels.**

**On a physical level**, essential oils are a most potent form of herbal energy. They are antiseptic and immune system stimulants. They are also effective for daily first-aid, e.g., for bites, itches, coughs and cold.

**On a cellular level**, essential oils are good for healing wounds, repairing scars, stimulating tissue and regulating the barrier (between the inside and outside world). They help maintain optimum moisture level in skin and protect it from infection. Geranium and lavender are examples of oils that work on this cellular level.

**On an emotional level**, they stimulate both conscious and sub conscious memories, basic drives and hormones. They are effective in dealing with depression, grief, low self esteem, improving sleep and stress-related disorders.

**On an energy level**, they can be applied to acupuncture meridian points, chakras and subtle energy points to help healing.

**On a spiritual level**, essential oils have been used by every major culture and society for over 10,000 years. They have been used for ritual, prayer, purification, magic, mysticism, celebration and meditation.

Many people believe that essential oils can bring focus and deeper meaning to our existence.

These days the understanding of their properties and appropriate use has been formalized into a health discipline – aromatherapy – and practitioners are now trained to know how to use them effectively for optimum health and well being.

The mechanism by which essential oils acts is complex and not well understood due to the nature of all the many compounds within each one. Nevertheless, the quality and effect of fragrance or smell, though little understood, is an important part of our human experience and via the many and varied healing properties of essential oils, can enhance our lives and heal our bodies, minds and spirits.



**Bay Leaf provides a wonderful and healing aroma.**

## **Section 3**

# **How Essential Oils Work**

You've probably noticed that when we humans cut ourselves a red fluid (blood) oozes out! No great news there. Similarly, when you break or injure the parts of plants, they "bleed," too.

Unlike blood, this fluid is clear. It is, in fact, an oil or resin and within it can be found trace elements of nutrients, hormones, enzymes, vitamins, minerals and anti-bodies.

It has a whole range of different properties such as anti-fungal, anti-bacterial, anti-infectious, antiseptic and can stimulate the immune system as well. Oxygen is also found in this resin, bound chemically within other organic molecules such as alcohols, phenols, esters and many other organic molecules, which together make up the essential oil.

This oil is released by the plant to clean the wound, kill the bacteria and start the healing process, and in fact has the same function as blood in humans (and other animals). Like

blood, this fluid/oil in plants transports the basic nutrients necessary to feed and support the cells. The essential oil has the ability to permeate or penetrate the plant's cell walls and transport oxygen and nutrients into the cells themselves to support and help their immune system.

Research has shown that, because of these immune stimulating properties, essential oils can support the immune system. So that, for instance, whether applied topically (rubbed on) or inhaled, 70% of people who get a cold or flu will recover faster using essential oils!

During an aromatherapy massage, some of the volatile essential oils are inhaled and absorbed through the nose and mouth. As well, the molecules of these essential oils lock onto receptor cells at the back of the nose. An electrochemical message is sent to the limbic (emotional) area of the brain which appears to trigger memory and emotional responses, which in turn cause messages to be sent to other parts of the brain and body. In this way, the production of euphoric, relaxing, sedative or stimulating neurochemicals is stimulated. So many beneficial mental and emotional effects are produced via this method.

Essential oils also have many special properties which give them the ability to help us deal with odors and bacteria. They act in several ways:

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