

What Is Aromatherapy?

Aromatics have been used by nearly every culture across the world for centuries, mainly for spiritual, religious, and medicinal purposes. There is recorded evidence as early as 4500 B.C. of ancient Egyptians using aromatic oils in cosmetics, ointments and in the mummification process. However, the actual term “aromatherapy” wasn’t coined until 1930 by French scientist René-Maurice Gattefossé. He founded the French Society of Aromatic Products and published many works on the subject, propelling the study of aromatics in the medicinal sense.

What is an essential oil vs. a fragrance oil?

Essential oils are quite literally the natural essence or fragrance of plant or fruit material which are extracted through various methods, most notably steam distillation. The essential oils from citrus fruits like lemon and orange are obtained through expression or cold pressing.

Despite mimicking the scent of essential oils, synthetic fragrance oils are made with chemicals by humans in laboratories. Synthetic scents often cause allergic reactions and other physical effects such as headaches and dizziness when inhaled.

Essential oils are purely made from nature. They are also potent, concentrated oils that should be handled with care. When you buy an essential oil from a reputable source, its label will tell you a lot about its source and quality. The label will include the botanical or Latin name of the essential oil. The first word is the genus, which is capitalized, while the second signifies the specific epithet. For example, lavender is given the botanical name *Lavandula angustifolia* or *Lavandula officinalis*. Pure essential oils will be labeled as such while synthetics may be labeled as a “fragrance oil.”

Some species of the same plant might produce different



chemicals based on where they are grown. Differences in geography including climate, soil and even altitude can affect the scent and therapeutic benefits of an essential oil. These variations are called chemotypes and help aromatherapists and other practitioners understand the benefits and side effects of essential oils distilled from the same plant species.

According to the US Lavender Grower's Association, lavender has more than 45 different species with over 450 varieties and there is still more yet to be classified. Many lavender chemotypes share similar therapeutic properties like linalool in True Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*), which promotes restfulness.

However, Spike Lavender (*Lavandula latifolia*) has a higher percentage of camphor than the more frequently used True Lavender. Its scent is more pungent and medicinal. It also

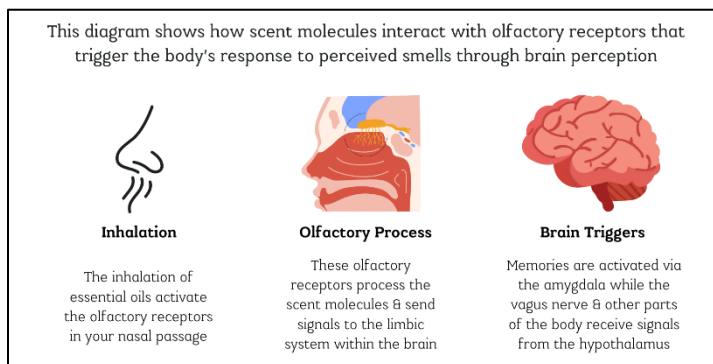


makes a better choice for diffusing the oil to use as an expectorant or to ease headaches and congestion.

How the Inhalation Process Works

When you inhale a pure essential oil, the olfactory receptors sitting on the cilia in your nasal passage come alive. These lightning-fast processors of scent molecules send signals to your limbic system. Housing the amygdala, the emotional epicenter of the brain, memories are triggered, eliciting an emotional response.

Essential oils also activate the hypothalamus which connects the brain with the rest of the body. The hypothalamus manages vital bodily functions such as heart rate, blood pressure and mood. In connecting with the hypothalamus, citrus oils like mandarin and



lemon provide an uplifting, energizing effect. Oils like geranium and clary sage may help balance hormones produced and managed by the endocrine system.

The vagus nerve keeps the nervous system in check. It counteracts the “fight or flight” response when stimulated. Inhaling calming essential oils like Lavender, Roman Chamomile and Sandalwood may help stimulate the vagus nerve. These oils help reduce anxiety and are prized for their ability to achieve a calming, stabilizing effect.

Creating a mood with Aromatherapy

There are many ways to enjoy the aroma of essential oils. Blanketing a space with scent is a nice way to create a mood, provide balance or evoke a particular feeling. Water-based diffusers are the most common way to enjoy essential oil inhalation on a larger scale. The big watch-out is to clean them frequently and thoroughly to combat mold and bacteria growth. If a diffuser doesn't have an automatic timer, be sure to run it in 30–60-minute intervals. Taking breaks between usage may reduce overexposure and adverse effects to the oils which may include headaches, fatigue and even nausea.



Waterless diffusers are a healthier alternative to the traditional water-based option. Offering a pure, undiluted experience, a waterless diffuser ensures you will enjoy every drop of an oil's therapeutic benefits. It also removes the risk of mold or bacterial growth since water is not needed. Great potency comes with a slightly higher price tag, but this might be a splurge worth making given all the benefits.

You can also use essential oils to enhance your bathing experience. Add a couple of drops of eucalyptus oil to a steamy shower to enjoy the congestion-clearing aroma. Peppermint, Camphor and Rosemary essential oils also work to open the nasal passage and increase respiratory function. Looking to enjoy a relaxing bath instead? Add a few drops of Rose, Neroli or Ylang

Ylang essential oil to melt your cares away. The scent of these floral powerhouses help to relax and de-stress the central nervous system.

Sometimes your body just needs a quick aromatic reset. A nasal inhaler is a plastic tube that holds a cotton swab soaked in essential oils. It is one of the best ways to quickly enjoy the inhalation benefits of essential oils. Inhalers last several months (provided the cap is replaced immediately after use) and are refillable, making them an eco-friendly way to enjoy essential oils on the go. Don't underestimate the power of simply inhaling these potent oils directly from the bottle. Avoiding skin contact, add a drop or two of your preferred essential oil onto a tissue or cotton ball and waft into the air.



Cleaning with Essential Oils

Skip the Febreze and look to essential oils to eradicate odors naturally. Chock full of anti-microbial properties, essential oils help inhibit the growth of bacteria, fungi and viruses. Some of the best essential oils to use for cleaning include tea tree, lemon, rosemary, peppermint and eucalyptus. Simply adding a few drops of these oils into distilled water and white vinegar will create an all-natural spray to rival any synthetic concoction. Spray down mattresses & linens to keep your bedding fresh & microbes free. You can also freshen your sofa, cushions and curtains in the living room. Make a spray without the vinegar and use it to spritz your face when the housecleaning chores are done. What a nice treat after all of that work!

Invest in a set of organic wool dryer balls to use in place of dryer sheets. You can scent them with essential oils like gentle lavender or chamomile. Not only will your clothes be scented naturally, but you'll also reduce landfill waste by not using dryer sheets which are coated with chemicals and synthetic fragrances. Wool dryer balls can last for many years through thousands

of washes. You will only need to replace the pure essential oil used to scent the balls as needed. A couple drops before each wash or two will do!

Use with care

Use pure essential oils with care and ensure you are purchasing them from reputable sources. Never apply a pure essential oil directly to your skin without first diluting it in water or in another carrier oil such as coconut, jojoba, shea or olive oil. Lavender is the only exception. Apply it directly to itchy, inflamed and even burned skin to soothe and heal the epidermis.

Essential oils are a great addition to your emotional support toolkit, but they should never replace necessary medical care. Always consult with a healthcare professional before using essential oils. This is especially important if you have a pre-existing health condition and/or taking medications as they could interfere with efficacy.

