

# **Beyond Aromatherapy: The Expansive World of Essential Oils**

By: Maria G. Turchi, NCTMB

Essential oils are being used by more massage therapists every day. Some therapists add them to their massage lotion, some purchase products with the oils already in them, and some diffuse them into the air. As the use of essential oils in the treatment room has grown, so has the need for the massage therapist to gain the knowledge necessary to identify pure essential oils.

Did you know that there are important differences between a therapeutic-grade essential oil and a perfume grade essential oil? Every part of the process, from seed to the final bottling of the product, affects the quality of the essential oil.

Historically, essential oils were used to cover up industrial odors. This practice has continued through today, where most essential oils on the market are created only for smell. When the goal for a product is uniformity in smell, there isn't a concern for the therapeutic benefits of the product. Many manufacturers want to produce oils that will smell exactly the same from the bottle you buy this year, to the bottle you buy next year. But in nature the plant may smell differently each year depending on many external factors.

In your role as a therapist presenting essential oils to your clients, you must be aware of the different grades of oils so that you choose the proper oil for the intended use. If you want to heat an essential oil over a tea candle, then any essential oil is appropriate. However, if you want to apply an essential oil to a burn or a wound, it is important that you only use an oil that is truly therapeutic grade.

## **The essential oils I use are organic – isn't that good enough?**

Although it is important to purchase an organically grown product, it is only one of the factors that create purity. We buy organic food because we recognize that pesticides can concentrate in the food. No one would drink a glass of water with pesticides in it, yet plants that have been watered with pesticides may contain harmful chemicals. Since essential oils are very concentrated, any pesticides used in the growing of the plants may concentrate in the finished product. In addition to being organic, you would want plants that are grown in a pristine environment, away from busy highways or chemical runoff. Yes, the use of organic plants is very important in choosing essential oils but there are other components that must be present as well.

## **Distillation – The Key to retaining the healing properties**

Essential oils are the life blood of plants. Just as we have blood flowing through our veins that carries nutrients and oxygen to our cells, plants also have fluids that carry nutrients and oxygen to the plants cells. Trapped within the plant material, these oils can be released using steam distillation. There are other methods of producing essential oils which involve pressing or solvent extraction, but these methods will not be discussed here.

Steam distillation is a process where the plant material is put inside a pressure cooker and, as the steam rises, the heavier plant material separates from the oil. Once the oil rises to the top of the water, it is skimmed off. Distillation should be done with pure, non-chlorinated water and never include solvents. The cooker must be made of stainless steel, or a material that will not interact

or impart any of its characteristics into the oil. One of the most important factors in choosing an essential oil is to know and trust the grower, since distilling essential oils is not only a complex science, but the energy of the intention of the grower is imbued into the finished product.

Using low pressure and low temperature with a long distillation time, the fragile healing properties of the plant will be retained. If high temperatures are used, new compounds not present in the original plant might be created, changing the chemical composition of the finished product and possibly losing some of the fragile constituents. These compounds, called artifacts, can change the way the essential oil integrates with the body. For example, if you purchase lavender that was distilled under high pressure very quickly, there could be a higher camphor content. If you were to buy this lavender for a skin issue, the camphor could make your skin issue worse. This is where people say “I tried essential oils but they don’t work”. Well, the truth is, they did try an essential oil, but they did not try a pure, essential oil.

### **Retaining Bioelectricity**

All living things contain a measurable frequency or bioelectricity. This is also true with essential oils. As Robert O. Baker, M.D., documents in his book, *The Body Electric*, a “frequency generator” was developed in the early 1920’s by Royal Raymond Rife, M.D. Dr. Rife found that certain frequencies could prevent disease and others could destroy disease. Essential oil frequencies are measurable in megahertz (MHz), with higher frequencies creating an unfavorable environment towards pathogens. Bruce Tainio of Tainio Technology in Cheney, WA, developed new equipment to measure the biofrequency of humans and foods. He used this biofrequency monitor to determine the relationship between frequency and disease. Tainio found that a healthy body typically has a range of 62 to 78 MHz, while disease began at 58 MHz. It is no mystery then why essential oils, whose frequencies start at around 52 MHz and go all the way up to the highest frequency of Rose at 320 MHz, can provoke a healing response in the body. When considering an essential oil to use, you can see why it is important to choose an oil whose frequency has been retained throughout the entire product processing.

### **Why is testing important and what are the standards?**

In the United States, the labeling of essential oils as therapeutic is up to the manufacturer as there are no labeling regulations or standards for essential oils. Any oil, whether adulterated or not, can say on the label that the oils are 100% pure and therapeutic. A good way to be certain you are purchasing a therapeutic-grade essential oil is to purchase AFNOR or ISO certified products.

In Europe there are standards regarding therapeutic-grade essential oils. Two organizations have created the highest standards and certify essential oils. These organizations are AFNOR (Association of French Normalization Organization Regulation) and ISO (International Standards Organization). In order for essential oils to meet these standards, testing must show that certain primary constituents are present in certain percentages. This testing is done using a method called gas chromatography; a complex system requiring chemists specially trained in interpretation of the gas chromatography charts. Proper equipment, including at least a 50-meter testing column, must be used. The lab must also be AFNO/ISO certified and be independent from the seller of the finished product.

### **Can you ingest essential oils?**

Just as you can ingest herbal capsules, you can also ingest essential oils. Many oils can be just as effective as herbs, if not more so, when taken internally. Since essential oils are more concentrated than herbs, you do not need many drops. When choosing an essential oil to ingest you must be sure of the purity of the product. You should not ingest perfume-grade oil, since there may be chemical solvents used in the distillation and the healing properties of the plant may not be retained. You would look for an essential oil that has an FDA Supplemental Facts label. Generally these oils would say "Essential Oil Supplement" somewhere on the label. Just like any other food grade product, the label would give you the number of drops in the bottle, the serving size, and the nutritional information. NEVER ingest an essential oil that does not have the FDA Supplemental Facts label.

### **Why would you ingest essential oil?**

Essential oils are wonderful when taken internally for a variety of reasons. They work especially well when you are getting a cold, have sinus issues or stomach upset, or would like to enhance your immune system. Taking essential oils internally daily may also work as a preventative, due to their anti-viral, anti-bacterial, anti-inflammatory, and other properties.

There are two ways to ingest essential oils. The easiest way is to put a drop on your tongue. This is a wonderful way to use an oil for a sore throat, for dental issues such as gum bleeding, and for refreshing your breath. Simply place a drop on your tongue and then rub your tongue on the back of your throat or around your gums.

You can also put essential oils into capsules and ingest them. Many health food stores sell empty capsules. I prefer the "OO" size since you can put in some essential oils and still have room to add vegetable oil if you wish. Never consume more than a few drops of essential oils per day without the advice of a physician.

### **In Conclusion**

As you can see there are many factors that go into creating ingestible, therapeutic-grade essential oils. Every one of these factors is important to the overall viability of the finished product. We cannot look at one factor, such as use of organic plants, and say that the oil is therapeutic. All factors must be present in order for the finished product to deliver the touted benefit.

Our clients are worth the protection of the highest grade essential oils. If we promote the healing benefits of essential oils but use a perfume grade that cannot deliver these benefits the credibility of our effectiveness comes into account. I recommend that every therapist who offers aromatherapy as a healing art take the time to study essential oils and, most importantly, invest in true therapeutic-grade oils. Once your clients begin to enjoy the wonderful benefits that may result from these health enhancing plants, they will not only become loyal to your practice but will tell all their friends about the wonderful benefits of the essential oils that you have introduced them to.