

BLENDING ESSENTIAL OILS

THE TRUE HOLISTIC APPROACH TO
TREATING YOUR CLIENT



AROMATHERAPY, AN ANCIENT ART,

is a science that is studied around the world today. As a therapy, it is a powerful complement to all the other treatments in the spa. The most powerful benefit, and primary reason for including essential oils in your practice, is that it brings a total approach to the care of your client. That is, balance on an emotional, physical and spiritual level.

As a science, the plants are researched for their natural plant-based chemical content. Scientists clearly understand that plants exhibit all aspects of living things: nutrition, excretion, respiration, reproduction, the ability to defend themselves from predators and survive powerful climatic influences. Researchers have discovered that the primary function of plants is to produce carbohydrates for food, but their secondary function is to produce essential oils. In the same way that plants use these precious extracts to live, survive and defend themselves, as a therapy, this can be translated into therapeutic properties that we use to restore balance in human beings.

However, we have to appreciate that aromatherapy is also an art. As we become educated in this ancient art and understand the powerful effect that the oils can have on the body with their therapeutic properties, we have to learn the art of blending the oils together. Some essential oils have mutually enhancing powers, while others can inhibit each other. A combination of mutually enhancing oils is called a synergy. Having done a consultation and determining the needs of our client, making a synergy in

theory is one thing. To actually choose oils correctly to make a blend that has a powerful action and an amazing smell is truly an art.

Creating the synergy is the most important part of blending. Synergies help the therapist to be very accurate and precise in treatment. To choose the correct oils and create the synergy requires a good understanding of essential oils, some experience and your own intuition. We do need to remember that a certain combination of oils might be excellent for one client but inappropriate for another.

To choose the correct oils for your client and create the right blend, you need to know which symptoms you want to treat and the physical, psychological or emotional factors involved. In order to do this, it is important to do a very thorough consultation. Allow at least 15-20 minutes for this step.

Basic principles of blending

After acquiring the knowledge and training to understand the therapeutic properties of the oils, the next thing that you have to do in order to make a successful blend is to learn which oil combinations are best. So you need to classify and group your oils to avoid costly mistakes and waste while you are learning this process.

1. Classification by note

For the purposes of blending, essential oils can be classified into top notes, middle notes and base notes. Each group has specific qualities that it brings to the

blend. A good synergy should provide a nice balance of these three categories.

Top notes: Top notes are the ones that you will smell first in a blend. Essential oils are generally considered volatile. That is, they combine with oxygen quickly and dissipate. Top notes will not last long in a blend. They are

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important, as they give the first impression of the blend. Generally they smell sharp and penetrating. They are found in flowers, leaves and fruits. Typical top notes would include bergamot, lemon, lime, lemongrass and peppermint.

Middle notes: Middle notes give body to the blend; they smooth the sharp edges and round the corners. They are less volatile than top notes and take a little longer to be present in the overall smell of the synergy. Typical middle notes would be lavender, chamomile, geranium and marjoram.

Base notes: Base notes deepen the blend and increase the lasting effect. They are the least volatile, and therefore take the longest to become apparent in the blend. Base notes are generally rich and warm, having profound effects on one's mental, emotional and spiritual level. Typical base notes include frankincense, sandalwood, benzoin and cedarwood.

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BY TRISH GREEN



THERAPEUTIC PROPERTIES OF COMMON BASE OILS

Sweet almond oil: Protects and nourishes the skin. Use for dry skin, especially at the change of the seasons.

Apricot kernel oil: Light texture suitable for facial blends. For dry, sensitive and mature skin.

Avocado oil: Very rich oil, thicker and viscous. Soothes the skin, suitable for very dry, mature, sun damaged and prematurely aging skin.

Calendula oil: Highly anti-inflammatory, it heals the skin quickly of all sores, bruises, wounds and rashes.

Evening primrose oil: For eczema, psoriasis and premenstrual syndrome.

Hypericum /St. John's Wort: A good body oil for muscular aches and pains. Warm the oil slightly before use.

Macadamia oil: Use for oily or dry skin, face and body. It is highly nourishing and very emollient.

Soya oil: It must be cold pressed, organic and not genetically modified. Look for a formula of European origin. Very high in vitamin E and phytoestrogens, and good for preventative aging.

With this information in mind, it is important to understand that trying to create a synergy while your client is waiting is not a good way to provide the very best to your client. A true synergy should be made and left to sit for up to 24 hours. This allows the chemical components to truly become a synergy, working together as one to provide a powerful outcome to enhance the well-being of your client.

Classification by fragrance

Some clients, if you were to ask them, are very aware of different smells that they like, and are naturally drawn to them. In the world of aromatherapy, we are very much aware that we are naturally attracted to the essential oils that we need, and we know which ones make us feel better. If you did ask a client to describe what type of "smell" they like, they may use some of the words in the below.

Essential oils can, based on this concept, fall into five general groups:

- **Floral:** Lavender, geranium, jasmine and rose.
- **Citrus:** Lemon, grapefruit, orange and bergamot.
- **Spicy:** Cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg and black pepper.
- **Woody:** Cedarwood, rosewood, patchouli and sandalwood.
- **Green or herbaceous:** Peppermint, chamomile, eucalyptus and rosemary.

Citrus oils blend well with spicy oils, as well as floral scents. Woody and floral scents work well. Green and herbaceous smells are also a good combination.

Blend according to biochemical content

Essential oils all contain different chemical compounds. These compounds give essential oils their therapeutic properties. It is the chemistry that gives lavender the core properties of being antiseptic (linalool) and anti-inflammatory (linalyl acetate). What really makes things interesting is where the crop is grown. Climate can change this chemistry, which in turn makes it smell differently. Although prop-

erties can be similar, the area where they are grown can also make them subtly different. Lavender grown in the valleys of Provence has a different smell and altered chemistry from the lavender grown at high altitude in Provence. Bulgarian lavender 38/40 has a different chemistry, a gentler smell and a slightly altered action compared to French lavender 40/42. The same concept applies to geranium from China and Egypt, and sandalwood from East India and Australia. Another classic example of this variation is seen in basil. Basil grown and distilled in the Comoro Islands has a high content of methyl chavicol, which is considered a skin irritant and therefore not suitable for skin care. However French basil has a high linalool content and is very safe for use in aromatherapy. All of this affects why we choose a particular oil over another, as well as how, where and when we use it. To make a successful blend according to biochemical content, we choose oils that contain a majority of the same compounds, therefore creating a powerful and focused effect on the body.

Classification according to plant family

Another approach would be to blend oils that come from the same "genus" or family, touching the underlying "plant field," resonance or energy that has been built into each group by Nature herself. Often different in their biochemistry and notes, all of these oils have a line of similarity, and therefore enhance the desired therapeutic effect. If you refer to the information in the sidebar, some of the common plant families are described, which provides further insight into this method of classification.

The next thing to consider after you have grouped your essential oils and decided on the therapeutic goal of your treatment is to select the appropriate base.

Base products

We have to remember that essential oils cannot be placed directly on the skin. There are certain groups that advocate dropping blends of essential oils directly onto the skin, particularly

onto the spine. The “neat” placement of essential oils on the skin is not advocated by The International Federation of Aromatherapy, and may compromise your liability insurance. Check with your insurance provider on this matter.

The first decision in providing custom blends to meet client needs is to keep a variety of different bases to choose from. The preferred base is usually an organic, cold pressed vegetable or nut oil such as sweet almond, peach nut, macadamia, soya and evening primrose oil. Each of these base oils has their own therapeutic properties that contributes to the outcome of the blend. These base oils are known to penetrate the skin, and eventually are found in the bloodstream. It is very important that you know the source of your products, and confirm that they are not sprayed with pesticides, so the quality of your product to use here is crucial. For example, if you want to stimulate the skin at the level of the dermis to stimulate collagen and elastin, then we need to use base oils in order to reach and penetrate the skin at that level. In reverse, creams stay on the surface of the skin and hold the essential oils that they carry at this level. An example here would be the treatment of rashes, eczema and sunburn, which could potentially need a cream or ointment base. Some examples and guidelines are provided here in the side panel. Other blends that can be created are those for diffusion into the atmosphere. In this case, a base is not required. The blend can be placed in a diffuser to disperse the blend into the atmosphere to create that “spa smell.”

Dilution and the strength of the oils used

The last step is to put your essential oil synergy together with your chosen base. Yes, there are more guidelines.

- As a holistic therapy, the “less is more” rule applies.
- Oils that are recommended for facial skin care do not necessarily work for body care and vice versa. Oils that work well on the body can be very irritating to facial skin.
- There are two ways to make your blend, depending on the general health of your client:
 - a. If your client is on many medications, has cancer, high blood pressure or another chronic condition, we need to make a gentler blend. Mix your carrier oils first, and then add your essential oils one at a time. Choose a 2 or 3% blend. Let the blend sit for 24 hours if time allows. This makes for a gentler, slower acting blend, restoring balance over a slightly longer period of time.
 - b. If your client is generally in good health, take your dropper bottle or glass measuring beaker and add only the essential oils in a 4 or 5% dilution. Put the cap on the bottle or cover the blend so no oxygen can get in, and again allow these oils to blend together. When your client arrives for her treatment, simply add the carrier oils. In simple terms, the chemistry of this blend will have a more powerful action and a more immediate action on the body.

- The term “percentage dilution” refers to the number of drops of essential oils that are placed in an amount of base product.

To give you a further idea, a facial massage would require 10 mls of base product at a 2% dilution. If you use the chart below, 2% in 5 mls requires 2 drops of essential oils. Therefore, 2% in 10ml would require four drops of essential oils. We have doubled the carrier oil, so we would double the essential oils required.

Final considerations and tips

- Be sensible about safety. Essential oils have contraindications, especially where ill health, medications, pregnancy and cancer are concerned. Essential oils need to be respected for both their power of action and energetics.
- Essential oils have many indications as well. Many oils have emotional components, physical components and affinities for each body system. Take your time to learn them well, so as to make the best choice for your client.
- When choosing a blend for yourself, it is clearly important that you like the smell. When blending for a client, remember it is for *them*—not necessarily for you to like or enjoy. Aromatherapy blends are very personal. Generally you will crave or enjoy whatever it is your body needs to help it rebalance. When you blend, your own body chemistry affects how you perceive and smell that blend, based on factors

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The chart reveals recommended dilution rates based on using 5 mls of base product:

Application	Total number of drops of essential oils.	Percentage
Pregnant women and children	1	1%
Skin care	2 or 3	2% - 3%
Hand or foot care	2 or 3	2% - 3%
Body care for the average size female	4	4%
Body care for the average male	5	5%

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like hormones, pharmaceuticals, stress and pregnancy.

On a personal level, note that as you heal emotionally, oils that you liked and needed disappear from your desired repertoire.

- Sanitation: Before blending, prepare a clean surface. Any mixing and stirring, tools, packaging, caps and droppers must be sanitized.

All blends must be labeled with specific information:

- a. Client's name
- b. Date that blend was made
- c. Name of blend
- d. "Do not take internally" warning
- e. "Keep away from children" warning

All records must be kept locked away in the spa in case of an "incident."

- Prepare the blend before the client arrives, based on the recorded information from a previous consultation.

To start, get training and education. Blend with a few oils and grow slowly. Locate a great reference manual that is written for professionals, not the general public. Enjoy your oils, and above

all, remember that custom blending essential oils for your clients is one of the best gifts that you can give them to achieve health and wellness. ■

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Around the world with common botanical families

There are as many as 20 plant families that produce essential oils. Some of the more common ones are featured below.

Burseraceae (dry fire): Plants classified in this family grow in the desert and extreme tropical areas. These climates of the world produce intense essential oils that are considered by many to assist in the survival of the plant in these extreme conditions. These oils help the plant stay cool in order to survive the intense heat. Produced in Somalia, Ethiopia, Libya and Iran, resins such as frankincense and myrrh from this plant family have been long used in rituals and religious ceremonies. These oils are cooling and drying.

myrrh tree



Compositae (organization and structure):

Plants in this group grow everywhere in the world except the far north and the tropical forests. Characterized by the presence of daisylike flowers, these plants adapt to their environment quickly. Produced primarily in places like France, Spain, Egypt, Italy and Morocco, these oils are produced in areas of more moderate heat but have plenty of long sunny days. Oils include chamomile, everlasting, calendula and arnica.

Coniferae and Pinaceae (inner warmth versus inner cold):

These are grown in the opposite of extreme climates, the deep frigid zones of the world, such as Canada and the United States. They also produce resins, which fill up the trunks, branches and needles. Due to the cold, these trees have developed an intense inner fire to get through the long, cold winters. These warming and reviving oils act on the nervous system and cold areas of our body. Typical oils include pine, juniper, spruce and cypress.

Graminae (the nutritious family): This group of plants grows everywhere, from the poles to the equator to the swamps

and the desert. This is the grass family and includes food we eat, such as wheat, barley and oats. However the essential oils in this group are produced in more tropical zones, again where the plant has to adapt to its environment. Little energy goes into the flowering process; all of the oils are in the leaves. Oils are pungent and stimulating. Essential oils include lemongrass from India and Brazil, citronella from Sri Lanka, may chang from China and palmarosa from Africa and the Comoro Islands.

Labiatae (plants of heat):

This group contains many medicinal plants and essential oils with curative powers. These plants grow and survive on dry rocky slopes and sunny mountains, mainly in the Mediterranean's dry season. Many are culinary herbs, and as essential oils have an affinity to the digestive system. They are warming and stimulating to weakened vital centers of the body. Oils include lavender, marjoram, peppermint, rosemary, clary sage and basil. Many of these oils are produced in European countries, including France and Spain. ■