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HEAVENLY SCENTS

How to Make Your Own Natural Oil Fragrances

by Kathleen Barnes

A whiff of sweetness can communicate a personal signature of tranquility, alertness or romance, or it can cause a bout of miserable sneezing, wheezing or nausea for those in the vicinity and even the unwitting wearer.

Commercial Chemicals

"When you see 'fragrance' on a personal care product label, read it as 'hidden chemicals,'" warns the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit watchdog Environmental Working Group (EWG). "A major loophole in the [U.S.] Food and Drug Administration's federal law lets manufacturers of products like shampoo, lotion and body wash include nearly any ingredient under the term fragrance without actually listing the chemical." Companies that manufacture personal care products are required by law to list the ingredients they use, but fragrances and trade-secret formulas are exempt.

What's known as a dirty little secret in the fragrance industry is the unlabeled presence of toxic chemicals not only in perfumes, but in any personal care product that includes a scent. Lab tests commissioned by the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics and analyzed by the EWG confirm the presence of parabens

that interfere with hormone production, cancer-causing phthalates, and synthetic musks that have been linked to hormone disruption, among many other ills.

Naturally Safe Scents

"Opting for natural scents from organic essential oils not only offers a toxin-free alternative, the oils' aromatherapy benefits have time-proven therapeutic value," suggests Dorene Petersen, president and founder of the American College of Healthcare Sciences, in Portland, Oregon.

Recent research from the Pontificia Universidade Catolica, in Brazil, confirms that lavender oil has anti-inflammatory, antioxidant and pain-relieving properties similar to those of a mild-dose narcotic. Plus, it smells heavenly, says botanical perfumer Roxana Villa, of Woodland Hills, a California-based spokesperson for the National Association for Holistic Aromatherapy.

"Considering the part of the plant used will give you an idea of its therapeutic value," says Villa. "A root base will be good for grounding. Since bark is like skin, oils such as birch will benefit skin and muscles. Oils from flowers are excellent for anything related to the head and mind."

Oregano and cinnamon oils have powerful antifungal properties, even against *Candida*-type fungi resistant to prescription drugs, according to Brazilian research from Universidade Federal. A groundbreaking study from the Slovak University of Technology, in Slovakia, even suggests that rosemary oil can kill cancer cells.

These are all scents that can be the foundations of do-it-yourself perfumes.

Customized Blends

"It's fun to experiment with organic essential oils and create that unique blend that becomes a personal signature," says Charlynn Avery, an aromatherapist with Aura Cacia, in Norway, Iowa. She explains that essential oils have three basic "notes" and blending them correctly will result in a fragrance suited to last throughout the day.

"The base note is heavier and lasts the longest. Patchouli, vetiver, sandalwood, cedarwood and jasmine hang around longer in the atmosphere and on the wearer," she explains. Blending the base with a slightly lighter middle note like lavender, rosemary or clary sage and a light and short-lasting top note like orange, lime or peppermint will create a complex and pleasing blend.

"That's the beauty of the art of it," says Avery. "You can create synergistic blends that harmonize and complement the attributes of each to such an extent that you may not be able to detect the scents of the individual oils."

There are no hard and fast rules, but our experts offer a few guidelines

for creating our own unique blends that will be well-received as holiday gifts.

Use a base of oil like jojoba or sweet almond to create a perfumed oil. Note that oils undiluted by a carrier can burn the skin.

For oil-based blends, use a ratio of 50 drops of bottom note oil, 30 drops of a middle note and 20 drops of a top note in two ounces of carrier oil.

Another option is to use an alcohol base of either isopropyl rubbing alcohol or 85-proof vodka to make a spray perfume; the alcohol will evaporate quickly. Alcohol-based blends generally last longer, especially with fragile citrus oils.

A usual ratio is 10 to 20 drops of essential oil per ounce of alcohol-based carrier.

Oil-based blends are ready to use almost immediately. Alcohol-based blends should age a week or two at least and will become more strongly scented in time.

Store fragrances in bottles in a dark, cool place. Bottles with tiny roll-on caps are commercially available.

"It's very much trial and error to arrive at a preferred scent, so be creative and keep careful notes of experiments and improve on them as you gain experience," counsels Avery. "If you crinkle your nose at patchouli, you probably won't like an oil blend with it, either. Choose scents you like."

Kathleen Barnes is author of numerous natural health books including Food Is Medicine. Connect at Kathleen Barnes.com.



GIFT BLEND FOR MEN

Western cultures value "manly" Earth scents like sandalwood and cedarwood, while in other cultures, flowery scents are acceptable for men. An appealing woody blend for an American male blends cedarwood, clary sage and lime.



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The 1-2-3s of Blending Oils

Base Notes

sandalwood
jasmine
myrrh
vetiver
patchouli
cedarwood

Middle Notes

lavender
bergamot
geranium
rosemary
tea tree
clary sage

Top Notes

orange
lemon
grapefruit
eucalyptus
lime
peppermint



A general ratio of 50 percent base note oils to 30 percent middle notes and 20 percent top notes is recommended.

Source: courtesy of AuraCacia.com