

# Quick Guide To Essential Oils

We've put together a handy guide with all of the most common questions and answers about these little powerhouses.

## **What are they?**

Essential oils, or 'essences', are extracted directly from the leaf, seed, bark, flower, fruit, or root of a plant, most commonly via steam distillation. They are a powerful concentrated form of the chemical components of the plants from which they come from. They are oils and easily give off a scent. Essential oils are soluble in other oils (principle of like dissolves like) as well as in alcohol and propylene glycol.

Our essential oils are all therapeutic grade and are produced to the highest standards in a pure and natural way.

## **How Are They Produced?**

### Steam Distillation

Essential oils are most commonly produced via steam distillation, where steam is passed through the plant material, producing two kinds of substances which are collected separately: the essential oil and the hydrosol.

### Expression

Expression is another type of extraction which is mostly used for the citrus oils (although sometimes these are now also extracted via steam distillation). Expression means the oil is compressed out of the peel of the citrus fruit.

### Solvent Extraction For Absolutes

Solvent extraction is used for delicate flowers such as rose and jasmine, and these oils are referred to as absolutes and are used in perfumery (and are very pricey!). To extract an absolute, the flowers are immersed in a chemical solvent, and then a series of processes are followed whereby the chemical is removed, leaving behind the aromatic compounds in a concentrated extract referred to as an absolute.

## **How Can Essential Oils Benefit Me?**

Essential oils each have their own unique benefits and properties. They have scents, physical properties and therapeutic properties as well as any combinations of the above. Essential oils are used in the home for everything from headaches, insomnia, anxiety and stress to uplifting the mood, balancing emotions and hormones, as insect repellents, for skincare, as fragrances, cleaning, the list goes on.

Many essential oils have 'anti' properties: antibacterial, anti inflammatory, antifungal, antiscatarrhal, etc.

Others are stimulating, open up respiratory pathways, relax muscles, offer warming or cooling effects, or even affect hormones.

Essential oils open up a whole world of possibilities!

## **Uses & Benefits**

Essential oils have a myriad of uses. They are most commonly used in aromatherapy and alternative medicine, in cosmetics and body products, and as natural fragrances, but they also have uses in foods, pesticides and other industries.

## **Organic vs Conventional Essential Oils**

Because they are produced from plants which can be farmed in different ways, essential oils can be purchased as organic or as conventional/not organic. Which is best for you depends on your values and views on the organic topic, and your budget. In this case, an organic essential oil will have been produced from organically farmed plant material. Usually this means minimal use of harmful pesticides, insecticides and chemicals. It does not necessarily mean no pesticides however, as organic farmers are still permitted use of certain controls. A conventional essential oil is produced from plant material that may use pesticides and other chemicals.

In certain cases, it is desirable to use an organic essential oil. When producing any product that you want to label and market as 'organic' you will need to use ingredients

that are organic. Organic farming is also widely considered more ethical and less harmful to the planet.

It is worth noting that due to the costs involved of getting certified as organic, many farmers and essential oils brands do not label themselves organic, but nevertheless do farm in an organic fashion. One such brand that we highly recommend is [Still Pure](#). They are not allowed to trade as organic as they have not been certified, but their products are of the highest possible quality and may be considered organic.

Organic essential oils will typically be more expensive than conventional ones and whether or not their benefits outweigh those of conventional oils is up for debate. Many do consider the scent of an organic oil to be superior to that of a conventional one, but this can vary from brand to brand and other factors such as season, rainfall and soil can all affect the properties of essential oils. This is a topic that deserves further inspection and we will cover it in a future blog. But ultimately the choice is yours.

### **What Is An Adaptogen Oil?**

An adaptogen is something that helps you adapt to what your body requires at a given time. Adaptogens can be both stimulating and calming, helping with stress, fatigue, anxiety, concentration or other factors that the body would otherwise struggle to adapt to. Most adaptogens are foods, but essential oils can be adaptogens too. Here are a few of them:

Lavender, clary sage, geranium, lemon, lemongrass and peppermint. There are others and some essential oils can also be layered in a blend to make them more effective.

### **Are Essential Oils Safe For Skin?**

It is standard practice to perform a 'patch test' of any essential oil you are wanting to use, to determine if any irritation occurs.

While many essential oils can be used directly on the skin, unless you are experienced and know what you are doing, we recommend that you always dilute essential oils in a carrier oil such as almond oil, jojoba, grapeseed, coconut oil, etc.

For adults, 2-5% dilution is fine: between 3-6 drops essential oil per tablespoon of carrier oil.

For children, 0.5-3% dilution is safe: 1 to 3 drops per tablespoon of carrier oil.

Citrus oils may present phototoxicity which means they can make the skin more sensitive

to sunlight. To be safe, do not apply citrus oils to skin and then go in the sun.

## **Are Essential Oils Medicine?**

Essential oils are used under the banner of alternative medicine and we urge you to speak with a naturopath or alternative medicine professional (or just any medical professional really, although you may get a different response from the 'old school' than you would from an alternative medicine practitioner!) if you would like to use them in this manner. Essential oils and plant extracts have been used as medicine for hundreds of years but are still to be used under supervision if you have any medical conditions or are using them as a treatment.

## **Can I use Essential Oils To Treat xxx?**

We are often asked if someone can use an essential oil to treat a condition they have, or if they have 'xxx', can they use an essential oil. Please understand that while we do our best to give correct advice, some questions really are best left to the medical professionals. We are not medical experts, we don't know your condition, your history or your health, and by law we are not allowed to give advice in any medical capacity. We urge you to consult with someone who can give you the best advice related to your specific medical condition.

## **Can You Ingest Them?**

This is one of the most common questions we get and our answer is always going to be the same: as a rule we do not recommend ingesting essential oils. This doesn't mean that people always take our advice however, and it is up to the user's discretion at the end of the day. But warnings to not take internally will appear on most essential oil bottles and we recommend that you take this into consideration. Our oils are not certified food grade and have not been tested for this purpose.

In the food and beverage industry, certain essential oils are used as flavourings. The food industry is heavily regulated and those flavourings will have been tested for food safety. Certain essential oils will qualify as food grade and suitable flavourings but our oils have not been specifically tested for this.

A common misconception is the belief that because a certain essential oil has, for instance, anticancer properties or is being tested and shown to be effective against

cancer cells, this means that someone can grab a bottle and start taking it daily as a supplement to fight cancer. If you search a medical journal (and we recommend you do your research if you are wanting to use an essential oil to treat any kind of medical condition), you will discover that in most cases, components of the essential oils are being tested in vivo or in vitro, not simply ingested. This doesn't mean that ingesting won't give some benefit but we strongly do not recommend this. Please consult with a medical professional for alternative treatments for any condition; if your medical adviser says you can ingest an essential oil as a treatment then that is fine.

Toxicity: certain components of essential oils can be toxic, particularly in large amounts. Our livers aren't designed to process certain chemicals (which is another reason why you shouldn't ingest them), and certain essential oils can cause a skin reaction. This varies vastly from person to person; some won't be affected at all while others will display irritation. It's just like a food or nut allergy, some have it, others don't.

### **Are Essential Oils Safe To Use During Pregnancy?**

Most are but there are restrictions on certain oils. We do put this in every oil on our site, but we also strongly advise that you consult with your doctor and/or gynaecologist about using essential oils while pregnant.

### **Are Essential Oils Safe For Animals?**

Please read [The Natural Pet Part 1](#) and [The Natural Pet Part 2](#) for the oils that are and are not safe for pets.

If at all uncertain, please consult with your vet!

### **Are Essential Oils Safe For Children?**

Essential oils can be wonderful for children but young ones can't always handle what adults can! We have a whole blog dedicated to exploring this, please have a read here: [Child Friendly Essential Oils](#).

### **How Do I Store My Essential Oils?**

You will see that essential oils always come in a dark glass bottle such as an amber bottle. This prevents light from getting in. Keep your essential oils in a cool dark cupboard with the caps tightly on to prevent any air getting in. This will extend their shelf life.

## **What Is Their Shelf Life?**

Essential oils can last extremely long! A typical essential oil can easily last 2-3 years before you need to replace it. I've even heard of some lasting up to 15 years. But you will almost definitely use them up way before then.

Essential oils don't go rancid the way other oils do; instead they may oxidise and lose some of their aromatic components. You need to be quite experienced to tell if an essential has expired and you will need a fresh essential oil to compare it to, but if an essential oil's scent changes dramatically over time and is less potent than it should be, then it might have oxidised and be time to get a fresh one.

You don't need to add a preservative to essential oils or carrier oils. Oils keep themselves. Only when blending oils with other ingredients such as aqueous components, do you need to incorporate a preservative.

Right, so now that we have all the nitty gritty out the way, let's get down to how you can actually use essential oils in your home!

## **How To Use Essential Oils**

There are many different ways to use essential oils. Here are the most common ones.

For therapeutic purposes and aromatherapy:

In a [burner](#) - add a little water to the top component of your burner, or use burner crystals, and then add a few drops of your essential oil. Light a tealight candle and place it in the cavity and let the warmth diffuse the aroma gently.

[Diffuser](#) - essential oil diffusers are specifically designed to diffuse the oil via steam into the air. Follow the instructions for your diffuser.

Humidifier – some makes of humidifiers allow for the addition of essential oils. Follow the instructions provided.

On skin – certain gentle essential oils such as lavender are suitable for use directly on the skin (always do a patch test first to rule out any sensitivity), or you can dilute them with a carrier oil and then apply to skin (recommended). You can make up an essential oils blend by combining one or more of your favourite essential oils in a little carrier oil and then adding it a [roller bottle](#). Apply the roller bottle to skin.

In aromatherapy and massage – make up your own massage blend with carrier oils and a small amount of an appropriate essential oil.

Body products & cosmetics:

As a fragrance oil – in soaps, perfumes, body products and cosmetics.

In body and hair products – essential oils can add their benefits and scent to body and hair care products. Simply add in a few drops and mix well.

Around the home:

In insect repellents, candles, soaps, hand washes, sanitisers, room spray, household cleaners, etc.

Basically you can incorporate essential oils into cosmetics, body and hair care products, oil blends, perfumes, hand washes, face products, soaps, household products, the list goes on!

You can combine essential oils to make a blend. Certain essential oil scents and properties work exceptionally well together. Look for scents that are complimentary or similar to one another. For example all the citrus scents go well, all the floral scents, all the 'tree' scents, spicy scents etc.

## **What Are Some Must-have Essential Oils? Where Do I Start?**

This will all depend on your scent preferences, what you want to use them for and what benefits you are looking for in an essential oil. There are so many essential oils to choose from that it can be daunting for someone new to them. We recommend that you first determine what you want out of an essential oil, as well as what scent you like. This will give you a great idea of the properties you want and you can start researching oils. On our website you can search for properties, eg type in anti inflammatory, and all the products that have that property will come up.

Another great place to start is our [blog](#)! We have hundreds of entries packed with recipes and info that you will find helpful. We even have a featured [Oil Of The Week](#) series which is an ongoing series showcasing different oils.