

Essential Oil Considerations

As with chemical, natural or not - the fact that it is considered to be a medicine by many should give pause to how and when essential oil is used.

Essential oils are powerful, whether:
diluted, and used as natural cleaning agents
applied to skin and absorbed internally via natural beauty products
diffused in an atomizer

Le Basics:

Always dilute essential oils for use on skin.

Due to the small molecular size of essential oils, essential oils can penetrate the skin easily and enter the bloodstream causing a secondary effect to the benefit you were intending with use.

You're perhaps familiar with seeing someone pour a drop of undiluted oil into their palms, rubbed together, for inhalation. While skin here is less likely to be irritated by a single drop - the potency of all oils, and certainly a handful of others, makes even this seemingly benign practice quite dangerous; since it promotes overexposure to some essential oils, which then accumulate in the body.

Some oils, like lavender, rose and chamomile are typically considered safe for undiluted skin use, but to be safe, in consideration of long term use, and because long term safety of essential oil use is still largely unknown.

Wear gloves when in regular contact with oils to prevent overexposure to your own skin.

Tip:

Consider using an empty essential oil bottle to dilute an essential oil of choice, with a carrier oil, to be carried with you. Roller bottles can be purchased inexpensively, or, consider our Core Healing travel roller already-mixed products, should you wish to avoid the cost and time it takes to make your own.

How much to dilute:

Interestingly, every oil manufacturer and user will give you a different safe ratio.

Most agree a 3-5% dilution is safe for everyday use, for adults, and folks of 'average' health. For elderly, sensitive, and immune sensitive folks, lessen this ratio to 1-3%.

Children, babies, pregnancy dilutions

For children and babies: highly dilute. Consider not using some oils on 'wee ones, at all.

Consult your herbal professional accordingly. Peppermint, rosemary, eucalyptus and wintergreen essential oils contain menthol and 1,8-cineole, which can slow breathing (or even stop it completely) in very young children or those with respiratory problems, and in children under age six (with consideration to size/weight), peppermint oil has been known to cause severe jaundice in babies with G6PD deficiency (a common genetic enzyme deficiency).

Oils like lavender, chamomile, orange, lemon and frankincense are considered safe for diluted use on children.

Some EO used on a pregnant woman near, or in labor, can stall labor. Evidence suggests essential oils cross the placenta, and so reach baby. Doses should be diluted, much weaker, up to 1% maximum, for pregnant women.

Essential oils are highly concentrated forms of multiple chemical components which have varied, multiple effects.

Safety with other medications:

The other reason to check your essential oil use with a professional: other medications, supplements and powerfully affecting foods entering your body can interact with essential oils.

Few studies have been done to indicate long term effects of these powerful plant parts - and while safe, and exploding in DIY popularity - airing on the side of caution with the amounts of essential oils you are exposed to.

Essential oils are hydrophobic:

They do not mix with water. So even added to an entire bath tub of water, those few drops of oil you added are simply floating on the surface, and if they don't adhere to the bath tub, they'll adhere to your skin, undiluted. The positive effect then, to the your bath, is more via olfactory/aromatherapeutics.

Massage/manual therapists:

Consider your long term exposure through both olfactory and direct absorption applications, to your EOs...hands, forearms - and this same exposure for your clients'. Adjust your potency accordingly, for systemic massage essential oil use.

If localized areas are your focus, remember, the oil will also be absorbed systemically.

Storage:

Essential oils can leach through plastic easily, and are sensitive to light exposure. They are best stored in PET free plastics, (which tend to be thicker), glass (optimal for the oils, but not always safest in many environments), in cool, darker places. Essential oils will leach into and dissolve furniture finishes, for example.

Some oils lose potency with air exposure at a very fast rate. Consider buying the smaller size of this oil if you expect to have frequent use. Oils which naturally thicken over time can be held in your hands for a few moments, before opening, to thin for measuring and use.

Less is more.

Hey DIYers, even a drop can vary greatly in size (as much as 200%), as can the potency of the oil according to the manufacturer, the source of that batch of oils, the length an oxidizing sensitive oil has been exposed to air...therefore, air on the side of less as more, in consideration of what this mighty set of chemicals can, and does do, to the human body.

Some essential oils, for instance, are toxic to the liver over long periods of time, while some, exposed to skin, make the skin sun sensitive.

Photosensitivity:

Dependent on the distillation method, some oils are photosensitive, meaning they'll make your skin sun sensitive if applied to skin within a few hours of use. This skin sensitivity includes UV light sensitivity, blistering, discoloration of the skin, or skin burning more easily.

Generally considered photosensitive: orange, lime, lemon, grapefruit, and bergamot essential oils.

Internal Use

A trained herbalist, aromatherapist, naturopath, or physician can guide you through taking essential oils internally.

Since essential oils are extremely concentrated, (20x as strong as a tincture, equal to 10-50 cups of herbal tea). Ingestion is not something to be taken lightly, it is medicinal.

Each essential oil affects multiple effects, not just the primary benefit you're thinking of by adding a drop or two to a cup of tea etc. Consider that an anti-biotic essential oil will affect the health of your internal flora, for example.

If the primary benefits are considered, as are risks, and internal use seems warranted, for example, a strong concentration of an anti-bacterial applied to a tooth infection, consider diluting, then rinsing and spitting.

As with any essential oil, use with caution, knowledge, and confidence.

Picking your Essential Oil Aware Massage Therapist

Most massage therapists have a rudimentary understanding of essential oils. It's part of (our) training. It's okay (and important) to ask questions if essential oils will be part of your massage experience. Simply assuring your essential oil(s) used will be diluted, and that any you are aware of having a sensitivity to will not be used is enough knowledge to make yours, and your therapist's experience better!

Many clinics have adopted a zero EO policy, in support of chemically sensitive folks who'd experience the opposite reaction you'd have, at the use of essential oils, which compound in strength, scent and sensitivity as more are used in a static, small room.

Have Fun you DIYers!

Want to know more about these wondrous 'natural remedies'?

Online sources are a wealth of knowledge concerning essential oils. Companies like Young's Living, with a long, honorable track record in the industry, who offer third party independent testing, and seed to seal processes, and have a strong moral attitude of giving back to the communities they serve are a great source of information about the products they sell.

DoTerra, fairly new to the essential oil scene, has, as company founders, folks trained, then migrated from, Young's Living.

Aura Cacia, one of our new favorites, and a few other essential oil companies, make tremendously good products.

Since essential oil use has skyrocketed in recent years, more studies are available for consumers, making their use safer, more known, and with new frontiers being crossed, all in the name of better health.

More technical type info

What's in Essential Oils?

The chemicals of components of essential oils are called components.

The components, of which each essential oil has hundreds, have their own properties, some important to pay attention to, since they offer, along with benefits, some caveats to use.

Terpenes, monoterpenes:

These are insoluble in alcohol, and so are removed in some formulations used in industry. Essential oils with terpenes oxidise quickly, and contain other components which makes using them photo-toxic (sun sensitizing.) This means once exposed to air, the chemical component varies considerably in its strength, and the effect is destabilized. Additionally, if applied to skin, and the skin is exposed, the effects can be toxic.

Sesquiterpenes

With anti-inflammatory, anti-allergy properties, these oils, German Chamomille, for one, have complex pharmacological actions.

Phenols

Phenols have great antiseptic, anti-bacterial and disinfectant qualities, greatly stimulating therapeutic properties.

essential oils high in phenols should be used in low concentrations and for short periods of time, since they can lead to toxicity for the liver if used over long periods of time, since the liver must work harder to excrete them.

Phenol oils like cinnamon and clove are classified as skin and mucus membrane irritants since even as they have great antiseptic qualities, they can cause severe skin reactions.

Alcohols

These oils have good antiseptic, anti-viral and anti-fungal properties with very few side effects (like skin irritation or toxicity) and provide an uplifting energizing effect.

These alcohols (linalool, citronellol and terpineol) are found in lavender, rose and geranium, juniper and tea tree oil.

Sesquiterpene alcohols

Not commonly found in essential oils these have great qualities, including liver and glandular stimulation, anti-allergen and anti-inflammatory help. sandalwood (a-santalol) Ginger, patchouli, vetiver, carrot seed, everlasting, valerian, chamomille, and bisabolol contain sesquiterpene alcohols.

Aldehydes

These are the component that imparts the citrus-like fragrance in melissa, lemongrass and citronella, and with anti-fungal, anti-inflammatory, disinfectant, sedative yet uplifting therapeutic qualities. Best used in aromatherapy when the essential oil is used in low dilutions - around 1%.

Ketones

Although ketones can be toxic, (thuja, wormwood oil), they also have some great therapeutic benefits - especially in the field of easing mucus secretion, and cell and tissue regeneration.

Hyssop, eucalyptus and rosemary oils have moderate amounts of ketones.

Some ketones (italidone, found in everlasting), is not only mucus easing, but is also useful in skin regeneration, wound healing and reducing old scar tissue: wounds, stretch marks and adhesions.

Essential oils high in ketones should be used with care in pregnancy.

Esters

Normally very fragrant, some fruity, their therapeutic effects include being sedative, and antispasmodic.

Some esters in oils have anti-fungal and anti-microbial properties (geranium oil.)

Linalyl acetate, found in lavender, clary sage as well as petitgrain, normally have gentle actions, and can be used with ease.

Lactones, Coumarins

The amount of lactones and coumarins normally found in essential oils is very low, good since they have some neurotoxic effects which can cause skin sensitizing and irritation. Yet the sesquiterpene lactone, (helenalin), found in arnica oil, seems to be responsible for its anti-inflammatory action.

Lactones have great mucus moving and expectorant properties. Elecampane is often used in the treatment of bronchitis and chest complaints.

Some coumarins, like furocoumarin - bergaptene - (bergamot oil), are severely phototoxic: (skin UV sensitive), and should be used with great care with this in mind.