

Summer Relaxation Begins with Aromatherapy

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Article from Carolina Mountain Living *June/July 2001 issue*

As summer begins, many people are thinking of ways to unwind and enjoy the healing serenity of western North Carolina's mountains.

Visitors and residents can go another step in search of relaxation. Aromatherapy-the practice of using essential plant oils for emotional and physical wholeness-is a holistic healing way to relaxation and peace of mind.

"There is so much more to aromatherapy than people realize," said Kelly Holland Azzaro, a certified aromatherapist, licensed massage therapist and Bach Flower Practitioner at Ashi Therapy in Banner Elk.

"So many products on market shelves boast the title 'Aromatherapy' and are not even made from the essential oils. I tell my clients 'Buyer Beware' when searching for oils on their own."

Azzaro says to follow these important tips when selecting essential oils:

- 1) Always buy from a reputable aromatherapist or aromatherapy supplier
- 2) Watch for all oils marked at the same price
- 3) Make sure to buy oils in dark blue or amber glass or the new aluminum covered bottles, as clear bottles can break down the essential oils' components
- 4) The bottle label should have the company name, contact information and batch number
- 5) The plant from which the oil was extracted should be named on the bottle with the plant's botanical name. As well as safety guidelines.

"Aromatherapy products that are priced the same can be diluted with alcohol and oils or other chemicals that cause the oils to lose their therapeutic values", said Azzaro. "Many of these are actually perfume oils-chemically made in laboratories to smell like the real thing. Perfume oils can smell great, but they have absolutely no therapeutic properties."

Aromatherapy oils, such as ylang ylang and sandalwood are very expensive. Sandalwood trees that grow in India, are rare and becoming hard to obtain. Ylang ylang, which comes from Madagascar, is considered an aphrodisiac and helps to lower blood pressure.

"If a customer sees citrus oil, one of the least expensive of the essential oils, on the shelf with ylang ylang and sandalwood, and all three have been placed at the same low price, the potential buyer needs to look at the bottle more carefully. It is most probable that the oils are perfume oils and not essentials," Azzaro said.

The batch number usually appears on a reputable company's bottle or website. With this

number, the company can actually trace back to where the oil came from and when the oils was harvested from the plant.

A very popular way to administer essential oils is by massage. Massage increases blood flow, and with the help of a carrier oils such as grapeseed, evening primrose, or almond, the essential oils are worked into the skin where they are carried into the bloodstream.

“It takes about 30 minutes or so to feel the effects,” Azzaro said. “Only a few drops of an essential oils or oils are added to the carrier oil. I stress ‘less is best’ when working with essentials. Because they are so powerful, an individual doesn’t need a lot to feel the effects.”

There is more than one way to use aromatherapy. “Many people have the misconception that essential oils must be massaged into the body,” said Azzaro. “But there are many different ways besides massage techniques that can be used to get beneficial results.”

One common way of essential oil use is as simple as placing one to two drops of oil on a tissue to inhale the aroma or by placing several drops in a diffuser or vaporizer to release the therapeutic aroma into the air.

Placing a few drops into a simmering pot of water, covering one’s head with a towel over the pot and breathing in the aromatic steam is also a method. (keep eyes closed with this method).

If an individual has suffered a sprain or burn, a compress can be made. “Just place a few drops of true lavender (*lavandula angustifolia*), an antispasmodic essential oil, onto a piece of cotton or flannel material and use ice or heat depending on the injury. The healing agents within the oil soothe the area. A foot soak with essentials oils is also helpful for tired feet.”

A steaming bath is great for using relaxing essential oils. By placing a few drops into the hot bath water and breathing in the steam, a person is able to release stress.

“There are so many different ways to get a benefit out of the oils. Sometimes, people need to just experiment at home to see how they get the most out of their oils,” Azzaro said.

But she also warns that people need to be educated and know what oils relieve what symptoms. “Some oils such as spike lavender are stimulants and can raise blood pressure. Spike lavender is good for people with arthritis, however persons with a history of high blood pressure may want to work or experiment with a different essential oil or a different species of lavender.”

Azzaro stresses that a good aromatherapist learns about a client’s health background before administering treatment. “The first thing I do for a new client is to get an in-depth health history. I want to know why they came for the visit. Do they have insomnia? Do

they experience a pain in a certain area? From this clinical analysis, I can pick the specific oils to help the client.”

Besides giving a pre-aromatherapy analysis, she also follows up with after treatment results. “If the client doesn’t feel that the particular oil or oils are helping, we can try another. I usually don’t mix more than three at any given time so that it is easier to determine which oils are working and which are not.”

Azzaro has been an aromatherapist and massage therapist for over 18 years. “I’ve had incredible teachers and love learning new styles and techniques,” she said. “I’m very eclectic in my knowledge.”

That doesn’t mean she’s through learning. Currently, she is writing a research paper on the effects of geranium (*pelargonium graveolens*) for premenstrual syndrome symptoms and plans to take a course given by Rutgers University that teaches aromatherapists about the chemistry and distillation process of essential oils.

“There is so much to learn,” she said. By understanding more about aromatherapy, she can better help her clients, not only administering what she knows, but also by educating them.

Azzaro recommends that people interested in learning more about aromatherapy should visit the National Association for Holistic Aromatherapy’s website at www.naha.org or email her through her website at www.ashitherapy.com

Azzaro is encouraged that modern medical professionals may be changing their views somewhat on holistic medicine. “One of my teachers was Jane Buckle, a nurse from the United Kingdom, where nurses are trained in holistic medicine as well as modern medicine. Her book “Clinical Aromatherapy in Nursing”, describes ways to use essential oils in a clinical hospital setting.”

Other books that would be of interest to beginners are “The Complete Book of Essential Oils & Aromatherapy” by Valerie Ann Worwood, “The Art of Aromatherapy,” by Robert Tisserand and “The Practice of Aromatherapy” by Jean Valnet, who is a medical doctor. Many medical doctors in Europe use essential oils on patients.

“Worwood’s book is very helpful for beginner’s because it lists the oils and their effects as well as provides recipes. Tisserand’s book is interesting because it goes into the actual history behind aromatherapy.”

The ancient Egyptians used aromatics frequently to bath and for massage. Inside Egyptian tombs is testimony to their many uses of aromatic oils-not just in embalming the mummies but also in the food urns.

Early Asian cultures also used herbs and plants. Oils and aromatics are found in traditional Chinese medicine dating back before ancient Egyptian times.

“Aromatherapy is one of the first ways that people found in treating themselves for ailments. “It’s a “tried and true” way to holistic healing.”