


RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Aromatherapy An A-Z

Patricia Davis

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Also by Patricia Davis

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SUBTLE AROMATHERAPY
A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER
ASTROLOGICAL AROMATHERAPY

WARNING

Make sure that the essential oils you buy are as pure as possible. Be suspicious of cheap oils. All the essential oil supplies in this book are recommended by the publisher and author although the quality of oils can vary from batch to batch. Buy essential oils as you would fine wines. Fine wines, that is, without the colour, but with twice the nose.

AROMATHERAPY AN A-Z

*The most comprehensive guide to
aromatherapy ever published*

Patricia Davis

ILLUSTRATED BY SARAH BUDD

Vermilion
LONDON

*This book is dedicated to my sister, Barbara, who
provided the initial impetus for its creation*

AROMATHERAPY

An introduction



The art - and science - of using plant oils in treatment.

Aromatherapy is a truly holistic therapy, taking account of the mind, body and spirit of the person seeking help, as well as their lifestyle, eating patterns, relationships, etc.

Although the word aromatherapy was first used in the present century (maybe we ought to spell it 'aromathérapie' in this context as the originator was a Frenchman) to describe the use of essential oils from plants as a form of treatment, the principles on which it is based are very, very old.

Aromatherapy has its roots in the most ancient healing practices of humankind, for the plants from which we now derive essential oils had been used for thousands of years before the technique of distilling oils was discovered. Archaeologists have found traces of many plants of known medicinal value in the burial places and living sites of early humans (the plants can be identified by analysis of the fossilised pollen), and it is very unlikely that their users knew nothing of their healing properties, even if these were stumbled across by accident in the first place.

The earliest people probably discovered by chance that some of the leaves, berries and roots they gathered for food made sick people feel better, or that their juices helped wounds to heal. They probably also observed the plants that sick animals chose to eat. Such knowledge would have been very precious to people who depended entirely on the resources in their immediate environment and, once

discovered, would be handed down within the tribe as part of their shared wisdom.



Pine

When the twigs of certain bushes or trees were thrown on the fire as fuel, the smoke and aromas they gave off may have made people drowsy, or happy, or excited, or maybe even given rise to 'mystical' experiences. If the same sensation was felt by all the people around that fire, and if the same thing happened next time that some twigs from the same bush were burnt, then that bush would be recognised as producing that effect, and possibly regarded as 'magic'. The 'smoking' of patients was one of the earliest forms of medicine, and as religion and medicine were closely bound up with each other, the use of special smokes also formed part of primitive religions. When early people made offerings to their gods of aromatic plants, they were making a very real sacrifice, for they were giving away to the gods something that was very precious to them. The use of holy or magic smoke, in the form of incense, has survived in almost all major religions in both East and West, and the use of fumigation with aromatic plants remained standard medical practice right up to the present century. For example, until relatively recently, French

hospitals burnt Thyme and Rosemary in the wards as a disinfectant.



Thyme

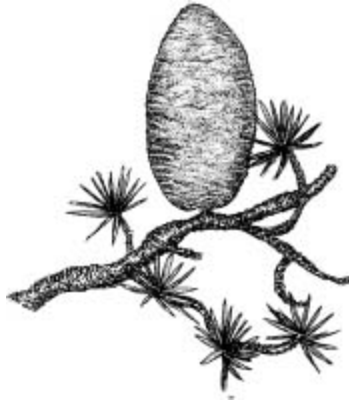
Ironically, the practice was discontinued at about the same time that research proved how effective both these plants are as bactericides! In some less advanced (?) parts of the world, fumigation is still standard practice.

The Egyptians were using aromatics 3,000 years before Christ for medicinal and cosmetic purposes, and to embalm their dead. They set great store by perfume for both public and private use. On important state occasions incense was burnt and slave girls danced with perfumed cones on their heads, which would melt and gradually disperse in the air as they performed. We know from various papyrus documents (the earliest dating from about 2,890 B.C.) some of the plants they used medicinally and the methods of use. They made pills, powders, suppositories, medicinal cakes and purées, ointments and pastes for external use, etc., from a wide variety of trees and plants, as well as animal and mineral substances. They also used plant ashes and smokes. Plants used included aniseed, castor oil, cedar,

coriander, cumin, garlic, grapes and water melon among many others.

Whether or not the earlier Egyptians knew how to distil essential oils is open to debate. No mention of distilled oils is found in the earliest documents, and none of the containers found in tombs would have been suitable for storing essential oils. Large numbers of ointment and cosmetic jars and oil bottles have been found in pyramids, with traces of the original contents still intact. These were mostly fatty ointments or gummy pastes, and the aromas of Frankincense, Styrax, etc., were still perceptible. There are records on clay tablets of oils of Cedar and Cypress being imported, which tells us that an international trade in oils already existed, but these appear to have been infused oils. However, the evidence of wall-paintings shows that, at least by the 3rd century B.C. the Egyptians had a primitive form of distillation.

A little further east, in the Mesopotamian basin between the Tigris and the Euphrates, the Babylonian doctors recorded their formulae and prescriptions on clay tablets, the earliest of which are in the cuneiform script of the Sumerians. Unlike the Egyptians, they did not record the quantities to be used (which were presumably common knowledge), but gave careful details of when the remedy must be prepared and taken - usually at dawn, before eating. A Babylonian king ordered the planting of a garden of medicinal plants, and we learn that it contained apple and quince trees, cucumbers, pumpkins, garlic, onions, fennel, saffron, thyme, mustard, caraway, coriander, roses, juniper and myrrh - in other words, many of the plants which we use today in herbal medicine and aromatherapy.



Cedar

The ancient Greeks acquired much of their medical knowledge from the Egyptians, as well as making further discoveries of their own, such as the fact that the odour of certain flowers was stimulating and refreshing while that of others was relaxing and soporific. They used olive oil (an abundant commodity in Greece, then as now) to absorb the odour from flower petals or from herbs, and used the perfumed oil for both medicinal and cosmetic purposes. Greek soldiers carried with them into battle an ointment made from Myrrh for the treatment of wounds. Hippocrates, still revered as the 'father of medicine', mentions a vast number of medicinal plants in his writings, including a large number of narcotics - opium, belladonna and mandrake among them - as well as food plants such as rhubarb, quince, etc. He wrote 'Let your medicine be your food and your food be your medicine', but he placed even more importance on the moral qualities needed to be a physician, such as discernment, self-effacement and devotion. The 'Hippocratic Oath' is still taught to medical students: perhaps if they were taught some of Hippocrates' methods the world of medicine would be in less of a mess!



Rosemary

Many Greek doctors were employed by Rome as military surgeons, personal physicians to Roman emperors, etc. Galen, who was physician to Marcus Aurelius, started out as surgeon to a school of gladiators, and it is recorded that no gladiator died of his wounds during Galen's term of office. Perhaps this is not surprising, as he knew a fantastic number of 'simples' from which he prepared his remedies. He wrote a great deal on the theory of plant medicine and divided plants into various medicinal categories, which are still known as 'Galenic'. He invented the original 'cold cream' which was the prototype of virtually all ointments in current use. Another Greek, Dioscorides, was a doctor in the Roman army in the reign of Nero. He collected medicinal plants in many countries around the Mediterranean and by 78 A.D. he had collected the information about these plants and their uses into the five huge volumes of his 'Materia Medica'.

The works of Hippocrates, Galen, Dioscorides and others were translated into Arabic languages and after the fall of Rome, surviving Roman physicians who fled to Constantinople took their books and knowledge with them. Via Constantinople, from the translations of Graeco-Roman

medical works and the famous medical library of Alexandria, knowledge built up in antiquity passed to the Arab world. The first great Arab physician of whom we have detailed knowledge was Abu Bahr Muhammed ibn Zakaria al-Razi (865-925 A.D.) who wrote over two dozen books on medicine, many of them consisting of collections of herbal formulae.

But the greatest of the Arab physicians was undoubtedly Abu All al-Husayn ibn Abd Allah ibn Sina (980-1037 A.D.) known to us as Avicenna. He studied logic, geometry, metaphysics, philosophy, astronomy and all the other natural sciences known in his day, as well as medicine - in fact he was a perfect example of what we would now call a 'Renaissance Man'. He was a child prodigy, already famous as a doctor at the age of 18. He, too, left valuable written records describing over 800 plants and their effects on the human body. Not all of these have been identified as he sometimes used their local, vernacular names, but among those that can be reliably identified we find camomile, lavender, rose and others used in modern aromatherapy. He described the all-fruit diet, spinal manipulation and various forms of massage in great detail.

However, his greatest importance in the history of aromatherapy is that he is credited with inventing the technique of distilling essential oils. It now seems more likely that he did not invent the technique but perfected it, as archaeologists have found primitive stills pre-dating his lifetime, but he probably refined the method by adding cooling coils.



Lavender

What was happening in Europe between the fall of the Roman Empire and about the 10th century (the epoch known as the Dark Ages due to the lack of coherent records) we don't really know, but it is almost certain that there was an established tradition of using herbs, much of which survives in present day folk medicine. We do know that by the 12th century the 'Perfumes of Arabia', i.e. essential oils, were famous throughout Europe. Crusading knights brought back with them not only the actual perfumes, but the knowledge of how to distil them. Lacking the aromatic, gum-yielding trees of the Orient, the Europeans used Lavender, Rosemary, Thyme and all the aromatic shrubs that are native to the Mediterranean, and were soon cultivating them much further north.



Rose

Mediaeval manuscripts contain references to Lavender water and many methods of making infused oils. The invention of printing soon led to these formulae being published in books known as 'Herbals', and by the 16th century anybody who could read could have access to recipes for infused oils, aromatic waters, decoctions, infusions and other methods of treatment with plants. The women of a household would have made all these remedies for home use, as well as pomanders, lavender bags and other herbal sachets to perfume the home and protect linen from moth. More complex remedies were bought from apothecaries, who also sold the precious essential oils, known then as 'chymical oils', though great houses had their own still rooms. Floors were strewn with herbs that gave off their volatile oils when walked on, and pomanders or little bouquets of aromatic herbs, known as 'tussy-mussies' were carried in public places to ward off infection, especially the Plague. These practices have often been dismissed by historians as superstition, but in fact most of the herbs used are now known to be powerful disinfectants, bactericides and even antiviral agents. Others are known insecticides or insect repellents, and were valuable against the fleas, lice and flies that carried disease.

Some of the most celebrated herbals were those compiled by Gerard, Banckes and Culpeper in England, Brunfels, Fuchs and Bock in Germany, Nicolas Monardes in Spain – who included plants from the newly-discovered Americas, Charles de l’Ecluse in France and Pietro Mattioli in Italy. Mattioli’s herbal, which was closely based on the work of Dioscorides, was translated into many European languages and sold 32,000 copies, making it one of the 16th century’s best sellers!

Throughout the Middle Ages and the Tudor era, all forms of plant medicine were used by doctors, apothecaries and lay people alike, but by the 17th century the growing new science of experimental chemistry gave rise to new uses of chemical substances in medicine. Nicolas Culpeper wrote passionate denunciations of doctors who used poisonous substances, such as mercury, but was dismissed by many as being either old fashioned, clinging to his quaint old herbs, or just jealous of the doctors’ financial success and position in society. Our current concerns about the side-effects of dangerous drugs is nothing new. Fortunately, though, attitudes towards ‘alternative’ practitioners are now somewhat more enlightened! The spate of witch burning in the 17th century coincided with the rise of early chemotherapy, and was as much inspired by the medical establishment’s wish to suppress the knowledge of the village ‘wise-women’ as by the religious establishment’s wish to stamp out heresy.

Of course, not all the new experimentation was harmful and some important minerals were discovered as a result, some of which – selenium for example – are only now being fully understood in their relationship to health and well-being. The chemist Friedrich Hoffman (1660–1742) did much research into the nature of essential oils, as well as investigating natural mineral waters at various spas. But the damaging aspect of this growing specialisation was the way it took medicine out of the hands of ordinary people.

Chemists continued to research the active ingredients of medicinal plants throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, and identified many substances such as caffeine, quinine, morphine, atropine, etc., which have valid uses, though this search for isolated active principles in plants was already leading away from the use of whole substances in a natural way. Essential oils continued to be used, though, many remaining in the pharmacopoeia until well into the present century. A smaller number are still in general pharmaceutical use (Lavender, Myrrh and Peppermint, for example). Gradually, though, they began to be supplanted by synthetic drugs, mostly derived from coal-tar products, especially in the second half of this century, with the disastrous results that we all know.



Ylang-Ylang.

I would like to break off here to consider the use of plants for healing in the Far East, especially in India and China, where they are part of an unbroken tradition, thousands of years old - in contrast to the situation in Europe where we are only now re-discovering our 'lost' heritage of knowledge.



Garlic

In India the use of plants reflects the religious and philosophical view of man as part of the continually changing process of nature. The most ancient religious texts, such as the Rigveda from 2,000 years B.C., contain formulae, as well as invocations to the plants themselves: 'Simples, you who have existed for so long, even before the Gods were born, I want to understand your seven hundred secrets!... Come, you wise plants, heal this patient for me.' Indian medicine was exclusively plant-based, reflecting the vegetarian principles of the main religions. The Buddhist King, Ashoka (3rd century B.C.) organised and regulated the cultivation of medicinal plants. Great attention was paid to the conditions in which the plants grew, and the people who handled them: 'They must be gathered by a pure and holy man ... who has previously fasted. They must be harvested only in places that are not easily accessible to men, with fertile soil and good drainage, and not near any temple or holy place, or near any burial ground' The medicinal plants of India became famous throughout Asia and eventually found their way into Western medicinal formulae, as well as forming the basis of present-day traditional Indian medicine (Ayurvedic medicine). They

include benzoin, caraway, cardamon, clove, ginger, pepper and sandalwood; cannabis, castor oil, sesame oil, aloes and sugar cane. The essential oils of the first seven of these plants are all used currently in aromatherapy.

China also has an ancient and unbroken tradition of herbal medicine, which is used alongside, and complementing, acupuncture. Again, many of the plants have been known and used for many thousands of years, the earliest records being in the Yellow Emperor's Book of Internal Medicine, dating from more than 2,000 years B.C. The great classic of Chinese medicine, known as Pen ts'ao kang-mou, lists no less than 8,160 different formulae, compounded from nearly two thousand different substances, most of them plants. This represents a greater range of plants than in any other tradition of medicine. Many of the plants used in China are known in the West, too: daisy, gentian, liquorice, walnut, peach, plantain, rhubarb, etc. China tea is a remedy for chills, headaches and diarrhoea. Opium was used as a treatment for dysentery as early as 1,000 B.C. but was not smoked until the 16th century A.D. when, under the Ming dynasty, alcohol was forbidden.



Camomile

Returning to Europe and the present day, we find not only an intensification of research into synthetic drugs, backed by big industry (it was Barbara Griggs who pointed out that you can't patent a plant, so there is little profit in plant medicine), but also renewed interest in the use of plants in a more whole and natural form.

Interest in essential oils and their properties has formed part of this trend since the 1920s, when René-Maurice Gattefossé, a chemist in his family's perfume company, became interested in the medicinal aspects of the oils. He discovered that many of the essential oils used in the company's products were better antiseptics than the chemical antiseptics being added to the same products. He burnt his hand badly in a laboratory explosion, and used Lavender oil to help heal the burn. The effectiveness of Lavender turned his attention to the use of this and other oils in dermatology and he did a great deal of research into their medicinal use. He first coined the word 'aroinathérapie' in a scientific paper in 1928, and published a book of the same name in 1937.

Other French doctors, scientists and writers have continued this work, most notably Dr. Jean Valnet, a former army surgeon who used essential oils to treat severe burns and battle injuries. Later, he treated patients in a psychiatric hospital with the oils and with other plant products, with great success, despite the scepticism of the hospital staff. His book 'Aromathérapie' (translated as 'The Practice of Aromatherapy') is the 'bible' of serious aromatherapy practice. Marguerite Maury, Fabrice Bardeau and Marcel Bernadet have all added to our knowledge through their practices and their books.

In England, although awareness of aromatherapy as a serious discipline is more recent, it has become a widespread and valued form of holistic therapy. Standards of training and practice are very high, and aromatherapy is increasingly practised in hospitals. The majority of

therapists, though, work within the wider spectrum of holistic medicine.

A properly trained aromatherapist will look far beyond the mere application of essential oils, and will seek to help the whole person in maintaining a balance of mental, physical and spiritual health. Essential oils lend themselves readily to a sensitive and subtle approach, for every one of them has many properties, unlike synthetic drugs or even active principles isolated from a plant, which are 'tailored' to treat a specific symptom. Essential oils are often balancing in their effects, helping the body to return from an unbalanced state which leads to illness, to the ideal balance representing health and well-being. Many aromatherapists embrace the Oriental idea of Yin and Yang - opposing energies which exist in a state of dynamic balance. When all the energies in the body and mind are in a state of balance, the person is in a state of health.

Some concrete examples of a lack of balance might be extremes of heat - fever or hypothermia, high blood pressure or low blood pressure, over or under production of various hormones ... I'm sure you can think of many more.

The same principle applies to the mental and emotional planes, too. Depression, hysteria, wild swings of mood (which at the most extreme might be classified as manic depression) are all states of imbalance. Essential oils exert a subtle influence on the mind and, combined with the loving care of a sensitive therapist, offer a truly holistic, gentle and natural alternative to psychotropic drugs.



Melissa

Another important quality of essential oils is the wide variety of ways in which they can be used. Massage with essential oils is the most important method of treatment, for it combines the effects of the oils themselves, with the important element of human contact between the aromatherapist and the person seeking help.



Coriander

The second most important use of essential oils is probably in aromatic baths. Water itself has many

therapeutic properties, as anyone who has ever sunk into a hot bath after a tough day will know, and when these are combined with essential oils, each enhances the potent effect of the other. Baths are the simplest method of use, and can be a valuable way of continuing the benefit of aromatherapy treatment between visits to a practitioner.

The oils can be used in hot or cold compresses for various physical conditions, and mixed in creams, lotions and aromatic waters to help with the health of the skin, whether it is in treating such conditions as eczema and acne or in promoting a healthy, and therefore beautiful, complexion.

Essential oils are readily absorbed through the skin, and whenever they are used in massage, baths, skin preparations or compresses a certain amount of the volatile essence is inhaled. The aroma alone can have a subtle but real effect on the mind, and via the mind, on the body. Inhaling the oils also has a direct effect on the body, as some part of the oil will be absorbed via the lungs and will enter the bloodstream in that way.

Do not embark too lightly upon self-treatment with essential oils. Properly used, they are very safe indeed, but some oils present hazards that anyone using them should be aware of. Even small amounts of oil can build up to a toxic level in the body over a period of time, and some of the oils are very poisonous indeed. Deaths from essential oil poisoning have been reported in the medical press, and two cases of accidental poisoning (fortunately not fatal) have come to my personal attention in recent years. My major intention in writing this book has been to encourage the safe use of essential oils so that as many people as possible can enjoy the health benefits and sheer enjoyment they offer without risk.

ALPHABETICAL ENTRIES

22





Abscesses



An abscess is usually treated in aromatherapy by means of hot compresses placed over the swelling, to reduce pain and inflammation and 'draw out' toxic matter. For a dental abscess, hot compresses should be applied to the face until a dentist can be consulted.

The most effective oils for treating an abscess are Camomile (especially for a dental abscess), Lavender and Ti-tree (singly or in combination).

The person's general health should also be considered. Advice on a non-toxic diet and maybe vitamin/mineral supplementation may be needed, especially if the condition is recurrent.

Absolute



This is the term used to describe materials which are obtained from the plant by means of enfleurage or solvent extraction. Enfleurage yields a material known as a pomade - a mixture of fat and essential oil - and solvent extraction produces a concrete consisting of fats, waxes, essential oils and other plant materials. The pomade or concrete is

treated with alcohol to extract the absolute. These methods are used to extract the essence from flower petals where distillation would distort the delicate perfume, and the three with which we are mainly concerned in aromatherapy are the absolutes of Rose, Jasmine and Orange Blossom (Neroli). Other floral absolutes, such as Carnation, Gardenia, Mimosa, Hyacinth etc., are employed in high quality perfumery but are used only very rarely for therapeutic purposes.

Absolutes differ from essential oils (i.e., those obtained by distillation) in that they have an extremely high perfuming and therapeutic power, and need to be used in low concentrations. They are normally coloured, and are usually thicker and more viscous than essential oils. Rose absolute may solidify in the bottle at room temperature, but quickly becomes liquid again when held in the hand.

The purist view is that absolutes should not be used in aromatherapy because they may contain traces of the solvents such as acetone, ethanol or hexane, used to extract the absolute from the pomade or concrete. An exception is where natural ethanol has been used. In practice, many aromatherapists do use absolutes in small amounts without problems.



Kazanlik Rose

see also CONCRETE, ENFLEURAGE, EXTRACTION.

Acids



Acids (in this context) are a category of organic plant molecules which occasionally occur in essential oils. Many of them are water-soluble, so you will find them in the hydrolat (q.v.) rather than the corresponding oil. They are very good anti-inflammatory agents, and generally calming. Some of them are analgesic. Examples: benzoic acid, in Benzoin (large amounts), Ylang-Ylang, etc.; geranic acid, in Geranium, Rose, etc., and salicylic acid, in Birch.

Acne



One of the joys of being an aromatherapist is knowing that acne can be successfully treated, without potentially dangerous drugs or chemicals.

The condition - commonest in adolescents, but sometimes persisting well into the twenties - is due to over activity of the sebaceous glands in the skin (q.v.) combined with bacterial infection. Too much of the oily substance, sebum, is poured onto the surface of the skin. Dirt from the environment, particles from clothing, and dead cells which continually flake off from the surface of the skin, stick to the sebum and form a 'breeding ground' for bacteria. Pores become blocked, forming blackheads, and become infected,

causing the familiar 'spots'. Liquid seeps from these and infects the surrounding tissues.

Aromatherapists can tackle acne in several ways. Essential oils are used to treat the skin externally to help clear infection and reduce the amount of sebum produced. Massage may be used to stimulate the circulation and help the body to eliminate toxins. The aromatherapist will advise on a non-toxic diet - probably the most important part of the treatment - and make sure that the sufferer is taught a proper skin hygiene routine. The collaboration of the acne sufferer in his/her own treatment is vital, and can help to alleviate some of the feelings of helplessness and hopelessness that are common with acne.

A variety of essential oils may be used to help this condition, and the therapist may need to try a number of different oils until the best one for the individual is found, and may also vary the oils from time to time during the course of treatment. The most helpful oils include Lavender and Ti-tree which are both bactericidal. Lavender is soothing and healing and promotes the growth of healthy new skin. Bergamot also has many properties that help acne, but should be restricted to winter because it is a photosensitiser. Bergamot is astringent, as well as antidepressant (useful, because many young people become depressed about their acne, and the depression may even make the condition worse). Oil of Geranium can be used to balance the secretion of sebum. These oils can be used in facial massage (diluted in a carrier oil) and mixed into creams and cleansing and toning lotions for use between treatments.

Rosemary and Geranium, among other oils, are used for body massage to stimulate the lymphatic system, and so help clear the body of toxins. As the condition improves, wheatgerm oil can be blended in a carrier with Lavender and Neroli and used to reduce any scarring.

Treatment may need to be continued for many weeks, or even months, and it is even possible that the condition may appear to get worse initially, so careful counselling is needed to avoid discouragement.

If acne is seen in a person past their mid-twenties, it is possible that it is due to an allergy, and a different approach will be needed (see **ALLERGY**). (See also entries under **SEBUM**, **SKIN**, etc.)

Acupressure

see **SHIATSU**.

Acupuncture



Acupuncture is one of the therapies which combine extremely well with aromatherapy. A few people are trained in both disciplines, but more often an aromatherapist will work in collaboration with an acupuncturist.

Acupuncture is a very ancient system, having originated in China over 5,000 years ago. It is deeply rooted in the Taoist philosophy which recognises two opposite and complementary energies, YIN and YANG, flowing through nature. Human beings are seen as a part of this whole, and Yin and Yang energies flow through the body in a network of pathways called meridians, Yang energy passing down the back of the body and Yin energy up the front of the body. The two are maintained in a subtle and constantly changing balance. While this balance exists, and energy flows freely, health is experienced, but if a meridian is blocked at any point, an excess or deficiency of energy will be created and illness may arise. By inserting very fine