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Innovative Ideas from the Aromatherapy Experts

A Potent Blend

AROMATHERAPY AND MASSAGE

by Brandi Schlossberg

Using plant extracts to foster wellness has, like healthy touch, been practiced for thousands of years. In a manner both natural and noninvasive, aromatherapy promotes relaxation, improves circulation and boosts one's sense of well-being.

The combination of aromatherapy and massage enhances the benefits of both treatments and forms a unique sensory experience.

"The pleasure people derive from the lovely aromas of essential oils—so long as the oils are high quality—enhances their overall experience and enjoyment of the [massage] session," said Anne Williams, B.F.A., L.M.P., C.H.T.

Williams, the education program director for Associated Bodywork and Massage Professionals, is a licensed massage therapist, aromatherapist, spa consult-



ant and educator. She founded the Aromatherapy and Spa Specialist Training Program at Ashmead College of Massage in Washington and Oregon, and wrote the

book *Spa Bodywork: A Guide for Massage Therapists*.

"Essential oils have physiological and psychological actions on the body," Williams said. "Essential oils can support or increase certain effects the massage or bodywork therapist is trying to elicit."

For instance, if a client comes in agitated or stressed, it may be difficult for her to initially relax for a massage. In this case, essential oils with sedative effects may be used to prompt unwinding.

"The therapist could place one drop of a sedative oil, like Atlas cedarwood, hyssop, sandalwood, valerian, ylang ylang or lavender, in the palms of her hands and ask the client to inhale for three deep breaths

while the therapist's hands are held in an arch over the client's nose," Williams said. "Other sedative oils might be added to the massage oil."

When used on a client's skin, Williams noted, some of the oil will be absorbed and enter circulation within 70 to 90 minutes, thereby increasing the long-term effects of relaxation. For clients who present with muscle tension and pain, the benefit of bodywork may be enhanced with warming, analgesic essential oils, such as Bay laurel, coriander, eucalyptus, fir, ginger, black pepper, rosemary or turmeric.

"Twelve to 15 drops in 1 ounce of massage oil is a gentle blend that is unlikely to cause skin irritation, even in sensitive clients," Williams said.

As an added benefit, the majority of essential oils are antibacterial, and many have antiviral properties as well.

"In general, essential oils boost the immune system," Williams said. "This has benefits for both the client and the therapist because it reduces the chance that someone will pick up a cold or the flu at the clinic or spa."

Williams' preference is a simple blend of citrus oils, such as lemon, grapefruit and mandarin, combined with some frankincense and a drop of thyme oil.

"Clients always respond well to citrus oils because they are familiar, and we associate citrus fruit with health," she said. "Everyone leaves the session feeling balanced, uplifted and boosted."

Before blending aromatherapy and massage, however, it's extremely important to consider the quality of the oils you purchase.

"There is a lot of poor-quality oil touted as pure and therapeutic-grade being sold on the Internet," Williams said. "When low-quality oils are sold, everyone suffers, because the client and therapist don't get to experience the true brilliance and amazing therapeutic potential of high-grade oil."

"The body reacts differently to synthetic aromas," she added. "Often clients get sore throats, emotional irritation, headaches or nausea from poor-quality oils."

To learn how to incorporate aromatherapy with massage, reading a respected aromatherapy text and attending training classes are a good start, but you'll ultimately discover there are limitless ways to tap the power of this age-old practice.

"I err on the side of lots of education, but that said, I think a good book can help therapists begin to use essential oils and other aromatic products sooner rather than later," Williams said. "When you do get training, you find that aromatherapy is a lot like massage—the information you can learn is endless, and you can keep learning and learning and learning forever."



For more information on aromatherapy, visit www.wingedseed.com, call (800) 782-4532 or e-mail info@wingedseed.com.

How Can You Tell if it's Real?

The essential oil trade is complex and encompasses a dynamic process that runs from "seed to bottle." When adding aromatherapy to your massage practice, start by evaluating the credibility of an essential oil vendor using these three categories:

1. Knowledge: Vendors should know basic information about any essential oil they offer, including the Latin binomial (universal plant identification), country of origin (where the plant grows and is harvested), growing practice (organic, regular, wild crafted), extraction process (steam distilled, hydro-distilled, solvent extract-

Vendors should stay current with ecological and human rights issues within the industry to help ensure sustainability.

ed, etc.) and the specific plant part oil was extracted from (leaf, flower, aerial parts, roots, etc.).

2. Inventory: Bottle labels should include all of the basic information shown above, have required FDA warnings and provide a lot-specific batch number for traceability. Vendors should know and follow a procedure for chemical analysis. A good supplier will also be aware of market conditions, making substitution recommendations if an oil is scarce or unavailable. Additionally, they should stay current with ecological and human rights issues within the industry to help ensure sustainability.

3. Integrity: Vendors should provide well-researched safety information and be able to advise consumers of an oil's physiological and psychological effects. For further information, they should recommend trustworthy books, journals and aromatherapy training. Vendors should maintain good business ethics (secure Web sites, register with the Better Business Bureau, membership with trusted nonprofit organizations). Be wary if they offer blatant medical advice or if they're part of a pyramid sales structure. Finally, vendors should be available by phone—not just e-mail—and provide references when requested.

—Text supplied by Samara Botane

Samara Botane has been sourcing genuine essential oils and other plant aromatics since 1995. Continually researching all aspects of the global aromatic community, we strive to consistently improve our products and service, while helping to protect our planet's future.