

[IMAGE]

Creating A Healthy Lifestyle With Aromatherapy

By Shellie Enteen, BA, LMT

The current flood of information about harmful chemicals in products commonly used for personal care, cleaning and laundry has caused thoughtful people to seek healthy alternatives. The good news is there is an easy and delightful way to eliminate many health risks while increasing the benefits by using simple, inexpensive ingredients and true aromatic essential oils.

Skin Care

The properties of certain essential oils that affect skin cell metabolism, circulation, elimination, and the ability to curb bacteria and fungus make them great to use in skin care products. Because essential oils are highly concentrated substances, they must be diluted before being used on the skin (with the exception of lavender in the case of a headache, cut or burn). Essential oils do not mix with water, so a fatty substance is used - usually a cold-pressed vegetable/nut oil such as almond, apricot kernel or sesame. Fractionated coconut oil has had the solid (white) coconut fragrance portions removed, but it retains the same essential fatty acids as human skin, making it a wonderful choice when complete penetration is desired. This long-lasting oil never oxidizes, will not produce a rancid smell and will launder easily out of clothing and sheets. Thicker oils, such as sesame, are highly emollient and desirable for dry skin. Cold-pressed oils can be found in your local health food store, but fractionated coconut may be purchased online. For bathing, essential oils can be diluted in honey (a tablespoon will do), milk (with high-fat content) or bath salts.

image - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark A skin care regimen might consist of steaming, exfoliation, mask, toner and moisturizer. Here are some simple ways to do it yourself and enjoy the cost savings and health benefits. (For optimum results, always choose organic ingredients whenever possible.)

How to make an infusion for steaming: Make an infusion by steeping two organic chamomile or jasmine green-tea bags in 2 cups of boiling purified water for at least 15 minutes. When cool, bottle and label with the date. This will keep for up to two weeks in the refrigerator. Mix some of the infusion with water in a small pan, bring to a boil and remove from stove. Allow to cool slightly, then place a towel over the head and pan to tent the steam for a few minutes. The fragrant steam will open the pores, soothe the skin and

relax the mind.

How to make an exfoliating scrub: Ingredients can include sugar, salt, ground oatmeal and medium-grind cornmeal. Example: Add enough cold-pressed oil to a tablespoon of cornmeal to make a thick paste. Add four to seven drops of an essential oil appropriate for your skin type. (Lavender, geranium and palmarosa are good for all skin types.) Stir. Gently rub this mixture on the face, avoiding the eyes, nostrils and lips. Rinse off and pat dry with towel. Larger amounts can be used for full-body scrubs, which can be applied and rinsed off in the shower.

How to make a facial mask: Ingredients can include clay (green for oily, acne-prone skin and pink for dry and/or mature skin), yogurt, honey and various foods like egg, avocado and banana. Example: For dry, mature skin, use 1 teaspoon of pink clay; add enough infused jasmine green tea or yogurt to moisten the clay until it is thin enough to spread. Mix in three or four drops of essential oil or blend of oils appropriate for this skin type, such as rose, patchouli, vetiver and palmarosa. Apply to the face, avoiding the eyes, nostrils and lips. Rest for 10 to 15 minutes while the mask does its work. Rinse off and pat dry with a towel.

How to make a skin toner: Ingredients for a toner can include witch hazel (low or no alcohol is best), apple-cider vinegar (balances the skin's pH level), herbal infusion or floral water, and essential oils appropriate for skin type. Example: For oily, acne-prone skin, place 1/8th ounce of witch hazel in a 1 ounce bottle. Add six drops of lavender, two drops of juniper, two drops of geranium and one drop of tea tree. Shake well. Top off with distilled water or an infusion of chamomile. Shake well again. Apply with cosmetic pad. Store in refrigerator.

How to make a skin moisturizer: Ingredients can include cold-pressed vegetable/nut oils. Fill a 1 oz. plastic flip-top bottle with the oil(s) of your choice. Add up to 12 drops of essential oils compatible with your skin type. Shake well and apply a small amount to the face and neck, avoiding eyes and lips. Example: For dry skin with broken capillaries, mix 1/8th oz. of evening primrose oil with 7/8 fractionated coconut oil. Add two drops Roman chamomile, two drops lavender, two drops geranium and one drop orange blossom (Neroli). Shake well and apply a small amount to the face and neck, avoiding the eyes and lips.

Cleaning

image - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Cleaning house with essential oils ensures effective disease prevention and boosts the immune system while lifting the spirits with lovely aromas. Mopping

floors is a pleasure when using a fragrant pine- or lemon-based blend. To dilute the essential oils, use 1 cup of white vinegar. Pour the vinegar/essential oil blend into water.

Make a wonderful carpet deodorizer using essential oils and baking soda. Put the baking soda in a glass container, add the chosen essential oils (don't choose those with a potential to stain, such as cedar or chamomile.) Close the lid, shake it up, let it sit for an hour and then shake it onto the carpet. Allow this to stay on the carpet for at least 15 minutes, and then vacuum all traces away. (*Note:* An added benefit is that if you have pets, fleas don't like pine.)

A cup of white vinegar in the laundry will soften clothes. Essential oils like lavender, eucalyptus and tea tree will kill bacteria and viruses in cold- and hot-water wash. Put the essences into the vinegar and add to the wash-cycle water. Studies have shown that eucalyptus eliminates all but the tiniest fraction of dust mites known to survive a "normal" laundering experience. Combine water and eucalyptus in a mister and spray your mattress, pillows, bedspreads, dust ruffles, curtains and upholstered furniture to eliminate dust mites and other unwelcome organisms. Spray this same mixture into the intake vent of air conditioning and heat systems. In a large spray bottle, use a cup of white vinegar and 30 drops each of lavender and tea tree. Shake, then top off with water. Use this to spray the shower and shower doors and to clean surfaces. Studies have shown that lavender and tea tree together are more effective than the chemicals in antibiotic soaps. Vinegar will leave shower doors clear and sparkling.

A Few Resources

For more information on essential oils and carrier oils for skin types, read *The Aromatic Spa Book*, by Sylla Sheppard-Hanger. Donna Maria's *Making Aromatherapy Creams and Lotions* has lots of great recipes that combine essential oils with fruits and foods.

History of Aromatherapy

Not much was heard about aromatherapy in the United States until the 1990s, although the use of fragrant essential oils for health and beauty care goes back to the beginning of our relationship with plants. From ancient times, aromatherapy flourished in the Middle East, India and China. Secrets about extraction methods, along with the precious oils themselves, made their way to Europe through expanded trade routes and soldiers returning from the Crusades. Essential oils and the herbs and spices that were the medicines of the time lost ground with the advent of microscopes and the ability to isolate and make a synthetic form of a

plant's active ingredients.

image - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark In the early 1900s, a French chemist named René-Maurice Gattefossé was badly burned while working in his cosmetics lab. He knew the old lore that recommended lavender for healing burns. In a state of emergency, he used the pure essential oil of lavender that was at hand. Amazed at how rapidly his injury healed without complications, he turned his microscope to the investigation of the healing properties of aromatic plants and coined the term *Aroma Therapie*. Today, a medical student in France can specialize in aromatherapy. Essential oils are regulated by a government agency and the properties and uses are well-researched and documented. However, there is currently no U.S. regulation of essential oils in terms of practice or products. For this reason, it is good to get an education in proper use of essential oils through reputable books and classes. (The National Association for Holistic Aromatherapy is a good resource for both. You can contact them at www.naha.org.)

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