

MAKING AROMATHERAPY CREAMS & LOTIONS

101 Natural Formulas to Revitalize & Nourish Your Skin

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Paperback, 160 pages

ISBN: 1580172415

ISBN13: 9781580172417.

EXCERPT FROM BOOK

One: Aromatic Self-Care

Interest in the use of natural aromatic oils has risen steadily over the past quarter-century as people have grown increasingly weary of the traditional treatments for ailments from minor skin problems to chronic fatigue and depression. Homeopathy, reflexology, herbalism, flower essence therapy, iridology, acupuncture, massage therapy, and many other complementary forms of alternative care are now available. If used responsibly, these modalities allow us to play a more active role in maintaining our health and well-being.

A significant outgrowth of the renewed interest in nonconventional self-care is the fascinating rediscovery of a cousin to the centuries-old practice of using aromatic oils to positively affect the human condition. Today, this practice is typically called aromatherapy, and its proper definition and scope are the subjects of considerable international discussion and debate. The most widely accepted description of aromatherapy encompasses the blending of plant essential oils to promote health, beauty, and well-being. This book concentrates on the incorporation of essential oils in combination with other natural plant extracts, both aromatic and unscented, into handmade skin-care products.

What Are Aromatic Oils?

Aromatic oils are removed by various extraction techniques from leaves, petals, blossoms, barks, twigs, and other fragrant plant parts. Different extraction techniques produce diverse types of oils with different chemical makeups and uses. For example, rose essential oil extracted via the steam distillation method is very different from rose absolute, which is extracted with solvents. These differences do not

necessarily mean that one oil is superior to another, but they often indicate the suitability of the oil for a particular purpose.

There are several types of aromatic oils, including essential oils and absolutes. Essential oils have historically been considered the purest form of aromatic plant material because they are extracted without solvents. As such, they are the oils most frequently used for skin-care purposes, and the most readily available. For the sake of ease, I typically use the term aromatic oils to refer to aromatic oils collectively and am more specific about types of oils as necessary.

Taking the All-Natural Approach

The benefits of incorporating aromatic oils and other unadulterated plant extracts into handmade toiletries are as diverse as the hundreds of plants from which the aromatics are taken, and can vary greatly from person to person. Some people experience the greatest satisfaction when they find the perfect blend of aromas to suit their taste or mood, while others enjoy the process of creating the base product regardless of the final aroma. Still others are most concerned about the effects of the aromatic oils on their skin and will sacrifice a pleasant smell to obtain the desired therapeutic effect. In any case, using aromatic ingredients from faraway lands to create potions that nourish both body and soul continues to be a time-honored and universal pleasure.

The recipes in this book call for pure and genuine aromatic plant oils, which I highly recommend to achieve maximum skin-care benefits. Though some people will no doubt be allergic to or otherwise adversely affected by certain pure oils, the likelihood of irritation is significantly reduced with these oils in comparison to synthetic oils. In addition, since you choose the ingredients, you can remove the offending ingredient(s) by a careful process of trial and error.

Some pure aromatic oils can be pricey, and synthetic fragrance oils can be used. Bear in mind, however, that the possibility of an adverse skin reaction is also increased if synthetic ingredients are used.

Blending and Using Essential Oils

When making handmade skin-care products, you can combine different aromatic oils to create products designed to address very specific skin conditions. In addition, because many aromatic oils are used to affect mood and health, you can select different oils on the basis of your state of health and mind. A classic example is lavender essential oil, which is not only an excellent skin conditioner but also a gentle relaxant.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of an aromatic oil is its volatility rate, which affects not only how long its aroma lasts but also how its odor changes as it is exposed to air. Thus, a combination of three oils that are each known to quickly vaporize will be simplistic and short-lived. On the other hand, a combination of three oils with varying volatility rates will produce a mellifluous fragrance that beautifully highlights the individual characteristics of each oil.

The differences in oil volatility rates form the basis of the art of perfumery. So if your goal is to design a skin-care product to suit a particular skin type, and you also wish to take into account the fragrance of the finished product, you will want to consider the volatility rates of the oils you use. This is most often described by the particular "note" category into which the oil falls. These notes can be likened to the instruments in a symphony orchestra.

Top notes are the flutes and wind chimes of an aromatic blend and are composed chiefly of citrus oils. They are light and sweet, and the first inhalation immediately reveals their delicate and playful nature. Top notes can be sharp and haughty, and they always tend toward extremely high levels of volatility and mischievous activity. They vaporize quickly, though they continue to tease us with their playfulness by peeking out now and again.

Middle notes are the clarinets and violins of the aromatic symphony. They are the character of the blend, if you will, providing support for the top notes and lift and clarity for the base notes.

Base or bottom notes are the basses, bassoons, and timpani of the combination. They are mysterious, heavy, deep, and strong, with an extremely low volatility rate. Base notes are typically imperceptible at first, but without them, the top and

middle notes would battle it out until they both simply dissolved into the air.

Sometimes an oil can take on different characteristics because of the other oils in the blend. For instance, lavender makes a wonderful middle note when combined with several citrus oils and fewer base notes. On the other hand, lavender oil performs more like a top note when mixed with several base notes and fewer top notes.

Safety Precautions for Aromatic Oils

When used properly, aromatic plant oils are healing on a variety of levels. Although natural, these oils are extremely concentrated and must be used with caution. Take the time to become acquainted with their individual properties, cautions, and recommended uses.

Bear in mind that the guidelines for using aromatic plant oils are constantly evolving as additional research is conducted. In general, I offer these basic recommendations:

Because the quality and purity of aromatic oils range from superb to abysmal, as a rule I do not recommend ingestion of aromatic oils. Use these oils internally only upon the specific recommendation of a qualified aromatherapist.

Do not allow aromatic oils to come into direct contact with your eyes or other mucous membranes. Use oils on broken or irritated skin only after consultation with a qualified aromatherapist or your health-care practitioner.

Always conduct a patch test before using any beauty product to ensure that you are not sensitive or allergic to particular ingredients.

Do not use aromatic oils undiluted on the skin unless recommended by a qualified aromatherapist - with the exceptions of very small amounts of lavender and tea tree essential oils.

If you are pregnant, wish to become pregnant, are under the continuous care of a health-care provider, or take any medications, it is wise to seek medical advice before using particular aromatic oils. Be aware of your body's changing needs, and act accordingly.

If you encounter any adverse reactions after using aromatic oils for any purpose, seek the advice of a qualified health-care provider, a trained aromatherapist, or even emergency medical personnel immediately.

Starting Your Aromatic Skin-Care Pantry ((page 33-34))

The Exquisite Aromatics

Though all aromatic oils are wonderful in their own right, one category stands alone. These oils, which I call "exquisite aromatics," have especially distinctive characteristics. The few exquisite aromatics also known for their skin-care capabilities, such as neroli, rose, and melissa, are contained in the Aromatic Skin-Care Pantry.

What Is an Exquisite Aromatic?

Many factors make aromatics exquisite. First, they smell wonderful, which accounts for their use in the world's most famous and recognizable perfumes. Second, many plants from which these oils are extracted produce very small quantities of essential oils, or the oils are removed from the petals of flowers that are too delicate to withstand the heat of the distillation process. Because of these qualities, exquisite floral aromatics are extremely expensive and often adulterated, making the pure ones the truest treasures of the aromatic world.

Exquisite aromatics are frequently composed of substances that are said to influence human sexual desire. For example, jasmine oil contains indole, a chemical also found in human sweat and feces, which is said to draw men to women. These oils are especially suitable for use in romantic aids, such as massage oils and body lotions.

With few exceptions, exquisite aromatics are not recognized for their skin-care benefits. Yet if a remarkable aroma is one of your goals, you would be well served to select a few of these oils and incorporate a tiny portion into some of your blends. Again, be aware that absolutes can contain a bit of residual solvent, so be careful using them, especially if you have sensitive skin. You may wish to simply set them aside to use in perfume blends and in handmade soaps, which are washed off the body quickly.

Face Grace ((page 95))

Face Grace is packed with nutrients to soothe and soften skin, and it has a lovely golden color thanks to the addition of heliocarrot oil, lecithin, and Mercy, one of my Aromatic Alchemy blends.

Makes approximately 3.5 ounces (99 g)

Oil Phase

12 grams macadamia nut oil

10 grams squalene

8 grams heliocarrot oil

4 grams vegetable emulsifying wax

4 grams jasmine wax

4 grams lecithin

2 grams palm stearic acid

Water Phase

60 grams cornflower hydrosol

1/8 teaspoon xanthan gum

teaspoon borax

6 drops Aromatic Alchemy blend of choice

(I suggest Mercy, page 11)

Make an emulsion, following the instructions on pages 85-87.

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