Natural Perfume Making with Essential Oils

Looking for a natural perfume? A fragrance that does not contain a collection of synthetic chemicals, which place a burden on your liver and other detoxifying organs. Wander through any perfume counter at the local department store and your olfactory system is bombarded with aromas. Some have names you recognize like gardenia, jasmine, or even rose. But, if you take a closer look at these perfume formulas, it is unlikely you will find anything resembling plant-sourced material even though they may use the term “natural” or “nature identical.” Don’t be fooled. These terms do not mean the perfume was blended from essential oils or absolutes, which are all distilled, expressed, or dissolved from plant leaves, flowers, stems, roots, or seeds in a solvent base.

Unlike perfumes made from plant-based materials, most perfume counter perfumes are made from a combination of synthetic chemicals, derived from petroleum. These ingredients allow perfumers to create an array of fragrances that are either unavailable or difficult to obtain in nature. Of course they are less expensive, too.

However, there is growing public awareness about the relationship between synthetic ingredients—potential toxins—and health challenges. To maintain optimal health, natural perfume blending is a healthy green alternative. These perfumes are made from high-quality essential oils, which are known to have therapeutic health benefits and are truly natural. In this context, the term “natural” refers to plant-sourced perfumes. The plants are grown or wildcrafted naturally and, preferably, grown organically (without synthetic pesticides) and sustainably whenever possible.

It is fun and easy to create an exquisite essential oil or absolute perfume blend that is as beguiling and aromatic as any department store perfume, but has the added benefit of health-promoting qualities. Let’s take a look at how.

How to Successfully Create a Natural Perfume

Essential oils are a complex blend of aromatic constituents that fall into three descriptive categories called notes: more specifically, top notes, body (or middle) notes, and base (or fixative) notes. Essential oil perfume blends are more successful when they are created with oils from each of the aroma categories.

A top note is like a first impression. This note is short lasting and the most difficult note to reproduce artificially. Top note essential oils include: Anise (Pimpinella anisum), Bergamot (Citrus aurantium var. bergamia), Mandarin (Citrus reticulata), Neroli (Citrus aurantium var. amara), and Peppermint (Mentha piperita).

The middle note is the body of the fragrance. Unlike the top note, which only lingers for minutes, the middle note effervesces for one to two hours. Often referred to as the bouquet or heart of the fragrance, the middle note is easier to reproduce artificially and includes oils like: Cinnamon (Cinnamomum zeylanicum), Geranium (Pelargonium graveolens), Nutmeg (Myristica fragrans), and New Zealand Tea Tree (Leptospermum scoparium).

(Continued on page 2)
By contrast, the base note (also called the fixative or dryout note), supports the top and middle notes. The base note can linger for up to one day, and is selected for a blend because of its resonance, strength, and depth. Base note essential oils include: Cedarwood (Cedrus atlantica), Patchouli (Pogostemon cablin), New Caledonia Sandalwood (Santalum austrocaledonicum), and Ylang Ylang (Cananga odorata var. genuine). Note that East Indian Sandalwood, traditionally used to impart a rich, woody aroma, has been overharvested and is now considered endangered. New Caledonia Sandalwood, which has a similar constituent profile, is an environmentally friendly alternative.

All essential oils contain qualities of top, middle, or base note aromas to some degree. However, when blending a perfume, essential oils are selected for how their notes work in combination. For example, Lemon (Citrus limonum) oil has a fresh top note, a faint body note, and a very faint base note. Therefore, Lemon essential oil may not be a good selection for perfume blending because its scent fades quickly unless it is blended with a tenacious base note that harmonizes.

### Blending Your Essential Oils

By and large, your perfume blend should reflect your personal tastes. However, there are a few general rules to keep in mind.

#### Evaluate strength:
When blending oils together, the strength of each separate essential oil should be taken into account. For example, Chamomile (Chamaemelum nobile) and Lavender (Lavandula angustifolia) may be your favorite scents, but are they balanced? Chamomile is a middle note and Lavender is a top note. If you were to mix one drop of each, your perfume would be imbalanced; Chamomile would dominate. Therefore, to create a balanced perfume you would want to blend one drop of Chamomile essential oil with four to eight drops of Lavender. Try this. It is a great experiment to help you understand aroma dominance.

#### You are the expert!
Selecting five or six essential oils will keep your perfume harmonious and understated. To select your oils, first try to imagine an overall mood, emotion, or experience that you want to portray. Then, narrow your oil selection by association. For example, if you want to capture spring, fresh scents like Bergamot (Citrus aurantium var. bergamia), Lemongrass (Cymbopogon citratus), and Neroli (Citrus aurantium var. amara) would be appropriate. But, here you have three oils that are top-note dominant. So, pick your favorite one or two and then try other combinations of base and middle notes until you find something that works for you.

Once you have made your final selection of oils you are ready to blend. To determine how much of each ingredient to include, base your blend on a small quantity to start, say a 25-drop total. Then, decide what you want the overall scent perception to be. In other words, are you looking for more of a citrus daytime perfume, or are you looking for an intensely feminine floral?

From here, blend in percentages where less is more (it is much easier to add fragrance than to mask or take away). For example, if you want a warm, spicy fragrance, start with five drops of a light citrus, add two to five drops each of a spice and herbal middle note, and then add two to five drops of a floral. Blend from here, adding more or less to preference as you go.

At each stage of blending, take a short break. This will curb “scent overload,” and will also allow the fragrance a few moments to settle into its true nature.

Use perfume-blending strips to test your perfume every step of the way. Write your initial formulas down and when you are ready, use the same ratios to increase the volume of your concentrate.

### From Essential Oil Blend to Perfume
The primary difference between an essential oil blend and a perfume is the inclusion of diluents, which help to harmonize the blend and make it easier to use as a fragrance.

Don’t think you have to add anything further though. As is, you can use your essential oil blend topically, where it will be directly absorbed into your skin. Not only will your blend envelop you in a satisfying aroma but, depending on the oils included, it may also be providing antibiotic or anti-
inflammatory properties as seen with both Lavender (Lavandula angustifolia) and Peppermint (Mentha piperita) essential oils.

Essential oil perfume blends do not lose their aromatherapeutic benefits and can, in fact, improve in aroma. Inhaling essential oil perfume blends can also have balancing, energizing, and calming effects, and with correct storage, can remain therapeutic topically for three to six months after blending.

So, where to start? For an aroma that is long lasting and customized, perfume is the solution. Focus on the end mood of your perfume and the therapeutic qualities will follow. With a few essential oils, base ingredients, and bottles you can create a perfume that is a lavish treat without making a large investment.

Author Bio: Dorene Petersen is President and Founder of the American College of Healthcare Sciences. She holds a BA in Archaeology and Anthropology from Otago University, New Zealand, a Diploma in Natural Therapeutics from the South Pacific College of Natural Therapies in Auckland, New Zealand, where she studied and specialized in aromatherapy, and is a certified acupuncturist with specialized training in Chinese herbal medicine and moxibustion. Dorene serves as Chair of the Aromatherapy Registration Council and is a member of the Research and Educational Standards Subcommittee of the Distance Education Training Council.

To submit a report of a serious adverse event to the FDA, a MedWatch Form 3500A should be used. This form is also called a FDA Form 3500A and can be downloaded from this Web address: http://www.fda.gov/Safety/MedWatch/HowToReport/DownloadForms/default.htm. When submitting a form, the submitter is asked to include: an identifiable patient, an identifiable initial reporter, the identity and contact information for the responsible person, a suspect dietary supplement, and a serious adverse event or fatal outcome. (The FDA defines a ‘serious adverse event’ as one that results in a: death, life-threatening experience, inpatient hospitalization, persistent/significant disability or incapacity, congenital anomaly or birth defect, or an outcome previously listed that requires medical or surgical intervention to prevent.)

References: http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceComplianceRegulatoryInformationGuidanceDocuments/DietarySupplements/ucm171383.htm

Author Bio: Dr. Staruch started her career working in medical research at Sloan Kettering Cancer Center and Cornell University Medical College, both in New York City. She then moved west, and attended the National College of Naturopathic Medicine in Portland. Since her graduation in 1997, she has maintained a practice in Oregon focused on women’s health and allergies as a naturopathic physician. Dr. Staruch is a strong advocate and supporter of women’s natural health issues and has traveled the country lecturing on such critical issues. Natural health is Arianna’s passion. She is extremely excited to be part of the Australasian College of Health Sciences. She finds that teaching is not only a way for her to share knowledge and experience, but often is an opportunity for her to learn from her students as well.
Green Your Life: ACHS Wellness Retreat and Conference
Breitenbush Hot Springs, October 4-9, 2009

Learn how to create and support wellness at our six-day, five-night Green Your Life retreat. ACHS faculty and guest presenters will guide you through a series of presentations, workshops, and nature-based outdoor sessions that promote health and wellness, including: plant identification, distillation, children's health, sustainable living, cooking with mindfulness, and more.

For more workshop and presenter information, visit http://www.achs.edu/course-desc.aspx?pid=169&id=6. To register and book accommodations, call ACHS at (503) 244-0726 or email admissions@achs.edu