

What's That Smell?

By Frances Fitzgerald Cleveland

Mmmm... What are those smells that offer you pleasure and peace? And, pew! What are those smells that would turn your nose up and make you say "Yuck"? First, I ask that you please do not judge me by my smell alone. I could offer you comfort in times of muscle pain, skin problems, stomachaches and headaches, melancholy, low energy, too much energy. This list could go on and on and by now I am sure you are wondering - what am I? I am an Essential Oil. And this just opens up another question: "What is an Essential Oil?"

I am a natural substance extracted from plants and hence given the name "essential oil". I am not greasy like one would think oil to be; on the contrary, essential oils are a volatile oil, meaning we evaporate rapidly. The parts of the plant that I am extracted from include the flower, leaf, blossom, petal, resin, tree, bark, root, twig, seed, berries, rind and rhizome. Essential oils are highly concentrated extracts and they contain hormones, vitamins and antiseptics (we are 75-100 times more concentrated than dried herbs). Some of our uses are antiseptic (prevents or combats infection locally), bactericide (kills bacteria), bacteriostatic (inhibits growth of bacteria) and cytophylactic (promotes cell rejuvenation when applied to the skin). We essential oils have been referred to as the soul of the plant and our drops of oils are considered the plant's jewels.

These jewels of the plants are being used more and more in the healing practice of people and animals. Doctors and veterinarians are starting to contact qualified and certified Aromatherapists around the world to learn more about their work with essential oils. Why an Aromatherapist? Because an Aromatherapist is a person who has studied extensively the science and art of working with essential oils. Dr. René-Gattefossé, a French doctor and the author of "Gattefossé's Aromatherapy"; is considered the father of Aromatherapy. He coined the term "Aromatherapy" to describe his work with essential oils.

Another term, Equine Aromatherapy, describes the work of using essential oils to help horses. The conditions one might treat with essential oils include: skin problems, digestive problems, muscular aches, arthritis and joint pain, fear, stress, anger, moodiness etc. This is just a small list of how we, the all-empowering essential oils, can help your horse. Caroline Ingraham, author of "Aromatherapy for Animals", is the pioneer of Equine Aromatherapy in England and her work is internationally known.

So how does Aromatherapy work? It works through the inhalation (breathing in) or topical application of essential oils. Let's look at the inhalation of essential oils first. Here I am, an essential oil, being inhaled by your nose, and your olfactory system is about to perform an amazing process. I, the essential oil smell, goes up the nose and reaches the olfactory mucosa (epithelium) where smells are collected; next I travel to the olfactory bulb. Here smell is translated into chemical information, which is then translated into electrical signals, which then travel along the olfactory nerves into the brain [can we say that here?] The cerebral cortex in the brain is where association takes place and where the olfactory cortex identifies odors. The odor information triggers the limbic system, which controls emotion and memory, to release neurochemicals (chemicals that affect the brain and nervous system), changing how

you feel and think. Examples of these chemicals are: enkephalin, which reduces pain and creates a feeling of well-being; endorphins, which kill pain and induce desires; serotonin, which helps to relax and calm. Essential oils are used to help trigger these chemical responses.

A horse's sense of smell is very sensitive and very important to him. Horses use smell for selecting food, recognizing predators and individuals, sexual behavior, helping a mother recognize her young, and helping them navigate their way home. Now let's observe a horse who has just sniffed me (remember I am an essential oil). Similar to the human route, the aroma goes up the nostrils and reaches a large cavity called the olfactory mucosa where the olfactory nerves and cells live. Messages are sent to the brain via the olfactory nerves and the brain then determines the smell. Then another part of the horse's olfactory system, the Organ of Jacobson, opens into the back of the mouth and has two tubes connecting in the nasal cavity. It has been suggested that the organ is used for extra screening of inhaled air for chemical odors, and that when a horse does a lip curl (Flehmen response) it allows the odors to enter. It also aids in locating and discriminating between foods.

When a horse is being treated with essential oils the beauty of it is that the horse, when offered the oil to smell, determines if he wants that particular oil at that time. When dealing with horses and animals regarding Aromatherapy, nothing should be forced on them. They should be allowed to choose what oil they want, when they want it.

Topical application should be used with only certain safe essential oils, and only if the horse approves. The essential oils are combined in a base oil, gel base or aloe vera base and massaged into the area being treated. Read the case study at the end of this article of a horse being treated with essential oils that she chose to inhale, and a topical aromatherapy product ("Pete's Equine Remedy", by Frog Works) for the horse's skin disorder.

An essential oil is considered for use depending on the horse's condition or problem. For example if you want to use an essential oil for relaxation or wound healing, you could use lavender. You could consider rosemary for exhaustion or poor circulation. These are just a small example of what essential oils can be used for.

We are very complex chemical compounds and should be respected. If you are considering using essential oils or want more information, you should contact a qualified and certified Aromatherapist. We are complex, but very healing. Essential oils are one of nature's most intricate and beautiful treasures, so next time you take a sniff of us, think about all the nice things we can do – even if we don't smell so good to you!

“Aromatherapy? A therapy or cure using aromas, aromatics, scents? Yes! They can all be therapeutic if used, dosed and administered correctly and at the right time....Fragrances, and thus essential oils, play an important role in our lives.”

- Dr. Foveau De Courmelles