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Aromatherapy -- The Fact & The Fiction

By Lisa Taylor Barger

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by: **Lisa Taylor Barger**

You've seen those mysterious little brown bottles in the health food store. But do you really know what "essential oils" are? Have you seen outrageous claims about lavender instantly curing wounds and found yourself thinking "Whoa!?" Let's take a look at one of the biggest fads to hit North America in years and try to separate some of the fact from the fiction.

AROMATHERAPY--WHAT IS IT?

Though the use of aromatic plant materials dates back millennia, aromatherapy is a relatively new idea. In fact, the term "aromatherapy" wasn't even coined until the 1920s. Though you'll find people who claim aromatherapy can cure everything from AIDS to dandruff let's first look at aromatherapy in its purest form--the use of fragrant plant materials to alter mood, create an atmosphere, and personalize a room.

Ask an aromatherapy aficionado and he'll tell you that "true" aromatherapy uses only pure, natural plant materials. But the truth is, mood can be influenced by any scent--natural or not. Ask any realtor about the use of scents and he might just suggest baking a batch of cinnamon rolls or an apple pie while showing your home to prospective buyers. An old wives tale? Some people think so but others swear by it.

IF IT QUACKS LIKE A DUCK . . .

Let's face it--there are folks out there hawking aromatherapy as a cure for cancer, a treatment for depression, and even as an aphrodisiac. But good scientific studies on aromatherapy are rare. Even among natural health experts aromatherapy isn't taken all that seriously. At best it's a complimentary therapy.

And while we're on the subject of quackery, let's also clarify another common misconception. There is currently no standardized certification aromatherapy program in the US. When you hire an aroma expert you've no way to be sure the person knows what he or she is doing.

OK. IT'S NOT A MIRACLE CURE. SO . . . WHAT'S IT GOOD FOR?

Aromatherapy may not cure terminal illness or heal burns in the blink of an eye but it's a wonderful way to bring natural scents into your home. Essential oils don't have the sickeningly sweet scent of artificial air fresheners or the solvent scent of room sprays. Whether you use them to freshen potpourri, diffuse them into the air, or use them to scent your linens, essential oils are a quick, easy way to inject a bit of your own personality into your private space. Let's look at some of the most popular uses of some of the more common oils:

The medicinal scent of Eucalyptus or Tea Tree will make your bathroom or kitchen feel cleaner, instantly. Rose in the bathroom, however, harkens back to Victorian times, when rose was the scent of

choice in perfumes, face creams, and soaps.

Lavender is the classic "linen closet" scent. Try lightly spraying your sheets and pillowcases about half an hour before you retire in the evening.

Citrus oils like Orange or Lemon make a room feel happy and alive while warm, woody oils like Patchouli or Sandalwood impart a mysterious, moody feeling.

In your bedroom, the deep, exotic scent of Ylang-Ylang urgently whispers "This is a romantic space".

As the owner of

, Lisa Barger is one of the few internet-based experts focusing

on truly therapeutic personal care products. Her cruelty-free products are made without petroleum, dye, alcohol, or perfumes.

Five Tips For Buying The Best Aromatherapy Oils

By Vincent DeLuca

Walking into an aromatherapy supply store can feel like walking into a slice of heaven. The sweet scent of aromatic skin care solutions excite the soul while the tantalizing aromas coming from scented candles steal the show. However, the aromatherapy connoisseur knows that not every scented oil and sweet smelling candle on the shelf contains healing power. Here are five tips to help you find only the best in aromatherapy products.

Tip #1: Check the bottle. If your aromatherapy essential oil is in a clear bottle or a plastic bottle, then

you should not get it. Light has a damaging effect on oil and truly essential aromatherapy oils can be contaminated when stored in plastic bottles.

Tip #2: Check the label. Keywords such as "perfume" or "fragrance oil" are a big sign that the oils contained within the bottle are not pure essential aromatherapy oils. Even though the bottle may have the term aromatherapy printed on it, if you see natural identical oil or fragrance oil on the label, then your aromatherapy oil more than likely contains unwanted perfumery chemicals.

Tip #3: Check for dust. If you see an aromatherapy product on the shelf that has dust on its cap or around its container, then avoid getting it. Dust generally means that your aromatherapy product is old. Like many other types of oil and solutions, as aromatherapy products age, they lose their healing powers and aromatic scent.

Tip #4: Check the price. Different types of aromatherapy oils demand different prices. Pure therapeutic oils that are exotic cost more than aromatherapy oils that are more common. If every bottle of aromatherapy oil is the same price, you may want to reconsider.

Tip #5: Do your research. Each type of aromatherapy oil has a different therapeutic quality. The scent of aromatic essential oils such as cypress is good for treating coughs and asthma. However, the scent of Patchouli is used for anxiety, depression, and healing skin conditions.

Don't let the sweet talk of the salesman override the natural therapeutic power of pure essential aromatherapy oils. Whether you are purchasing your aromatherapy supplies from one of the many great online retailers or from the local establishment at the shopping center down the road, by following these five tips you can avoid the pitfalls and start enjoying the healing power of aromatherapy.

Vincent DeLuca is author of "Healing Health from Home." To learn more about aromatherapy and purchasing aromatherapy supplies, look at the aromatherapy resources available at

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