

Perfect Scents

Discover oils that are essential for a reason—they boost your mood, help you sleep, ease stress and more.

By Mallory Creveling

GET A WHIFF OF THIS: Although essential oils have been around for centuries, sales have reached \$1.2 billion over the past few years and that number continues to grow. The slick uptick is likely thanks to mounting research on the pain-relieving, mood-improving and sleep-inducing abilities of these plant extracts. “A lot of my patients who have anxiety or just everyday stress respond amazingly well to aromatherapy,” says Brent Bauer, MD, director of the Mayo Clinic Complementary and Integrative Medicine Program. Follow our simple tips to soothe yourself—and even your kids—with a little R&R in a bottle. ➡➡

SHOT ON LOCATION AT BEACHES TURKS & CAICOS RESORT VILLAGES & SPA

Top Drops

Five liquids that improve your health, plus how to use them at home

Lavender When it's time to wind down from your jam-packed day, find calm quicker with this floral fragrance. Studies have shown it even reduces anxiety levels in both dental and heart attack patients.

TRY IT Create a serene setting by putting 10 to 12 drops of lavender into a spray bottle filled with 6 ounces of distilled water and 2 ounces of distilled witch hazel, which helps the liquids to blend evenly. Shake it all up, then spritz around the room.

Peppermint If your schedule is about to be sidetracked by a tension headache, the minty aroma will provide fast, research-backed relief.

TRY IT Add one drop of peppermint to a base oil, such as jojoba or coconut, and massage the solution onto your temples near the hairline. Keep it away from your eyes to prevent irritation.

Eucalyptus Feeling stuffy? This green plant's oil relieves congestion and respiratory problems, courtesy of its antibacterial, antiviral and antioxidant properties.

TRY IT Breathe easier by dispensing a few drops into a diffuser so that the scent permeates the room. Caveat: Avoid using around infants, small children and pregnant women, and keep concentrations light for those with asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease—an aroma that's too strong can cause discomfort.

Tea Tree Get a healthy, blemish-free complexion by applying tea tree oil to your skin. Its antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory benefits help treat fungal infections and fight acne, but always dilute before using.

TRY IT Combat toenail fungus or pimples by dabbing a solution of three to six drops of tea tree oil and an ounce of jojoba oil on the affected area. If you experience any irritation, wash off with warm water and soap.

Clary Sage Inhale the essence of this purple flower to heighten happiness, as it has been found to have potential antidepressant-like effects. Rubbing a blend of clary sage, lavender, sweet marjoram and a base oil on your lower belly may also ease menstrual cramps.

TRY IT Soak in a bath with three to five drops of clary sage mixed with a teaspoon of Epsom salts or powdered milk (which fuses the combo) to enhance your mood and alleviate muscle aches. Avoid this oil if you've had breast or ovarian cancer as it contains estrogen-like compounds.

ESSENTIAL DOS & DON'TS

DO test on a small patch of skin before applying all over to check for a bad reaction. If you experience itching, burning, swelling or redness of the skin, become nauseous or stuffy, or suffer a severe headache, stop use.

DON'T ingest oils. They should be taken orally only under a doctor's supervision.

DO exercise caution if using aromatherapy in homes with pets, young children or those with allergies or asthma.

DON'T use on infants or if you're pregnant, unless a doc gives the okay. Studies are inconclusive as to whether oils used by expectant moms can harm the fetus, particularly if taken orally or used topically.

DO toss any oils that appear to have oxidized. Citrus, tea tree and clary sage bottles should be used within one year.

DON'T expose yourself to direct sunlight after applying oils to skin. Some can increase the risk of sunburn or a rash called phototoxicity.

DO keep essential oils away from candles, cigarettes and fire, since these liquids are very flammable.

DON'T use the same oils for a prolonged period of time, especially if applying topically. It can lead to sensitivity and inflammation.



MIX MASTERS

Four ways to spread soothing scents

METHOD	HOW TO	KEY TO CARE	CHOICE PLANTS
DIFFUSER (inhalation)	Purchase an atomizer diffuser, which uses water to automatically disperse scents into the air.	Avoid cinnamon bark, basil, bay, lemongrass, peppermint, clove and thyme. These oils can dry out your eyes, nose and mouth.	For a relaxed setting, choose floral fragrances like lavender or citrus ones like sweet orange.
SPRITZER (inhalation)	Dispense 10 to 15 drops of oil per ounce of water into a small glass spray bottle and shake well before misting. The bottle should be amber, dark blue or green to prevent oxidation.	Aim the spritzer toward the desired area and use a small fan for circulation. Keep away from faces.	To boost energy, opt for clary sage or spearmint. Both also freshen up a room.
BATH (topical)	Add 2 to 12 drops of essential oil (the bottle's label should clarify the number) to a teaspoon of honey, whole milk or Epsom salts. Fill the tub with water, then add the oil mixture so that it disperses properly.	Since oil and water don't mix, it's crucial to use a carrier base (like those mentioned at left). Otherwise, the oil will float on top of the bathwater, which can cause irritation.	Lavender and sweet marjoram will calm your mind and help ease body aches.
MASSAGE (topical)	For kids, use 2 to 4 drops of essential oil per ounce of carrier oil, such as olive or coconut. For adults, use anywhere from 6 to 10 drops.	Never apply pure, undiluted oil directly to skin since this can lead to irritation, rashes or burns. If you have sensitive skin or allergies, proceed with extra caution.	Try geranium or rose mixed with olive oil for a skin-smoothing solution.

LABEL LOWDOWN

Whether you want to purchase essential oils for relaxation or to address a specific concern, visit a local shop where aromatherapists are available to help you choose liquids and customize blends. (Find one near you at naha.org.) Once you know exactly what you need, you can search sites like planttherapy.com, auracacia.com or youngliving.com to get bottles shipped to your door. No matter how you purchase, always check smaller companies' sustainability practices first and opt for those that source from local farmers, test products and make results public. Then use this checkoff list for label items that confirm a top-shelf bottle.

- Instructions for use and caution notes for your protection.
- Both the common name and Latin botanical name. If it's a blend, that stands true for all oils in the mix.
- The words "pure essential oil," meaning there's nothing synthetic included, like fragrance oils.
- Company name and contact info so you can research them or ask questions.



SOURCES: Kelly Holland Azzaro, registered aromatherapist and past president of the National Association for Holistic Aromatherapy (NAHA); Brent Bauer, MD, director of the Mayo Clinic Complementary and Integrative Medicine Program and Rejuvenate at the Mayo Clinic Healthy Living Program; Francesca Fusco, MD, a dermatologist at NYC's Wexler Dermatology; NAHA.org