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Aromatherapy: Benefits And Profit Potential

by Fabienne Guichon-Lindholm

The science of aromatherapy has been used for centuries. Essential oils of cedar-wood, clove, cinnamon, nutmeg and myrrh were used by the Egyptians for embalming. The Egyptians also used infused oils and herbal preparation for spiritual, medicinal, fragrant and cosmetic use. Today, aromatherapy is the No. 1 requested treatment by spa consumers. It can be very lucrative when used in a strategic place and time during spa treatments.

The science of aromatherapy uses the power of essential oils or aromatic essence. It is the heart and soul of the plant—the most powerful, pure and precious part. An essential oil is a very volatile gas. It contains up to 400 molecules including esters, aldehydes, alcohols, sesquiterpenes and ketones, which give the essence a stimulating or calming effect depending on the percentage of each molecule. It has a power of absorption that is much greater than a plant oil.

Research has shown that an essential oil can cross the basal layer of the epidermis and be found in the blood stream within 24 hours. The aromatic essence is obtained through several processes of extraction; steam distillation, which is the most common; expression, which is used for citrus fruits; and effleurage, used for delicate flowers such as jasmine.

Establishing Quality

What makes an essential oil pure begins with the quality of the vegetal. Selecting the correct family, type and species of the plant that will be extracted is important, as well as the part of the plant being used such as the roots, flowers, leaves or seeds.

An orange tree can produce several essences. Aromatic essence can be obtained from the fruit, petit-grain essential oil can be extracted from the leaves, and neroli essential oil can be obtained from the flowers. The place of cultivation also can make a difference in the properties of an essential oil, because of soil, sun exposure, rainfall that year and other weather effects.

The extraction process, the second step toward pure essential oil, must be adapted to each species. The pressure of steam distillation, the temperature and the length of the extraction process is different when processing a flower, root or leaf.

When the end product is obtained, it should not be diluted with other substances such as alcohol or synthetic essential oil. The molecules of the essential oil should be preserved and untouched.

Effective Uses

Each essential oil has specific properties, but they are all bactericidal and antiseptic. The first goal of an essential oil is to purify, cleanse and prepare skin. It will eliminate all bacteria and toxins so skin can function properly, regenerate and have a healthy complexion.

Essential oils can be used in facials as boosters and must be blended with plant oil for better absorption. Some essential oils already are blended with plant oil and can be used directly on skin. Different skin types can benefit from the use of essential oils.

Oily skin can benefit from the essential oil of Melaleuca or St. Thomas bay leaves because it will kill bacteria without affecting skin's texture and hydration level. Geranium or angelica essential oil can help dry skin because it will increase and stimulate the oil secretion of skin naturally, without causing too much oil on the surface. Marjoram essential oil can be beneficial for sensitive skin because it will soothe any irritations and boost skin's tolerance. Mature skin can benefit from geranium or iris because it will stimulate regeneration of cells and provide better blood circulation for an increased plumpness of skin.

Essential oils also are an enhancer of relaxation and a powerful treatment for use in body wraps, massages, and hand and foot treatments. For relaxation, essential oil of frankincense and lavender should be utilized in body wraps and massage. To drain and detoxify excess of water and toxins, the essential oil of grapefruit and sandalwood can be beneficial. To nourish and firm skin, rosewood and lemongrass will regenerate skin structure.

Essential oils change the makeup of skin physiology to achieve a normal balance and youthful stage. Usually they are applied in a very small quantity onto clean skin. They will treat skin and work in synergy with moisturizers. The aromatic essences are absorbed into the deepest layer of skin and the moisturizer, which usually contains plant extract, will condition the upper layer of skin.

Boosting Revenue

Aromatherapy can be quite lucrative when used during treatments at very strategic places and times. Spa management can attempt to increase revenue with aromatherapy by utilizing several effective methods:

- **Creating An Experience:** Aromatic essences are very fragrant and tantalize the senses. Placed in the entrance of the spa, they provide the first moment of relaxation and well-being.
- **Up-Selling In A Massage:** Adding an essential oil to the massage oil or using a body balm with essential oil can add an additional \$5 to \$10 to the treatment price.
- **Up-Selling In A Facial Treatment:** An aromatherapy facial always should be considered an upscale facial compared to a traditional European facial.
- **Retailing:** It is very easy to link the professional treatments and products used in the treatment room to the retail products due to olfactory power. The spa must ensure the professional products used in treatments have matching homecare products.
- **Starting With The Receptionist:** Up-selling can be done on the phone when the customer is booking an appointment. Then, aromatherapy should be smelled throughout the spa. Technicians should explain the aromatherapy treatment when the client arrives in the treatment room. Technicians also should talk about the aromatherapy products they are using and link them to homecare.

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Aromatherapy offers an amazing tool to spas and estheticians to provide a fantastic spa experience, an effective service and comprehensive homecare for the consumer.

Fabienne Guichon-Lindholm is the director of business development for Decl or and Carita Paris. Born and educated in France, she has worked in the beauty industry for 20 years as an entrepreneur as well as a director of operations for a chain of 12 spas in the Chicago area. She also has earned a CIDESCO international diploma and French national diploma.



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