

AROMATHERAPY FOR PET GROOMERS

BY BBIRD

Supermarkets, drug stores, gift shops, and bookstores are only some of the places you are sure to find products designated as aromatherapy. Candles, lotions, potions, air fresheners, shampoos and even dishsoaps are being touted as not only smelling good, but reducing stress or increasing sensuality. Aromatherapy has become a huge marketing trend. Can you say Ka-ching Ka-ching? (sound of cash registers)

Naturally this immense popularity has led to imitation and exploitation of the concept. There is a widespread misconception that anything fragrant has aromatherapeutic value. Not so. True aromatherapy refers to the use of essential oils extracted from aromatic plants and flowers. Synthetic imitations need not apply, nor other perfumes and fragrances. It may smell good and be delightful, even make you sigh, but if it is not botanically derived, it has no *therapeutic* value. It is true, however, that many essential oils are used in perfumes.

The physical and psychological properties of essential oils have been documented through folk medicine for hundreds of years. Most essential oils are antiseptic, and some have powerful antibiotic, antifungal or antiviral properties. Some of the oils can be used to balance the hormonal system, others to stimulate immune response, among the many uses. Psychologically, the essential oils work through the limbic area of the brain to have calming, balancing, and stimulating effects. Most oils have multiple physical and psychological properties - lemon, for example, is one of the most powerful antiseptic and antibacterial oils, considered to be a "purifying oil", and also is uplifting and increases alertness.

The blending of essential oils is done with two things in mind: blending often synergizes the effects of the oils, and oils are blended for fragrance value, seeking top notes, middle notes and base notes for the most desirable fragrant effect. Blended oils form a compound that is greater than the sum of its parts. Most blends are of three to five oils, more than that is less likely to be complimentary.

ESSENTIAL OILS IN THE GROOMING SALON

How might a groomer use aromatherapy? Essential oils can be diffused in

a grooming salon to deodorize and sanitize the air. Used solely for fragrance, an essential blend can create an aromatic signature for your workplace. At the table, oils can be used to uplift, calm or help you recover from stress or upset. Aromatherapy can also be used to help calm the dogs. Essential oils can also be added to a shampoo or conditioner base to help with skin and coat health.

**Deodorize and sanitize* - Lemon oil is an excellent sanitizer for the workplace, as it is strongly antiseptic, antibacterial and can be blended with Ravensara which is a powerful anti-viral, and lavender, another good bactericide which also seems to enhance the therapeutic effects of oils in its company. Citrus oils, such as lime, lemon, bergamot, grapefruit, and orange, are particularly effective at cutting across the odor "values" of musty wet dogs or the other pet odors that can occasionally haunt the grooming establishment.

**Fragrance Statement* - Essential oils can be used singly or blended for fragrance value that can be used in your waiting area or doorway to establish a fragrance "identity" for your salon. The clever groomer can even include something in her/his blend that will have calming and balancing effects on the clients. Here's a favorite of mine. It smells great and look what it does:

Bergamot - Calming and uplifting - good for anxiety or nervous tension.
Lime - Refreshing, uplifting aroma which reduces anxiety and mental fatigue.
Vetiver - cools heated emotions and subdues neurotic behavior.

**At The Table* - Oils can be diffused in your personal space to help you be less anxious over your work (lavender and geranium), less distressed (orange and ylang ylang), and even to control anger (lavender, neroli and rose). Peppermint, lemon and basil are great energizers for that late afternoon slump. There are blends that help with focus and concentration (clary sage, pink grapefruit and lemongrass), and fragrances to help with different kinds of headaches.

**Calming the Dogs* - Lavender is the most commonly used essential oil in helping to calm animals. Basil has been used for dogs with separation or other anxiety, and sweet marjoram is used in calming blends for animals. Cats are notoriously sensitive to essential oils, because their liver does not handle the oils well. For this reason, current responsible thought is to NOT use aromatherapy steadily around cats, or to use only where the cat

has access to fresh air, or to use hydrosols rather than oils. Although cat clients are not endangered by lingering scents in your grooming room, I would not actively diffuse oils when working on cats, except for a light lavender blend. Here is a list of essential oils that should not be used on animals, according to Kristen Leigh Bell, *Holistic Aromatherapy for Animals*:
Anise, Birch, Bitter Almond, boldo, Calamus, Camphor, Cassia, chemopodium, Clove leaf and bud, Crested Lavender, Garlic, Goosefoot, Horseradish, Hyssop (use decumbens variety only), Juniper (use j.berry only), Mugwort, Mustard, Oregano, Pennyroyal, Red or white Thyme, Rue, Santalina, Sassafras, Savory, Tansy, Terebinth, Thuja, Wintergreen, Wormwood, Yarrow. pg. 22

The good news is that calming, balancing and energizing effects of aromatherapy essential oils are the same for people and animals. If you are using an oil blend for yourself that calms anxiety and helps with stress, the dog on your table should not have an opposite effect.

**Other Uses* - Essential oils can be used in massage oil, shampoo, and conditioner to help with skin and coat problems of dogs. This requires study and confidence, and straddles a thin line between our work and the practice of medicine. You do not want to find yourself diagnosing and treating medical conditions. However, there are cosmetic applications that can be considered. First you need to get a neutral shampoo or conditioner base without added fragrance. Carrot seed oil has properties to rejuvenate and stimulate tissue regeneration. Camomile has been used through the ages as a natural anti-inflammatory. Lavender is said to be soothing to the skin and has been used for insect bites. Palmarosa mixes well with lavender and balances sebum production as well as relieves stress. Tea Tree or melaleuca alternifolia, has become popular because of its powerful antiseptic, antibacterial, antifungal properties. Some aromatherapists recommend niaouli, or melaleuca quinquenervia viridiflora, a milder cousin to Tea Tree, which has a more pleasant scent and less potential for irritation.

Essential oils can also be blended for use as natural insect repellents. Lavender is an insect repellent, as are cedar, clary sage, lemongrass, patchouli, peppermint, and tangerine. Kristen Leigh Bell distinguishes between oils for repelling ticks and those for fleas. She recommends blending clary sage, citronella, peppermint and lemon for fleas, and geranium, rosewood, lavender, myrrh, opoponax (I've never found this) and bay leaf for ticks. For fragrance value, lemongrass and clary sage are

fabulous together! For topical application, these oils would be diluted with a light massage oil, 1/2 oz oil to 10-15 total drops essential oil.

Pure essential oils are highly concentrated, potent substances. If used incorrectly they can be toxic or harmful. Only a very few essential oils are safe for direct application to the skin. It is always advised that they be diluted to about 1-3% in a carrier oil. For animals, the dilution is less, often .5-1%, no more. Although some essential oils are used in internal medicine in France, the professional associations of aromatherapists in the U.S. and the U.K. are strongly against taking essential oils internally. The exception would be food oils such as peppermint and lemon and spice oils.

DIFFUSION METHODS

Aromatherapy oils are often used in candles or candle-heated dishes. I do not advise using fire or glass in the grooming establishment. The purists among aromatherapists insist that nebulizers which ionize and diffuse minute particles of the oil are the only true way to go. Others disagree and maintain that electric powered fan diffusers are effective as well. There are also units available that contain ceramic dishes heated by electricity. Heat diffusion methods are likely to somewhat diminish the value of the oil, but these methods have been used traditionally for hundreds of years. Passive diffusers which rely on evaporation are yet another means, and the oils or blends can even be placed on a folded paper towel near your table. I clamp paper towel with a few drops of oils right to my grooming post. In my waiting area I have both a ceramic dish and a fan diffuser. For instant action, I have a nebulizer on a shelf by my front door. If there has been an odor assault in the salon, I can instantly overcome any lingering effects of the offense.

PURITY AND GRADE OF AROMATHERAPY OILS

As the aromatherapy marketplace has become crowded, there is some confusion, inconsistency, and "hype" in claims about aromatherapy products and how they are marketed. There are three basic grades of essential oils, industrial grade used in cleaning products and industrial applications, food grade regulated by the FDA and used in foods, and therapeutic grade used in aromatherapy. Essential oils are easily adulterated by diluting with carrier oil, adding a cheaper oil with a similar fragrance, chemically enhanced to boost a chemical composition among the methods of stretching the value of an oil. Tea Tree, or *Melaleuca alternifolia* has gained such popularity that it is often

adulterated or diluted. Only 100% pure therapeutic essential oils will have the effects we are talking about here. There are no aromatherapy police, so you must purchase from a reputable source with integrity. Price is a good indicator of quality, as good essential oil products are usually costly.

What about "organic" oils? True essential oils come from crops that are grown around the world, often in third world countries, or hard to reach areas where there are no regulators. The concept of "organic" to a farmer in Madagascar or Thailand might be very different from the understanding of a farmer in California, USA. It is the opinion of most established aromatherapists that the growing conditions of climate, rainfall, elevation, etc. are more important to the therapeutic quality of essential oils than the over hyped concept of "organic."

Processing of essential oils: Most essential oils are obtained by steam distillation of parts of plants. Citrus oils are sometimes cold pressed to extract their oils. A few oils such as Rose oil are solvent extracted because it takes so much flower to produce a small amount of essential oil. The method of extraction or processing does not have a relationship to the purity or quality of the essential oil.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

We have become so inundated with botanical ingredients and aromatherapy claims that it is hard to separate out what is hype and what is helpful. True aromatherapy products are based on essential oils carefully extracted from plants that have documented therapeutic value. Some of these oils are very expensive. Just one-tenth of an ounce of rose oil can cost over \$60. Essential oils and botanicals are often combined for synergistic effects. But products containing more than a few botanicals are likely to be utilizing marketing hype.

Aromatherapy can be used in the grooming establishment to create a pleasant environment, to reduce stress for staff and clients, to help lift the energy and to calm the pets. Essential oils can be blended for fragrance or for psychological effects. Most of the common essential oils that are used for humans are safe for dogs. Cats, however, are extremely sensitive and do not process some of the chemicals in essential oils well, even by inhalation. Essential oils can also be used cosmetically for skin and coat health and as a natural insect repellent. Aromatherapy offers the

professional groomer a means of drawing upon our love of fragrance to bring additional benefits to the grooming environment and pets we care for.

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