



Essential Oil Basics

What is an essential oil?

An essential oil is an aromatic, volatile substance found within a plant. It is extracted from a particular part of the plant, like the flower, leaf, resin, bark, root, branch, seed or fruit. Within these oils, hundreds of organic constituents promote beneficial responses when applied or inhaled.

Where do essential oils come from?

Essential oils are sourced from all over the world. At Aura Cacia, we source botanicals from the geographic regions where the plants are cultivated and work to establish long-established, trusting relationships with the growers.

How are essential oils produced?

There are three primary ways to extract essential oils from their plant sources: steam distillation, solvent extraction and expression or cold press.

1. Steam Distillation

The vast majority of oils are extracted using steam distillation. During this process, steam is introduced into a distillation chamber, which contains the plant material. The steam breaks down the plant tissue, causing it to release its essential oil in a vaporized form. The vaporized essences, along with the steam and other substances, pass into a pipe through the condensers. The vapors return to liquid form and are separated from the water, where they're captured as essential plant oil.

2. Solvent Extraction

Solvent extraction is used when the odorous properties of delicate flower and plant material would be altered or destroyed by steam or water distillation, or when a plant—for instance, rose absolute or jasmine—contains very little oil, making steam or water distillation impractical.

Solvent extraction produces a concrete, which is refined into an absolute. To produce a concrete, the plant material is gradually saturated with a solvent. The solvent dissolves the plant's constituents, including essential oils, fatty acids, and waxes. After the solvent is vacuumed off, the remaining constituents make up the concrete.

The essential oil is extracted from the other constituents with alcohol. The fatty acids and waxes are not alcohol-soluble, so they're left behind. A secondary distillation then removes the alcohol, leaving the absolute oil behind.

3. Expression or Cold Press

Cold press, also known as expression, is a mechanical method of pressing citrus peels, such as lime, lemon, bergamot, orange, and grapefruit, to remove the essential oils. The expression method uses pressure to physically squeeze the oil from the plant tissue. This method is practical for citrus because of the unique oil-bearing structure of citrus fruit rind.

How do you use essential oils?

There are many ways to enhance your everyday life with essential oils. The primary applications include inhalation, diffusion and topical.

1. Inhalation

This one's simple. Simply open the bottle or place a few drops on a cotton ball and inhale. With each inhalation of an aroma, thousands of olfactory nerves in the nostrils send messages to the brain.

2. Diffusion

Diffusion is the method of releasing essential oils into the air. Diffusion doesn't deliver as concentrated an aroma as inhalation, but it does extend the aroma for longer periods of time. Diffusion includes the use of vaporizers, diffusers, candle lamps, air fresheners, room sprays and mists, and more. Many of these applications combine water and one or more essential oils.

3. Topical

Essential oils are readily absorbed through the skin, where they mingle with the skin's natural emollients. There are many topical applications for essential oils, including massage oils, face creams, body moisturizers and lotions, foot scrubs, body mists, and more. Because essential oils are so concentrated, however, they must be diluted with skin care oils, water, or other carriers before being applied directly to the skin.

4. Internal

DO NOT use oils internally. Aura Cacia does not recommend cooking with or taking essential oils internally. There is not enough substantiated evidence to warrant this practice and it is a widely misrepresented and misunderstood topic. Essential oils are highly concentrated and toxicity varies with each oil. In addition, aromatherapy products are regulated by the FDA as cosmetics and must conform to cosmetic labeling regulations. Aura Cacia labels all products in compliance with regulations in order to protect users.

Explore more ways to use essential oils in our Be Inspired section.

Essential oil safety

Essential oils are very concentrated. Their safe use requires they be treated with care and respect. The user should be knowledgeable about their properties and actions before any use. Most personal applications require drops rather than ounces.

Whenever you use essential oils, keep these safety tips in mind:

- Do not use essential oils undiluted on skin.
- Keep in mind that the absorption is increased on damaged skin.

- Test diluted essential oils on inconspicuous areas before general use.
- Use photosensitizing essential oils cautiously.
- Consult with a health practitioner before use if pregnant, nursing, suffering from any medical condition, or taking medication.
- Keep essential oils out of reach of children and pets.
- Keep essential oils away from your eyes.
- Do not use essential oils internally.
- Follow specific recommendations for dilution based on the person and application.
- Don't overuse essential oils.

[Learn more about blending and diluting essential oils.](#)