

## AROMATHERAPY NOTES

THE ESSENTIAL OILS – AN ESSENTIAL OIL IS THE ESSENCE OR PERSONALITY OF A PLANT, THE PLANT’S LIFE FORCE DISTILLED FOR USE. THE FRAGRANCE AND CHARACTER OF EACH OIL ARE AS INDIVIDUALLY UNIQUE AS A FINGERPRINT, AS ARE IT’S THERAPEUTIC PROPERTIES AND THE EFFECTS THEY HAVE ON THE INDIVIDUAL. ESSENTIAL OILS ARE NATURAL, VOLATILE SUBSTANCES THAT EVAPORATE READILY, QUICKLY RELEASING THEIR AROMA INTO THE AIR, AS HAPPENS, FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN SOMEONE BRUSHES AGAINST AN AROMATIC PLANT IN A GARDEN. THE GERMAN TERM FOR ESSENTIAL OILS MEANS “ETHEREAL OILS”, WHICH IS A MUCH MORE ACCURATE AND EVOCATIVE DESCRIPTION. SOME 300 ESSENTIAL OILS ARE COMMERCIALY AVAILABLE, BUT, OF THESE ONLY BETWEEN 50 AND 100 HAVE HEALTH-GIVING PROPERTIES AND ARE SUITABLE FOR USE IN AROMATHERAPY.

NOT ALL PLANTS CONTAIN ESSENTIAL OILS. IN THOSE THAT DO, THE OIL, OR ESSENCE, IS CONTAINED IN HIGHLY SPECIALIZED GLANDS THAT ARE PRESENT IN THE FOILAGE, FLOWER, OR OTHER PART OF THE PLANT. THE PURPOSE OF THE OIL IS TO HELP PREVENT WATER LOSS FROM THE PLANT. AS THE OILS EVAPORATE THEY CREATE A BARRIER AROUND THE LEAF OR OTHER PART AND SO REDUCE EVAPORTION. ESENTIAL OILS MAY ALSO PROVIDE SOME DEFENSE AGAINST INFECTION, AND ATTRACT INSECTS THAT ARE VITAL TO POLLINATION.

THE PLANTS THAT CONTAIN ESSENTIAL OILS ARE FOUND MAINLY IN HOT, DRY HABITATS. IN SOME PLANTS, SUCH AS MARJORAM, THE ESSENTIAL OIL GLANDS ARE PRESENT IN THE MINUTE HAIRS ON THE LEAVES, BUT IN WOODY PLANTS SUCH AS ROSEWOOD THEY ARE EMBEDDED IN THE

FIBROUS BARK OR WOOD. IN OTHERS THE OIL GLANDS CAN BE SEEN CLEARLY AS SHINY, COLOURED DISKS ON THE SURFACE OF THE LEAF OR FLOWER.

AT CERTAIN TIMES OF THE DAY, AND PARTICULAR TIMES OF THE YEAR, THE ESSENTIAL OILS ARE PRESENT AT OPTIMUM LEVELS, AND THIS IS THE BEST TIME FOR HARVEST AND DISTILLATION. THE AMOUNT OF OIL PRODUCED BY A PLANT IS ALSO AFFECTED BY THE GROWING CONDITIONS, INCLUDING THE TYPE OF SOIL, THE AMOUNT OF SUNLIGHT IT RECEIVES, AND RAINFALL. FRENCH LAVENDER, FOR EXAMPLE, IS FAMOUS FOR ITS RICH AROMA BUT, LIKE WINE, THE QUALITY CAN VARY FROM YEAR TO YEAR.

ESSENTIAL OILS HAVE A CONSISTENCY SIMILAR TO THAT OF WATER AND MOST ARE LIGHTER THAN WATER, ALTHOUGH SOME ARE HEAVIER. ALL OF THEM DIFFER FROM VEGETABLE OILS IN THAT THEY ARE NOT GREASY. MOST ARE COLOURLESS; THOSE THAT ARE COLORED INCLUDE BERGAMOT, WHICH IS GREEN, LEMON OIL, WHICH IS YELLOW, AND CHAMOMILE, BLUE.

INFORMATION OBTAINED FROM THE BOOK "AROMATHERAPY FOR HEALTH, RELAXATION, AND WELL BEING"

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