

## Articles by Martin Watt & others are below

Articles not by Martin are indicated

With about 30 years of writing articles you will find some repetition but I improved them in 2018. Some issues that cross between marketing and safety are in the file on [safety](#).

### Marketing issues

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### ESSENTIAL OILS SALES VIA AMAZON.COM & INADEQUATE SAFETY WARNINGS BY THEIR SUPPLIERS

By Martin Watt

**Safety:** Amazon say: "The Product Safety Team at Amazon works to protect Amazon customers from risks of injury associated with products offered on Amazon by looking into and taking action on reported safety complaints and incidents". Yet when you try to find out **how to report a safety issue** it is like looking for a needle in a haystack. Amazon are very careful to avoid giving email addresses and you may need to sign up for an account to be able to contact customer services. *See the links at the foot for more.*

I was sent an email by webessentialoils.com requesting I put a link on my website to their site promoting essential oil sales via Amazon. So I then followed the links to the suppliers featured on Amazon. It was horrifying that essential oils **with known hazards** were being sold by these Amazon 'shops' without any or inadequate safety warnings. In addition, the referring blog site above lists every oil as "therapeutic grade". **There is no such thing as a therapeutic grade essential oil, this is just marketing hogwash!**

The blogger above is giving incorrect and potentially dangerous information on her site and in a book. She admitted that this information had been gleaned from online sources. I informed her that most such sources were of doubtful merit and some were giving dangerous information. She then tried to defend herself by saying that it was "down to suppliers to give safety information". This blogger is also recommending essential oils that have never been subjected to formal skin safety tests. She also lists **mustard oil** but fails to say if she means distilled mustard or the infused cooking oil. Distilled mustard oil burns the skin and is banned by most if not all aromatherapy organisations.

**Please readers do not rely on blogger websites for information on essential oils.** See my other articles for more on these people. Many of these sellers on Amazon are amateurs who often have no training in anything to do with essential oils. Anyone that sells essential oils **should** have the authoritative data about essential oil safety which has been available for years.

**A few examples of the lack of knowledge, or not caring about safety, of sellers linked to by Amazon shops:**

1. On edensgarden.com I noticed on the shelf life of most of their oils it was claimed to be "two years". That is fundamentally incorrect unless antioxidants have been added to their oils, particularly with citrus and pine type oils. If you see a supplier claiming a two year shelf life for citrus oils then beware, they either do not know or do not care about major safety issues. They might be relying on their suppliers for such information but that in turn means their suppliers either do not care or are also ignorant about what they are selling. **All large wholesalers who supply aromatherapy outlets have known of these safety issues for many years.** Therefore, such errors as the above on a web site can indicate someone who is buying via small resupply outlets. In the UK it has been the law for years that any customer requesting safety data must be supplied with it. In the USA most of the larger aromatherapy outlets will provide data sheets if asked and some even put MSDs on their site for downloading. Therefore a supplier unable to provide such information is likely to be an amateur and much smaller than their flashy web sites suggest.

2. A company www.neroliane.eu. Are based in France and are making illegal medicinal claims about what their oils can do, but of course most USA customers (their target) have no idea about EU medicines laws. Some smaller French oil suppliers have ignored EU medicines laws for years and no action has been taken by their Government.

**Bergamot expressed:** They say nothing about its severe **photosensitizing** properties.

**Bitter Almond oil:** They say nothing about it being one of the most **toxic** essential oils. Any reputable supplier would only sell the variety that is free of prussic acid. With this company you have no idea what they are selling.

**Sandalwood** has the botanical name "**Thymus vulgaris/L.**" A typo perhaps or just another company that buys and sells essential oils but knows nothing!

3. A US company natureskissproducts.com states "**Essential oils have been used since biblical times**" and lists numerous biblical references in order to mislead their customers. The statement is incorrect; the references in the bible are to infused oils or more often the use of the herb. Such language indicates someone who has been fooled by the lies told by multi level sales scammers.

4. **Calamus oil** sold by a company in the USA called dradorable.com. No mention of the safety issues of using this oil and the fact that the reputable safety authorities in the fragrance trade severely limit its use in products to less than 0.01% which is way below anything that an aromatherapist or natural perfumer would use it at. **Yet it is classified further down the page as "suitable for Bath & Body".**

There is nothing about the concerns of Calamus oil being carcinogenic. Of note may be that while this oil is still on the Amazon shop site, if you go to the company site they no longer seem to sell essential oils. This oil is promoted as: "**Calamus is used to promote cerebral circulation, and to help manage a wide range of symptoms including neuralgia, epilepsy, memory loss and shock**". The medicinal uses given are the traditional ones for the herb, **not** the essential oil. Some of these claims are also illegal in the USA.

**It is so disheartening that the efforts made over many years by myself and a few others on the safe use of essential oils have been made all but worthless by bloggers and sellers on Amazon.** There are examples of essential oils being promoted that are the most dangerous known and have no safety warnings. There are many such blog type sites run by people who know next to nothing about essential oils but that have direct links to Amazon **just to make money from clicks to ads or suppliers.**

I despise marketing that puts sales above all other considerations. These large corporations top managers/owners have some kind of psychiatric malady which pushes them to make cash without any consideration of public safety or people being ripped off. Their only interest is the company share price, nothing else matters. Most advertising agencies in the world have now got this mind set. They will dream up the most misleading ads all to capture the gullible and particularly the young gullible.

**Illegal sale.** This is clearly a problem for Amazon because the laws on that vary around the world. However, Amazon safety staff should have a knowledge of concerns published by reputable International journals. In particular they should have data where Government organisations have created laws banning or restricting essential oils from public resale.

**Inadvisable sale.** There are several essential oils that aromatherapy associations advise their members not to use. For example cinnamon bark, costus, verbena, expressed citrus oils, etc. There are other oils that reputable International organisations ban or restrict in cosmetic products due to known dangers. **You will find most of these oils available on Amazon.**

Unethical sale. A common get-out among suppliers of dangerous oils is that they claim to "just sell the oils and what people do with them is up to the individual". Certainly essential oils are used in a wide spectrum of trades but that said most sellers on Amazon are targeting the general public. On Amazon shops only rarely do you see warnings about certain oils. The supplier may give warnings on their packaging but how many people read the small print. Instead they assume if the item is on Amazon that it must be legal and safe.

If Amazon had any real concern for public safety they would insist that all suppliers submit provable referenced safety data before they allow them to sell via their shops. Any large trader with such huge cash assets should have staff that would check into claims made for the products and safety issues. The public buy from them assuming what their approved traders sell is fit for use. Clearly that is not the case with Amazon. Remember the thousands of hover boards that had to be withdrawn due to batteries exploding? One would think that such an event would prod them into upping their safety reviews departments.

**It is interesting to note that Amazon were fined \$350,000 by The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration for breaching packaging regulations on a drain cleaner that spilled. Nine UPS employees had to be treated for chemical burns. The agency is continuing to investigate Amazon's compliance with hazardous shipment rules.**

time.com/money/4366920/amazon-hazardous-materials-fine/

**Complaints:** There are thousands of complaints against Amazons customer services to be found on the Internet. They seem to have outsourced that activity to countries where the agents command of English is so poor people get frustrated trying to make them understand the nature of the problem. I do not know if the same has happened with the safety department but if it has been outsourced it would explain a lot. I have not dealt with Amazon for years after my own poor customer experience. In view of what is here and on other web sites I hope my readers know what course of action to follow!

For more customer complaints see:  
thripp.com/2015/09/amazon-digs-a-deeper-hole-for-themselves/  
consumeraffairs.com/online/amazon.html

theguardian.com/money/2015/feb/16/giles-coren-declares-war-amazon-prime-free-trial-subscription

http://www.bbb.org/alaskaoregonwesternwashington/business-reviews/internet-selling-services/amazon-com-in-seattle-wa-7039385/complaints/  
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### OILS HYPED BY NUMEROUS AROMATHERAPY SUPPLIERS

By Martin Watt

**This is of particular relevance in the USA where laws on therapeutic claims and consumer safety issues of essential oils are rarely enforced.**

It would be beyond my means to name all of the suppliers involved as there are so many. However, if you see a lot of the oils below on their web sites, **along with medicinal claims**, beware of that supplier.

Below is a sample of a huge list of oils that are sold because therapists and the public have fallen into the trap of believing what oil suppliers and some aromatherapy teachers tell them. The main problems are:

1. 95% of aromatherapy courses and authors have never educated people on the significant **differences** between herbal medicines used internally, and the same plants essential oil used externally. Many in aromatherapy are misled into believing these oils work for the same conditions as herbal medicines.

2. Suppliers are constantly trying to keep a high profile by offering 'new' oils without knowing if they are safe, or more effective than existing oils. They will find a few pieces of academic scientific investigations and start plugging the oil to make sales. They will tell you "xxxxx author or course provider says it is wonderful" to get themselves off the hook without really having a clue about its use or safety.

3. Many of these oils have no history of use in traditional medicine. Most were written about by aromatherapy authors because the perfume or food trade uses or used them. That is misleading and fraught with dangers (see 5.) **If an oil is used in fragrance production in small volumes it may be safe, that does not mean that its use in aromatherapy on the skin, or internally, is also safe.**

4. It is crazy to base effectiveness or safe uses of essential oils based on aromatherapy data resources. That is the basis on which most of the uses of these novel oils are promoted. "Well my customers have used it for years and say it works". You will hear that frequently and it is just a technique used to sell novel oils. **Facebook and other social media blogs are the worst for these urban rumours becoming accepted as reality.**

5. Many oils have been produced for use in the food flavouring and fragrance trades. You should always remember that these trades usually only use **minute volumes** of oils in products, often as low as a few parts per million. Therefore, an oil that has GRAS status for use in food, may not be safe when used at the far higher volumes used in aromatherapy massage, or in some home produced cosmetics.

**The following comments apply only to skin application or internal use. The sale of many of these oils for non skin contact fragrances may be fine. What I have a problem with is:**

1. Aromatherapy suppliers and 'names' that make therapeutic claims with no real evidence.

2. Those who mislead about the activity of these oils with claims based on their use in herbal medicine.

3. Claims based on academic research where the safety on humans has not yet been assessed.

4. Medicinal use claims based only on the major chemicals in the oil.

5. No warnings given on oils that are well recorded as being hazardous.

6. No warnings given on oils where safety is not known.

Do not interpret "safety unknown" as meaning anything other than what it says. It means that the oil has not (as far as I can ascertain) undergone formal safety assessment and therefore no one knows if it is safe or not. Some judge safety based on the major chemicals in the oil, which is fundamentally flawed because minor components can cause allergic reactions. What chemistry is useful for is to assess the potential self life of essential oils due to chemicals that are known to degrade quickly in the presence of oxygen such as the pinene's, d-limonene, linalool, etc.

**The list below is not complete and never will be due to "new" oils constantly being introduced by small 'artisan' producers and aromatherapy suppliers. Note: the large essential oil traders rarely use such oils because their big cosmetics and flavour trade customers will not use essential oils on which safety is not known.**

**Alligator Juniper Wood**, Juniperus deppeana. **Safety unknown.** Hugely variable in composition depending on sub species and habitat. For example, a-pinene can be 5% up to 22% with huge variability in the other components. Therefore the reliability of any therapeutic claims is questionable.

**Aloe Wood:** A perfume and incense product - oil not used in traditional medicine - trees all endangered species.

**Amyris:** No traditional medicine use of this oil - trees all endangered.

**Angelica Root:** The oil was always produced for the fragrance trade - when introduced into aromatherapy, most attributes were based on traditional herbal use.

**Balsamita Carvone:** No idea on the oil and I doubt anyone really has!

**Balsam Peru Oil:** This oil is a **known sensitising** agent and sellers should give a warning.

**Balsam Poplar Oil**, Populus balsamifera: **No skin safety testing.**

**Basil Grand----Basil Bush----Basil Camphor----Basil Eugenol----Basil Thymol:** All these have **No skin safety testing** - massive differences in chemical composition compared to the known tested Basil oils. Declared therapeutic differences are just guesswork based on the major chemicals, a very faulty concept.

**Blue Lotus absolute:** **No known safety data** - no traditional use of the essential oil.

**Blue Tansy**, Tanacetum annuum: **No known safety data** - no traditional use of the essential oil. No traditional use of the herb. The therapeutics are speculation and invention. You will find this stuff being sold by hundreds of suppliers yet none of them know its real safety or efficacy. You will see some who confuse it with Tanacetum vulgare which is an extremely toxic oil. **Beware!!! See below.**

**Burdia:** **No skin safety testing** - don't know about traditional use.

**Buddha Wood**, Eremophila Mitchellii: **No known safety data.** Sold by numerous suppliers with therapeutic claims for which there is no basis. This oil contains some unusual chemicals about which little if anything is known. That can be good or bad, but if the oil is not tested for safety nobody knows!

**Buplevre:** **No skin safety testing** - don't know about traditional use.

**Bupleurum**, Bupleurum fruticosum: **No safety testing.** This oil does have some research on its potential therapeutic uses. However, its chemical composition is hugely variable and thus only research based on the actual source of oil used is valid. Oil from another location may be completely different.

**Cassie:** A Perfume absolute - **never used in traditional medicine.**

**Calamus:** Primary use as a chemical conversion starter material. The only uses for the oil are modern and all based on extrapolations from the herb use - **a dangerous oil.**

**Calamint Lessor:** **No skin safety testing.** Extensive traditional use of the herb; the oil may have uses but we do not know the safety factors.

**Calamint Common:** (ditto)

**Calendula** (Marigold): No such essential oil is recognised by the big essential oil traders or data resources - it is a fragrance trade absolute which has no traditional use as a medicine - all claimed therapeutics are based on use as herbal medicine. If someone is distilling the essential oil then its **skin safety is not known.**

**Calophyllum:** **No known safety data** - no traditional use of the essential oil.

**Cape Chamomile**, Eriocephalus Punctulatus. **No known safety data.** Most therapeutics seem to be based on the oil which contains azulene and it is **assumed** to be similar to German chamomile, yet the main chemical does not even occur in German chamomile!!

**Cedarwood Himalayan:** **No known safety data**, probably OK, but trees are being over exploited and as a result causing flooding down stream from the mountains.

**Celery Plant:** This oil was produced for food trade use only. The traditional use is the seed or its water or alcohol extracts in herbal medicine.

**Chamomile Moroccan:** **No known safety data** - only introduced to aromatherapy as a cheap substitute for German chamomile. Chemistry is complex and contains unknown chemicals with unknown action. Moroccan traditional medicine **does not list the oil.**

**Chervil:** This oil was produced for food trade use only.

**Cinnamon Bark Essential Oil:** This oil is mentioned here because you will come across suppliers selling it with no warnings about how dangerous it is. You will also find stupid and dangerous claims such as "great for digestion" along with several other medicinal claims most of which are based on the internal use of cinnamon bark or bark powder.

**Cistus:** Only the absolute has been tested - not used in traditional medicine.

**Cistus CT:** (Ditto).

**Coco absolute:** **No known safety data** on skin sensitisation.

**Coffee absolute:** **No known safety data** on skin sensitisation.

**Combava:** Another citrus oil.

**Combava Petitgrain:** Another type of petitgrain.

**Nettle and Copaiba**, a codistilled oil. **No known safety data** on skin sensitisation. Since we know stinging nettles contain extremely complex chemistry, this means any oils yielded should be properly tested.

**Cyperus Round:** **No known safety data** - no traditional use of the essential oil.  
Cyperus Nagar Matha: (ditto)

**Cypress Arizona:** **No known safety data** - no traditional use of the essential oil.

**Cypress Wood:** (ditto)

**Davana:** Extensive use of the herb - no traditional use of the essential oil.

**Elderflower absolute or CO2 extract:** **No known safety data** - no traditional use of these extracts.

**Eucalyptus, rosrata:** **No known safety data.**

**Eucalyptus, campanulata:** **No known safety data** - very different to E. globulus the safety and toxicity of which is well documented.

**Eucalyptus, masale (camaldulensis):** **No known safety data.**

**Eucalyptus, divisa:** **No known safety data** - very different to E. globulus the safety and toxicity of which is well documented.

**Eucalyptus, polybractea** - Cineole: Similar to globulus safety of which is known.

**Eucalyptus, polybractea - Cryptone:** **No known safety data - safety of cryptone suspect.**

**Eucalyptus, radiata:** Similar to globulus safety of which is known.

**Eucalyptus, smithii:** **No known safety data.**

**Eucalyptus, staigeriana:** **No known safety data** - very different to globulus which is known.

For several of the above you will come across claims such as "antiviral" and even "Diuretic" etc. These claims are **without any foundation**, but people really believe them.

**Fleabane Common:** **No known safety data** - no traditional use of the essential oil.

**Fingerroot, Boesenbergia pandurata:** **No known safety data.** Any health claims are inventions.

**Fir - Corkbark, Abies lasiocarpa var. arizonica:** Any supplier who tells you such an oil can keep for 3 years cares nothing about their customers health and safety. All oils that are very high in a - $\beta$ -D pinenes are capable of degrading in a matter of 6 months (depending on storage).

**Fragonia, Agonis fragrans:** **No known safety data.** No traditional use of the oil. Therapeutics 100% invented based on the oils composition. You will see a lot of hype over this oil!

**Ghandi Root, Sugandh mantri:** **No known safety data.** Therapeutic uses seem to be all based on the traditional use of the root as herbal preparations. The essential oil was **not** used.

**Garlic:** This oil was produced for food trade use only - crazy to use it in aromatherapy - **a known allergen.**

**Galanga Large:** This oil was produced for food trade use only. **Galanga Lessor:** (ditto)

**Gingergrass:** **No known safety data.** - no traditional use of the essential oil.

**Ginger Lilly, Kapur Kachari, Hedychium spicatum:** **No known safety data.** There are several varieties of Hedychium giving variable essential oil compositions. Most claimed effects seen on aromatherapy sites are taken from the traditional use of the root or alcoholic extracts, **not** the essential oil. The oil has been tested for antimicrobial activity but other safety tested oils give better results.

**Goldenrod, Solidago canadensis:** **No known safety data.** Therapeutic claims are nearly all based on the traditional use of the herb, **not** the essential oil.

**Gotu Kola:** **No known safety data.** No idea as an essential oil is not produced commercially. All info probably based on the herbal use or the macerated oil which is available.

**Greenland Moss-Labrador Tea, Gummed greenlandicum:** **No known safety data.** The therapeutic use claims made are **dangerous and preposterous** such as; "viral hepatitis, enteritis, toxemic nephritis, microbial nephritis and infectious prostatitis". I know of no validated research proving this and in any case it would have to be via internal use and not the external use of the oil. From my research it would seem once again we are looking at therapeutic use claims based on the traditional use of the herb rather than the essential oil.

**Grindelia, Grindelia squarrosa:** **No known safety data.** Therapeutics 100% invented based on the oils composition or traditional herbal use. High in a-pinene and d-limonene and therefore a 3-4 year shelf life (as some suppliers declare) is most unlikely unless they have added antioxidants.

**Guava Leaf, Psidium guajava:** **No known safety data.** Therapeutics 100% invented. Claims on a long shelf life are not reliable as this oil contains a lot of d-limonene know to degrade into skin sensitising agents.

**Helichrysum varieties:** This species is enormously variable in chemical composition depending on geographical location and variety. The safety of H. angustifolia is known, the other varieties it is not known and will vary with each variety.

**Khelkla - Ammi Seeds:** **No known safety data.** No traditional medicine use of this oil - mainly used as a herbal drink. Contains a lot of linalool which may degrade giving a short safe shelf life.

**Kunzea, Kunzea ambigua:** **No known safety data.** No traditional medicine use of this oil. Most claimed therapeutic uses seem to be from a French doctor well known for inventing the use of essential oils. Oil contains a lot of a-pinene which degrades into sensitising agents making a claimed shelf life of 4-5 years improbable.

**Lanyana:** **No known safety data.** - traditional medicine use, no idea.

**Larch-Tamarack, Larix laricina:** **Safety data is vague.** Delta-3-carene has been implicated by some dermatologists as being the sensitising agent and there is a lot in this oil. It also has a fair amount of a-pinene which degrades into skin sensitising agents.

**Lentisque Essential Oil, Pistacia Lentiscus:** The absolute has been tested and sensitisation on some people was produced, but **the essential oil is safety not known.**

**Lilac CO2 Extract, Syringa vulgaris:** **No known safety data.** Therapeutic uses unknown.

**Linaloe Berry, Bursera delpechiana:** **Safety data is limited**-rare reported cases of skin problems. Oil is variable in composition with some sources finding high levels of linalool which is known to degrade into skin sensitising agents. Therefore shelf life is limited. No sound therapeutic use information.

**Hemp Seed:** Only a fixed oil is recognised - any distilled oil is **100% safety unknown.**

**Inula graveolens:** **No known safety data** even though this oil is used by a lot of aromatherapists. The experience of aromatherapists and suppliers can no way be considered an accurate monitor of any side effects of an essential oil. There is no centralised reporting system in place and suppliers cannot be trusted to report adverse reactions reported to them. Some samples of this oil contain a lot of p-cymene which is an acknowledged skin sensitiser.

Although there is a little research on the antimicrobial activity of this oil, most claimed therapeutic uses are based either on the traditional uses for the herb, or are inventions based on its individual components such as Borneol. In addition, the herb is subject to huge fluctuations in its composition depending on where it is grown.

**Jatamansi, Nardostachys Jatamansi** (also known as green Spikenard): **Safety on the skin is vague** as no authoritative testing seems to have been published. The **herb** has been widely used in Ayurveda, and the oil used in perfumery, but its use in aromatherapy seems to be based on traditional use of the herb.

**Juniper-Dwarf, Juniperus communis var. nana:** **Juniper-Rocky Mountain**, Juniperus scopulorum: High in sabinene. Beware of medicinal claims you will come across for these oils such as "detoxifier, supports the kidneys, lymph and respiratory systems". External use will not achieve these claimed effects and **internal use would be very dangerous.**

**Mastic, Pistacia lentiscus:** **Safety on the skin is vague.** The absolute is known to cause skin reactions. Some samples are high in a-pinene which may limit shelf life. This tree produces two essential oils, the leaf and the fruit. Both oils differ markedly in chemical composition. Therefore it is vital to know which oil is being purchased. These distilled oils were not used in traditional medicine.

**Monarda Fistulosa:** **No formal skin safety data.** Traditional use was the herbal extracts. So if you see claims such as "Powerful anti-viral and anti infectious. Liver/gall bladder supporter", they are not the properties of the essential oil.

**Muhuhu - African Sandalwood, Brachyleana hutchinsii:** **No known safety data.** Composition is nothing like real sandalwood oils. This oil is typical of one of those where academic studies have found antimicrobial effects, yet no studies published on its safe use on the skin. The primary traditional use for this tree was for wood products.

**Neem, Azadirachta Indica:** **Safety on the skin is vague.** Although this herb and the fixed oil have been widely used in India, the essential oil was not. That was primarily used as an insecticide. Most therapeutic claims are based on the use of the herb or fixed oil.

**Opopanax** - Sweet Myrrh, Commiphora guidotti: **A safety warning should be given on this oil** because some people have shown sensitisation reactions. Its use in cosmetics is restricted to less than 1%.

**Pallo Santo - Holy Wood**, Bursera graveolens: **No known safety data**. The vast majority of therapeutic use claims are taken from the traditional use of herbal extracts **not** the essential oil. Some samples contain a lot of d-limonene making this oil an easy target for adulteration. High d-limonene can reduce any safe shelf to less than a year.

**Plai, Zingiber cassumunar**: Only the toxicity is known, **no skin safety testing** results published. Most therapeutic use information seems to be gleaned from tests done on alcoholic or methanol extracts, or on the use of the oil in a cream base. Therefore, be wary of therapeutic claims on suppliers web sites for the oil.

**Rabbitbrush, Eriocameria nauseosa**: **No known safety data**. Some samples contain a lot of d-limonene making this oil an easy target for adulteration. High d-limonene may reduce any safe shelf to less than a year. Any therapeutic use claims are speculation or invention.

**Ravintsara** sometimes called Ho leaf, *Cinnamomum camphora*: A vast amount of hype and misinformation surrounds this oil, to call it rho leaf is not correct because the oil declared to be 'Ravintsara' is high in 1,8-cineole and true Ho leaf is nearly all linalool. As with several similar oils, the therapeutic uses were "made in France" by certain authors who invented therapeutic uses based on an extremely faulty knowledge of the true chemistry of essential oils.

**Rhododendron**, Rhododendron Anthopogon: **No known safety data**. Beware of any medicinal claims. There is no known traditional use of this oil. The +b pinenes are high and therefore care with storage times is necessary. University studies - like with many oils - have shown medicinal activity in-vitro but without safety data its use on humans is unwise.

**Rosemary verbenone**, chemotype: **No known safety data**, and differs so much from the cineole variety that no guesses should be made. The chemical verbenone is available as a synthetic additive and trade sources claim it has been used by certain oil trade middlemen to 'create' this oil. Beware of all therapeutic use claims, most are those of ordinary rosemary or are complete fabrications originating from one or two French therapists.

**Rosalina**, Melaleuca ericifolia: **No known safety data**. Claimed traditional use is not correct because Australian natives never used distillation, this is a marketing ploy used by numerous suppliers.

**Samphire** Essential Oil, Crithmum Maritimum: **No known safety data**. p-cymene can be rather high in this oil which makes it a potential sensitiser.

**Sandalwood Australian: Safety on the skin is vague**, animal tests done by Saxton on behalf of Mt Romance in Australia indicate low toxicity. Oil is extracted from wild trees which are \*not being replaced in the wild\*. See [crowswatch report and article on sandalwood in the oils file](#).

**Saro**, Cinnamosma fragrans: **No known safety data**. Therapeutic claims seem to be traditional uses of the herb, NOT the oil.

**Snakeweed**, Gutierrezia arizonica: **No known safety data**. No known therapeutic use data. Oil composition likely to be highly variable due to the numerous sub varieties used.

**St. John's Wort Essential Oil**, Hypericum perforatum: **No known safety data**. The herb is a known photosensitiser making the need for proper skin safety testing of the essential oil vital. All therapeutic use data likely to be drawn from the extensive traditional uses of the infused oil and herbal extract. The essential oil was NEVER used in traditional medicine. Yet another oil that was an experimental distillation and then half the worlds suppliers jump on the band wagon without any knowledge on uses or safety.

**Sugandha Kokila**, Cinnamomum glaucescens: **No known safety data**. Contains lot of methyl cinnamate which puts question marks over its skin safety. No known therapeutic use data. If someone is allergic to cinnamon, or balsams such as Peru balsam they should not touch this oil.

**Tagetes** - Marigold Essential Oil, Tagetes minuta: **A known photosensitiser and sensitiser**. However you will find it being sold with no warnings. Most of the therapeutic claims are once again based on the traditional use of a herbal extract, NOT the essential oil about which little is known.

**Tamalal**, Cinnamomum tamala: **No known safety data**. The oil is high in linalool which is known to degrade into sensitising agents and that can happen rapidly, see old lavender. Therefore anyone who claims a shelf life of 4 years does not give a hot about your health.

**Thyme chemotypes** other than the thymol type: The chemical composition of most of these chemotypes is so different to the thymol type (the safety of which is known), that these chemotypes should be considered **as safety unknown**.

**Trinity blend**: This blended oil contains sagebrush (Artemesia tridentata) on which there is **no known safety data**. It also contains a lot of a-pinene which is known to decay into sensitising agents. Therefore do not believe any web site that claim this oil lasts 3-4 years.

**Verbena (Lemon)** - Lippia citriodora: Safety well recorded and so dangerous **it is banned in cosmetic products**. Most therapeutics on web sites are based on the traditional use of the herb, NOT the oil.

**Vitex agnus castus** - Leaf and Berry oils: **No safety data** on either essential oil. Great concerns over possible side effects on the female hormone system. No sound clinical studies on its safety or therapeutic uses have been published to date. An oil which has been promoted purely on the basis of urban rumour and on the acknowledged actions as a herbal medicine. Certainly an oil to be treated with the utmost caution, if it were up to me I would ban its use as a human medicine until adequate studies have been conducted.

**Xanthoxylum** - Xanthoxylum armatum: **No known safety data**. Traditional therapeutics based only on herbal extracts NOT the essential oil.

**Wild Tansy Oil** - Tanacetum vulgare: **An extremely toxic oil** which no reputable aromatherapy association would permit members to use. The chemistry is hugely variable making any therapeutic uses unreliable. Most seen on web sites is 100 percent based on the past uses of the herbal extract NOT the oil. **Ignore statements such as** "A premier oil for immune system. Known to fight the flu, cold and infections".

**White Ginger Lily Absolute** Hedychium coronarium: **No known safety data**. Do some simple arithmetic on GLC/MS analysis you will find on websites. I have found analysis of this absolute which only gives 66 percent of the components. In such a case the question has to be posed "well what is the rest of it made of" could it be just bulked out with fixed oil, fragrance chemicals, or a cheap analysis which has failed to identify all of the components in the oil? It is common to find 5 percent unidentified, but 35 percent is peculiar. **No confirmed therapeutic data**.

**White Sage Oil** Salvia apiana: **No known safety data**. Although this oil contains around 70 percent of 1,8-cineol, there are 30 percent of other constituents including the pine's which are known to decay into sensitising agents.

**Yarrow oil** - Achillea millefolium: **No known safety data**. Not an essential oil ever used in traditional medicine. It only came into aromatherapy as a cheaper substitute for German chamomile. Most of the claimed therapeutic uses you will see on the Internet are taken from the traditional use of the **herbal extract** given internally.

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## ORGANIC ESSENTIAL OILS

The Reality  
By Martin Watt

See also the next article by the late Bernie Hephurn.

The term '**Organic**' is used to describe food, drink, cosmetics and other commodities. If an item is described as 'organic' by a supplier, it is being used to suggest a superior product. However, the term is misleading because it describes all living things. It is also applied to 'organic' chemistry.

If something is described as "**organically grown**" this has a completely different meaning, but just look at how many products (including essential oils) are sold as "organically grown". It would require an area of cultivated land as big as the whole of Europe to supply the volumes of products in the marketplace.

In the case of aromatherapy suppliers, there are hundreds of web sites using these misleading terms in order to fool their customers. There are others who claim all their oils are "organically grown" when that is impossible to achieve if they sell the full range of essential oils. There are others who buy the cheapest oils they can find and sell them at inflated prices as 'organic', 'wild grown', etc.

**How is "Organically grown" defined?**  
It is not easy to be specific because each country tends to have its own definitions. The standards are mainly set by growers trade organisations and may be adopted by regulatory organisations both Governmental and NGOs. These standards can be good if adequately policed, or poor, leaving the door wide open for market abuse.

Crops and produce can be labelled as 'Organically grown' if they conform to the organisations standards and licensing system. However, some of the organisations offering certificates are just paper pushers and do not conduct adequate or any inspections of the grower - particularly the case with some European organisations.

The criteria which is crucial to organic farming is normally defined as an '**effective soil management regime**':

A first phase of **clearing the land** of unacceptable chemicals has to occur - this can take up to 5 years of normal weathering. Improvement of the soil during this period is allowed such as adding lime to reduce soil acidity, or adding green composting materials. Weeds can be destroyed using barrier methods such as plastic sheeting. When the required time has elapsed, some organisations will conduct their own tests to ensure no undesirable residues remain, while other certification organisations just accept a growers assurances!!

Once the land is considered 'clean', crops are planted. They can be treated with permitted fertilisers such as manure, green composts, or in some cases minerals. Some growers will only plant seeds produced from other organically licensed farms, but this is another claim to be wary of without proof.

**Crop rotation** is encouraged to allow soil fertility to be restored. This can include growing legumes to boost soil nitrogen entrapment. A rotation system may not apply to essential oil plants that stay in place for many years such as lavender, rosemary, tea tree etc. When the plants natural life has been completed or they become unproductive, new plants may be grown on the same spot. Trees can be classified as organically grown if they are wild, or plantation crops provided no artificial methods are used for weed control and pest control.

**Weed control** can be by manual or machine weeding, barrier sheeting, or by dense ground covering plants to suppress the weeds.

**Pests and disease control** can be by using pest resistant varieties and by using a predatory-encouraging ecology, E.g. Ladybirds and other natural predators, or by the application of 'approved' natural pesticides.

Even if all the above are complied with, it does not invariably mean that the plants are not contaminated. Incidents such as Chernobyl and Fukushima show just how far contaminants can travel. Most essential oils exported from the old Soviet republic had to undergo radiological contamination testing and be certified before being imported. Any aromatic plants grown downwind of chemical factories could well be contaminated, despite the growers being certified as only growing organically. There are many such scenarios around the world that put big question marks over the true nature of organic growth certificates.

**Is it the soil or the oil which is organically produced?**  
Whilst the plants may be grown in uncontaminated soil and therefore can be described as 'organically' grown, **the essential oil is a secondary product** resulting from physical and sometimes chemical processing. Therefore, you may have a Jasmine absolute where the flowers were genuinely organically grown, but subsequent chemical extraction techniques mean the end product certainly should not be classified as 'organically grown'. One therefore has to consider how the oil or extract is processed subsequent to the plants production.

Another good example is benzoin. The starting resin may be from wild trees. However, there is no such thing as benzoin **essential oil**. What is often sold as "benzoin oil" is the resin dissolved in a solvent which is often a synthetic one. Therefore if you see benzoin sold as "benzoin oil OG" this is typical trade hype, or a seller who knows nothing about production.

Describing an oil as 'organic' without any specification is therefore just marketing hype.  
**Is the Certificate valid?**

As previously pointed out, various organisations have their own definitions and such definitions need to be evaluated if they are to have any meaning. In recent years there has been a proliferation of various forms of 'certification' and these are usually rather vague. The fact that a certificate is demanded by buyers often means the producer - or more likely the middleman dealer - know they can obtain a higher price. This then raises the question of how genuine and checkable is the certificate and any organisation granting it.

An important part of this question of reliability of certification is that the large dealers in the essential oil trade have to tie up many millions of cash in stock. Therefore, they want to shift that stock as fast as they can. In order to do so, the claims made by their sales force selling to small non-technically equipped suppliers, can be exaggerations or just lies.

When one considers the wide variety of plants which can produce oils and the method of extraction, the problem which invariably emerges is purity, consistency and the absence of biocides. However, **it has not escaped some growers and traders that to label an oil as 'organic' will help to sell it - and often at a higher price**.

Once the raw plant material is processed by steam distillation or solvent extraction, the chemical compounds may change. New compounds are formed as a result - some minor, some major. **An essential oil is a result of processing**. Hydrolysis and oxidation occurs during the process and components which may not be normally be found in the plant can be produced. Due to these changes one has to consider whether any essential oils should really be classified as "natural" even though the starting materials may have been produced in regulated growing conditions.

**Wild is another term which has several meanings**.  
It usually means that the plants are left to grow without pesticides or fertilisers. Cross fertilisation means that the new plants have a 'natural variation' with resultant chemical variation making therapeutic uses unreliable. The plant material is gathered periodically and the oil distilled. If they are trees these may be destroyed completely such as happened with Sandalwood, or their health compromised such as can happen with over exploitation of resin bearing trees such as the Olibanums.

Some Governments have made attempts to get reputable certification authorities established. However, in reality, many of these so called "approved" organisations tend to be paper pushers and nothing more.

**Which oils can be certified as 'Organically grown'?**  
As a general rule trees that are wild and not subject to treatments can be considered as "organically grown" or "wild grown". Herbaceous plants such as rosemary grown on uncultivated hills in Tunisia and other areas can be genuine, but once even that oil has got into the International essential oil traders hands it can be "touched-up". Therefore **traceability is the key** but that is often a difficult task.

Oils produced by farmers in poor countries may be genuinely certified 'organically grown' simply because they cannot afford pesticides, fertilisers, etc. However, it should not be forgotten that there are cases known of big pesticide companies dumping stocks of banned pesticides on such countries. These can then be used by illiterate farmers who are unaware of their dangers.

**Literacy is a huge issue over the classification of plants grown in under-developed countries**. Frequently the peasant farmers cannot read or write and any documentation required by overseas customers will be filled in by the middlemen traders. Even the UK Soil Association was accepting such suspect documentation on essential oils originating in such countries. [Documentation supplied just on the word of the oil suppliers!!](#)

**What are the criteria needed to evaluate an oil?**  
The quality of essential oils can vary considerably. There are variations due to several factors - botanical, geographical, climate, etc. The production and distribution varies according to the agricultural regime, distillation methods, specification, etc. However, even the term 'quality' is open to interpretation. What may be the correct quality for the food flavouring trade, may be very different to what is required by the fine fragrance trade. It must never be forgotten that aromatherapy is only a minute part of the International trade in oils and they do not as a rule set the standards.

The larger traders in essential oils tend to have every batch of oil analysed by specialists in the trade. This is because prices are set on the basis of long-established trade criteria of quality. When ton lots of oils are being sold and bought, big money is involved and the buyers do not want to get caught out with low grade oil sold as top grade. Once you go lower down the supply chain things get much analysed as far as analysis is concerned. The fact an oil is **claimed** to have been analysed means little. There are grades of analysis the same as grades of oil. Most aromatherapy suppliers cannot afford potential analysis of their oils. The tendency is to have a few oils from a potential new supplier analysed to see what they are like. However, that analysis is likely to be the cheapest they can get and it **does not necessarily detect if an oil is adulterated**. The vast majority of aromatherapy type suppliers will simply accept what their suppliers tell them about an oil. Indeed many of them know little more than they have read in the trades popular books (I call them novels).

Some of the reputable middle-men traders in essential oils will not apply the 'organic' or 'organically grown' labels to what they sell because they have been in the trade so long they know these terms are rarely trustworthy. They will sell oils to aromatherapy suppliers without such descriptions who then add their own OG labels. The market is flooded with such traders. Often this lie is proliferated because the suppliers know that their customers will not purchase perfectly good oils unless fancy marketing terms are used. Therefore, often the blame is with customer demands in turn due to inaccurate information in the trades education systems.

You must beware of those who claim their oils are pesticide free. Routine analysis of essential oils does NOT detect pesticide residues. Only very large wholesale traders can afford such testing and this is rare.

**A few examples of trade hype taken from another article**.  
"We grow all our own plants and distill them".  
Classic sales hype that one. Since when did sandalwood trees grow in France, or Ylang trees grow in the USA, or ravensara 'wild' grown in France? I have seen this all on the literature from certain essential oil suppliers.

"We don't grow them all ourselves, but we inspect all the people that grow the plants for us." I have a simple answer to that, **hugobush!**

"We own the farms in x,y,z." Ha, Ha, Ha!!!

"All our oils come only from organically grown or wild plants".  
In the majority of cases this is hype. The International essential oil trade is a massive agricultural business. There is no sound evidence that organically grown essential oils are any better than those grown on a commercial scale. Indeed, in many cases they will not be of such good olfactory quality if they have been grown in old copper stills "on the farm". If you want to support organic growers that is a fine thing to do, but please try and get some evidence that you are not just throwing your money into a con artists pocket.

Another good indication of an intention to mislead is a web site packed with impressive looking conservation and organic growers logos. This always sets alarm bells ringing in my head. Particularly when you can't work out what the heck they mean.

The next one is not so much how to spot a con, as how to spot someone who does not have a clue about what they are selling. It is suppliers who sell lily of the valley, apple blossom, strawberry, musk, etc. and in their literature describe them as 'essential oils'. Many of you will of course know that these are all synthetic.

**Conclusion:**  
The situation for an individual buyer is extremely confusing. The best means is the analytical profile of an essential oil, but this is principally concerned with purity rather than the growth methods of the plants. It is up to the individual buyer to examine the parameters that are given to an oil and never ever rely on those who say "I trust my supplier". A few are excellent, but hundreds who seem to be good based on BS marketing are far from it.

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## Buying Essential Oils - and Absolutes.

By the late Bernie Hephurn

**Introduction:** This article by Bernie is some years old, but it is still very informative. Most parts remain valid and it is a better insight into the real trade in aromatic oils than the hype that most aromatherapists and natural perfumers are getting. Bernie was one of the first (mid 1980s) suppliers to aromatherapists in the UK. He was a retired teacher and always researched subjects in great detail. He did not just take his suppliers word for what they were selling him. Instead he visited the big fragrance and flavor companies in the UK and France who then were the main suppliers of essential oils to this 'new' trade. He quickly realised that a trade body was needed just for aromatherapy suppliers in order to establish quality standards and other issues. At this time many people were setting up businesses supplying aromatherapists, yet they had not a clue about the subject and many of them got most of their information from Bernie.

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**Start:**  
If you are buying essential oils and absolutes it can appear to be a somewhat daunting experience. Today there are the numerous distributors varying from the national supermarkets to individual aromatherapists, aromatherapy companies, schools, clinics, and traders. Words appear such as 'pure', 'true', 'natural', 'organic', 'Certificated', 'tested', 'approved by', dynamic aroma and so on. Only a few of these terms are defined. All this coupled with the vast array of essential oils can present difficulties in understanding the way in which essential oils get to the ultimate user. Sometimes you will have been advised on how to buy oils by a tutor if you were on an aromatherapy course. However, the world of essential oils, perfumes and flavours is quite complex and sound information does not come easy. Worse, there is an awful lot of information around which is either confusing or conflicting. The central thing to remember is that essential oil crops are very similar to other agricultural crops and therefore there need be no mystique about the subject.

Like all plant produce, the supply chain can be fairly long, but it is important to see how it operates. The way as with all human activity there may always be charlatans along the then who want to make a quick 'buck' at your expense and lack of information. The object of this brief article is to try and dispel some of the mythology which has grown up over the years.

Briefly the chain of supply includes:  
1. The Grower or original 'collector'.  
2. The Distillation Unit.  
3. The Trading Chain  
4. The Oil Companies.  
5. The Aromatherapy Companies.  
6. The End User. Aromatherapists, Clinics, Schools, Shops, Supermarkets, the public.

**1. THE GROWER OR PRODUCER.**  
The grower or producer of the plants which produce an essential oil or absolute are principally concerned with several factors. They need to grow an enormous number of plants which can be harvested at a certain time of the year. The grower may have to invest large sums of money to prepare the land, seed or plant, greenhouse cultivation, careful plant nurturing, cropping and preparations for distillation. Growing plants presents its own set of difficulties. Many books and Courses can stress the botanical name of a plant and although this is a useful guide for many plants the name may not apply. The grower is concerned with growing a specific type of plant which will produce an oil when distilled.

Moreover, they will want to produce an oil acceptable to the market place. In many countries the cultivar is one which may be chosen locally for its growth habit and this includes its regeneration, longevity and ability to withstand climatic conditions. This may be quite different from the 'original stock' as identified by its 'Species name'. The oil distilled from the plant stock may vary from the original. In some cases the cultivar may change to produce an oil with a specific oil composition. This would then be known as a chemical race or chemotype. As every gardener knows, 'sports' appear from time to time which are often different in colour, habit and growth pattern from plants of the same species. If these are encouraged, the farmer could use these 'sports' to obtain cuttings of them and produce a whole family of offsprings from them. In this way 'clones' are introduced into the market place which may produce essential oil quite different from the original plant stock.

Whilst it is useful to have the scientific Latin name for a plant, it cannot be assumed that it is correct for the plant which is growing in the field. Geranium is a case in point where the names often quoted may be incorrect. Although Pelargonium graveolens is normally listed for Geranium oil (Only P.capitatum and P. tatarum is given for INCI name) it is highly unlikely to exist any longer. It takes about ten years for a country's National Committee to get a name approved by the International Botanical Nomenclature Organisation. To further confuse matters, different Legislative Bodies do not agree on names of certain oil plants. You will find that Brussels gives Mandarin (Citrus aurantium sp) as Citrus amara and Grapefruit (Citrus paradisi) as Citrus grandis. Names in books are not always correct.

The economics of oil production are wide wide and the competition can be quite severe. If massive amounts of Chinese Geranium oil are produced, the price may fall and this can affect the ability of Egypt to sell their Geranium oil at a competitive price. There is always a demand for land to be used for house building and industrial uses and this puts pressure on that land so that if the price falls, it may be uneconomic to grow the plants for oil. Similarly, if the workers on the field are not paid a good wage, they will simply not work for very low wages.

Other crops can be affected by natural disasters such as fire, political turmoil and production changes. Indonesia had a series of destructive fires during 1997 which resulted in very little Patchouli oil ( Pogostemon patchouli) being produced. Increased demands for spicy foods and flavours for use in potato and other crisps increases the demand for Pepper oil and other spice oils. This puts pressure on certain oils which invariably increases the price as demands exceed supply.

Trees present a different set of values. They normally have a long life and therefore the oil tends to have a relatively stable composition. Indian Sandalwood (Santalum album) for example can grow for about 70 years before it is cut down to use the heartwood which contains the oil. Though due to the continued loss of trees new experiments are being made to produce plantations of younger trees. However, because the growth period is so long and the demand exceeds supplies, the Indian Governments attempts to reduce production has led to pirates cutting trees illegally and available oil being 'extended' by unscrupulous traders. This is also occurring with the Brazilian Rosewood tree (Aniba rosaeodora), (Syn Bois de Rose) as the trees continues to be cut down in the Brazilian Forests. Plantations to grow the trees and the leaves appear to be successful in producing an oil which is very close to the original. This is being done in Guyana. This trend is likely to expand as the demand for the oil continues. Tea Tree Oil (Melaleuca alternifolia) which is currently undergoing an enormous expansion programme is now almost exclusively grown in plantations which can be coppiced regularly. The original tea tree oil was taken from virgin stands of trees in New South Wales, a practice which now goes against the 'green' and conservation lobby and is also not regarded as very ethical from an ecological point of view. It is also illegal, but labelled to control. A sad fact is that pharmacists in Australia now require it to be labelled as a poison.

**If people tell you 'they have their own plantations' forget it.** Strange thing - the prices are always hiked up and advertised as 'very special'. It was somewhat reminiscent of the Medicine men of the American Plains of the last century who travelled from town to town in covered wagons selling their 'elixirs'. They sold their stock and moved out quietly overnight. In the European Union at the moment there is a trend to get some support from the Union for initiating new crops with financial help. However, this requires dedicated work by people who have the technical ability to bring the growers and their crops together for the next stage in their programme.

However, when oil is sometimes produced as for example Melissa Oil in Ireland (Whitehall Farm) and Wales (Clwydian Oils) over the past few years it has limited sales because it is expensive. Now there is the new development of English Oils by The English Camomile Company. In spite of the recent survey in Aromatherapy Quarterly about all aromatherapists only wanting 'pure oils' this has not borne out by companies in the Melissa oil business. The demand for essential oils is growing and demand usually exceeds supply. As the European Farming industry is collapsing in many countries, especially in Britain there is an enormous opportunity for farmers to look at essential oil plants as a viable alternative.

**2. THE DISTILLATION OR EXTRACTION PROCESS.**  
The extraction of the oil or absolute from the parent plant can take several forms. It is often assumed that 'oils are steam distilled' and 'absolutes are solvent extracted'. This is an over simplification. There are many different methods of producing oils from the parent plant (or even part of the plant).

Original distillation methods go back many centuries to where the plant materials was treated with steam and the resultant vapour was cooled and collected and any oil skimmed or drawn off the top of the water. The original cucurbit and alembic of the Arabian chemists has come a long way in the past 1,000 years. In particular the last 100 years has seen a development towards more sophisticated methods to collect every drop of oil available. The 'oil' isolation techniques are quite extensive.

'EXTRACTION' METHODS.  
1. Physical process - Cold Pressing.  
2. Dry Empyreumatic Distillation.  
3. Enzyme Release - Water Distillation.  
4. Water Distillation - With or Without Cohobation. (recycling)  
5. Steam and Water Distillation - With or Without Water Cohobation.  
6. Steam Distillation - Batch or continuous.  
7. Hydrodiffusion.  
8. Aqueous Extraction - Spray drying.  
9. Extraction Specific materials with Solvent Oleoresin.  
10. Extraction With Non-polar Solvent- Concrete.  
11. Extraction of Concrete with Ethanol - Absolute.  
12. Liquid CO2 Extraction.  
13. Extraction with Super Critical Fluids.  
14. Process with Hydrocarbon solvent.

Whilst original field stills have almost disappeared, the stills for sandalwood and other wood oils tend to be very simple. Modern distilleries however are very high tech with sophisticated equipment. Every drop is extracted and most stills co-hobate - that is they recycle the water constantly. The notion that you can take away the water and sell it as 'floral water' is incorrect. The term 'hydrosol' has crept in recently and the use of this French word gives it a certain mystique and cachet. Sounds real. However, if the still is modern and you can visit several in Provence, Spain or even England, you will soon discover that modern stills nearly all cohobate (recycle) the water. **Most floral waters are made with concentrates and do not come from the stills**.

The actual water from many stills can be pretty dirty and needs to be filtered anyway. Orange Flower Water and Rose water for foods and Pharmacies has been produced with concentrates this way for some 50 years or so. Of course it would be wrong to say that there are no natural floral or plant waters extracted from stills which do not cohabitate. Many of these 'waters' are ideal living conditions for bacteria and usually have to be treated with biocides to prevent spoilage. Traders and companies have to state the origin of such materials under new EU regulations.

There are many oils which have either to be rectified, matured or standardised. Several oils contain elements that are either obnoxious or unpleasant (e.g. menthofuran in mint oils). Some oils need to have dangerous compounds removed - Bergapten in Bergamot oil - hence the FCF type. As for oils being 'locked-up' in plants, waiting to be released, alas this is not so. Some oils (Birch and Wintergreen) do not exist in plants and are actually produced by enzyme activity.

This notion of oils locked up in plants has arisen over the years, and goes back to the days of the Alchemists (slids) when they thought that 'essential oils' were the 'quintessence of life'. Oils were obviously not the four elements water, air, earth and fire so the fifth element' (quintessence) was invented to account for this phenomenon. It tends to go hand in hand with the idea that they have a life force. If you watch the plant material being comminuted (chopped up small) prior to distillation, it is difficult to entertain this notion. Vegetables and plants all have a similar cellular structure and often the oils are almost incidental. Their production and function even now is still not fully understood and it would be beyond the scope of this talk to develop this aspect.

### 3. THE TRADING CHAIN.

The trade in spices goes back centuries. The building of empires by the European powers were often dominated by the need to get spices for their newly emerging industries and populations. Until the beginning of the spice age food tended to be drab, flavoured only with salt and local herbs. The discovery of spices changed all that and there was a rush to buy and trade in these new commodities. Pepper, nutmeg, cinnamon and all the other spices produced a chain of supply which was invariably limited to countries with colonies overseas.

The supply chains have often built up over the last four centuries so that you often find that Britain and France are quite notable in this chain. Of course it has changed considerably over the post war period as other countries got involved and many countries wanted to deal direct with their ultimate customers.

Now the various chains are dominated by either traders who specialise in oils and spices amongst other products or by companies who need to buy direct to get economic prices. Sometimes, the oils or absolute is distilled locally. At other times the material may come onto the market from saw mills or other sources. Occasionally material is transported to Britain (e.g. Frankincense) to be distilled here.

Most oils are transported by air for obvious reasons. The shelf life is important and deliveries need to be quick. Transport by sea is only used for some oils and almost as expensive as air transport. It is important to mention that once the oil or absolute has been 'extracted' it is beginning to age. Even transporting oils can lead to problems. If you send Cedarwood oil by air the main components of cedrol and cedrene can separate out and do not easily coalesce again. In the last ten years the fragrance and flavour industry has seen massive changes in ownership of companies so that the well known names may no longer be locally owned.

### 4. THE OIL COMPANIES.

Oil companies are relatively unknown to aromatherapists. These are the companies who are engaged in trading essential oils, absolutes, oleo resins, aroma chemicals, perfume compounds and all manner of aromatic materials. Most of their customers are involved in Pharmaceuticals, Fragrances, Flavours and Aromatherapy. In addition there are a few very large companies who trade in spices, herbs and oils. These are the companies who are busy producing many of the well known fragrances and flavours and most have been around for a long time. In the UK, these companies are all members of the British Essential Oil Association. They monitor standards, legislation and know their products in great detail. They are also in close collaboration with the European Union which now sets all the legislation and standards in oils with regard to Names, Health and Safety, Hazards, First Aid Measures, Fire Fighting Measures, Accidental Release, Handling and Storage, Exposure Controls, Physical and Chemical Properties, Stability, Toxicological Information, Ecological Information, Transport Information and Regulatory Information. They invariably seek to buy the best quality of materials available for their customers. Collectively they are the repository of massive amounts of information which has been built up over the years. Most deal direct with specific growers and producers.

These companies are used to trading in large quantities, usually from the source or origin of the oil. Their suppliers are usually the very large growers who can often supply tons of oil. Usually certain companies are linked to specific growers and this relationship is beneficial to both parties. The buyer represents reliable purchasing and the grower responds with growing oil plants for the distillery. The relationship is based upon trust grown out of many years of trading. Many are specialist companies and may do their own distillation of materials, special distillations such as Carbon Dioxide Distillation. Special Mention should be made of the work of Oils Pioneer - David Moyler who has advanced the process greatly. This means that such oils as Jasmin oil are now available.

It is a common assumption the 'essential oils are expensive'. They are not. They are relatively cheap. If you doubt this then distil some of your own lavender, rosemary or camomile. It is fairly easy to make a simple still. Essential oils on the whole are relatively cheap although the rare florals are very dear simply because there is little oil available. In the jargon - the yields of florals are very low therefore this is reflected in the price.

The companies are mainly international, reflecting the trade in general. Their work covers the whole world and they are acutely aware of sudden problems or disasters which can reduce a crop and therefore an oil overnight. They have a measure of the market in all the producing countries and are aware of fluctuations which can occur. Most of these companies offer a wide range of materials and oils. One company alone may offer as many as 20 different Lavender oils. Another can perhaps offer 10 different Peppermint oils. The range is quite immense and requires a wide, careful understanding of the nature of oils to buy correctly. As a general rule they do not market either dangerous oils or oils which do not have any 'pedigree'. Oils which are not normally traded need to be viewed with caution and in certain circumstances with suspicion. **These are oils which keep appearing in the aromatherapy market place which are either untested, badly named or non-existent. 'Chemotypes' are a case in point.** You will not normally find these in the 'international trading catalogue'. The reason is fairly simple - it has become an aromatherapy hype to list these oils on a price list as though they are 'very special'. A few are popularised by people who are not in the main stream of the industry and are not aware of the structure of the oil industry. Aromatherapists need to be aware that these oils which may be recommended by a single person. Most have no history and none of them have been tested by international bodies for toxicity. As an aromatherapist or herbalist insurance is unlikely to cover them for using these 'oils' it is only common sense to be aware of possible consequences. Some of them do not appear to exist in the countries concerned.

### 5. THE AROMATHERAPY COMPANIES.

A unique and special feature of Aromatherapy is that there is a somewhat select band of companies who are dedicated to supplying oils to aromatherapists and others. This is because most of them started when the movement began and are well known names. Some specialised in supplying oils whilst others went on to develop schools and organisations of aromatherapists. The first oil company organisation to be set up was EOTA which was launched in 1987 with an ambitious programme culminating in its first year with AROMA 88, the first major conference in essential oils which was held at Reading University, UK. Many of the 'names' which appeared here are now on the international circuit. This is one of the principal Universities which specialise in Plant Science and essential oils.

As many of these companies developed they were faced with all the difficulties that newcomers find when sourcing oils. They had to learn about the idiosyncrasies of oil the hard way. Finding the supply chain, how to assess purity, how to deal with storing oils, information and knowledge of oils and so on. Their aim, contrary to what one or two critics may feel, was the struggle to buy the best quality oils available. However, it can be quite a long learning curve and most have a story to tell you of their early days.

The Aromark idea was born in these early days, but died quickly as many companies felt that it would lead to some kind of standardisation of oils. Growing companies found little time or inclination to collaborate. It regained the initiative in 1990 when the Natural Oils Research Association established it as a method of monitoring and testing essential oils, so that member companies could use the Mark for their oils. The testing of oil however can be an expensive process and small companies or even small buyers could not afford the process. However, testing is by no means a universal method of assessing oil quality.

However, the logistics of policing such a mark has diminished its effectiveness and it remains to be seen how long it can operate under new legislation. One pioneering aspect was the notion of 'Batch Number' and 'Best Before Date', which was established in 1990 with the co-operation of scientists from Reading University who worked hard to establish parameters of oil decay. It is generally thought that 'essential oils last a couple of years'. Not so, they vary considerably. The European Union set up legislation in 1997 which requires this information to be printed on oil supplies. Many supermarkets have yet to catch up with this.

Having been in at the start of the movement means that aromatherapy companies have invariably collected a great deal of information on the way. What differentiates these companies from other companies is the way in which they can supply information to therapists. Many will have an open door policy so that you can visit them and see their operation. Many have open days where you can see how their company works. **If their suppliers are hidden or you are not shown round, or worse - don't get through the front door, then forget the hype you are being presented with and go elsewhere.** It does not matter if they are small companies (everyone has to start small - indeed it can be a positive virtue and all the main companies started here), they invariably are enthusiastic about oils and therefore are always in the learning curve. Most of the companies are delighted to show you how they buy oils, how they test, and you can see how the supply chain works. After all, much of this information is in the public domain through trade journals and now - the Internet. This does not happen with 'supermarket' supplies or operations which tend to be more commercial. They also have other priorities. In Aromatherapy companies you can see the chain from oil producer to the company. They usually buy some oils direct and have long standing relationships with growers, suppliers or oil companies. They do not as a general rule produce their own oils as oils are produced throughout the world and it is simply not feasible.

Of course many Aromatherapy companies have built up close relationships with a few growers and this is a healthy relationship as they can interchange information which can benefit both parties. Another point to bear in mind is that Aromatherapy companies do not 'knock' other companies. This is regarded as heresy so that if you find a 'trader' saying everybody else is supplying rubbish, then hesitate and consider what has been said. Can it be justified or are you being led by svelte talk to get you to buy their oils or other services? Prices are almost universal so that trading in oils is not the 'sweet smell of success' you sometimes see in the tabloid press. It is sheer hard work. It always pays to look around and see what is on offer from various companies. Each have a varied catalogue.

Every company usually has some specialist oils. They also have different information so that you can end up with quite a dossier on oils. If you find a price hike because it is 'special', 'organic', 'special odour', 'vibrant aroma' and the like - **pause and take a careful look.** Is there any form of analysis, checking, and certifying (if so when and by whom). Is there printed information on the oils or just words? Are they familiar with the many regulations and Legislation coming out of Europe? At the present time, virtually all the Legislation which controls oils comes from Brussels and the European Union.

Universities are usually not specialised to do analysis as they often have a weak data base and it is often left to technicians or students who may fail to understand 'the peaks'. Lecturers at Universities are concerned principally with what oils will do in pharmacology or agriculture and normally do not do this routine work themselves. Independent analysis by experts in the supply trade means that you can be more confident of your oil. Of course testing may seem expensive, but if you are buying reasonable quantities it is worth the expense. The problem comes with small companies or aromatherapists who find that it is expensive to test a sample. However, many companies are now testing so that if you are buying reasonable amounts you can follow up your purchase with requests for detailed information.

Oils of course have their own particular characteristics and change from the moment that you buy them. Oxidisation or heat can destroy many of them. Information is usually available from companies about this aspect of oils so that storage is important. Some companies care about quality so much that they cover their oils or absolutes with either Nitrogen or Argon to prevent destructive oxygen getting to them. This particularly affects Citrus oils and floral absolutes. Another thing to check is the Batch Number and 'Best Before' date. This is legally required for many oils with a limited shelf life. This information is now virtually on everything in the supermarket and is a useful guide when buying. It has come a long way since eggs were introduced with a 'best before date'.

Recently 'organic' oils have appeared on the market place. This may be justified - organic cannot. The question is one of definition and this is the difficult aspect. It is well known that many growers in some countries will ask you what you would like to see on the 'certificate'. More recently however, the French Government has been trying to simplify the many organisations which exist and bring them under one umbrella. This new certifying body is known as known as Ecocert. In Britain the only organic certification available is the Soil Association but this cannot apply to essential oils as it is based upon crop rotation. The definition adopted however is most important.

### 6. AROMATHERAPISTS, HOSPITALS, CLINICS, SCHOOLS, HEALTH SHOPS, SUPERMARKETS, THE PUBLIC.

Now we are at the end user of oils or absolutes. Even within the last year legislation has gripped the entire industry so that if you are in a Health Service situation, Clinics, Medical Practitioner or Pharmacist they you are required by law to have detailed information of the products you work with. These are usually in the form of Health and Safety Data Sheets and Technical Data Sheets. The former outlines the requirements of the Health and Safety Executive and much of the information requires detailed information on safety, toxicity, transport and many other features. The latter identifies the major compounds present in the oil. The former Sheets are obligatory according to E.U. Legislation 91/155/EEC, the latter Sheets are supplementary information and not legally required. Most companies can provide this information if you are buying 'commercial' quantities.

It may come as a surprise to some that many important aspects of data sheets are simply not known. It is likely to come as a surprise that some of the information is quite daunting. However, you have to remember that these sheets of information are designed primarily for an industry which will be buying drums of oil. As more information is usually required it is likely that these dossiers will increase over the years. It has been suggested by one group that Aromatherapists ought to have this information, but the problems of supplying information is enormous. If you got Health and Safety data Sheets for your average supermarket goods you would have to have a library resource in every store and every home.

The question which has been raised in the past by various people is the question of adulteration. It is always possible to add materials to oils and dilute them. This occurs with 'washing up liquids' and 'bleach' to some extent where the really cheap ones probably have a higher water content in their formulation. Everybody who does the washing-up is familiar with this. Oils however are somewhat different and it is possible to adulterate an oil with a solvent, yet the smell or aroma will hardly have changed. One can only look carefully at what you buy. Every oil or absolute has its own odour, composition and special characteristics. If you test sandalwood oil on a smelling strip and the odour disappears after an hour, then you need to be cautious.

Most aromatherapy companies will always spend time studying oils and rarely buy them before they have authenticated the supply. The danger for aromatherapists is when they have are buying oils where the prices are unrealistically high. If the price is too cheap, there may be a reason for this. It could be old stock, oil from an un-named source, a special promotion or even poor quality. The prices of oils are all fairly similar so that if a price is very much higher it should be justified by quality.

Ylang Ylang is a good example of an oil which has several different 'types'. Ylang Ylang 4 is fairly low on 'quality', Ylang 3 is regarded as 'finer' and Ylang 2 is better and more representative. many years ago it was decided to produce a pure distilled oil from start to finish and this was to be called 'Ylang Ylang oil complete'. It was not popular, principally because perfumers formulated on the different grades. However, it is possible to buy Ylang 1 or even Ylang Extra or Extra Superior. All the grades are decided subjectively by the distiller at source. Price is not always a reliable guide for quality so therefore you have to evaluate other factors when you decide. As we tend to live in a world where price = quality, it is easy to believe that the dearer the oil, the better quality. Not so. All oils on the market are within a narrow price band, and if you are offered one at twice the price because it is 'very special import', question further. It could be a case of 'never mind the quality - feel the width'.

The problem for hospitals and other organisations is somewhat easier. They demand and require detailed information when they buy. They are expected to have Health and Safety Data Sheets and Technical data Sheets. This gives the Medical profession exact information as to the quality of the oils.

### THE END USER.

This can be the Aromatherapist, Herbalist, Reflexologist, Physiotherapist and so on through the list of therapies. However, with the proliferation of aromatherapy it can be almost anyone who is interested, and currently this includes the general public.

Buying has several stages - Suppliers, Tutor or friends Recommendations, Advertising, Book References, Visiting shops, Reading and studying oils. As most aromatherapists come through courses they will have been introduced to oils as part of their course. It takes a long time to learn about 'the tools of the trade' and aromatherapy is no exception. If your course has been short - the knowledge will be short and it up to you to expand this by having a personal library on the subject. A personal library starts with just one book. After a while you will find that it does not give all the answer so you look for others and the constant search for detailed information is an ongoing learning curve.

'HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT TO BUY?'

1. Examine carefully the literature.
2. Try to cut out any 'hype'.
3. Compare prices for the same oil.
4. Visit your supplier or talk to somebody who has visited them.
5. Form a judgement. Are there tests and validation? Look at the price structure; quality evaluation; be objective.

### WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

Some years ago an Australian Company set up their company as 'clinical' with white gowns, clinical surrounding and hygiene standards. They also made medicinal claims for their oils. This was regarded as a direct challenge to the Pharmaceutical Authorities and it was not long before they instituted proceedings and attacks on the company. The Pharmaceutical Act came into play and as a result many oils were declared as 'toxic' and should not be sold without a toxic or worse - poison - on the bottle (Tea Tree) A similar state of affairs in Canada occurred and even in Britain a few years ago there was an attempt to place herbs and their by-products on some kind of register.

More recently Directives have listed many oils as 'Toxic', 'Harmful' and 'Irritant'. These oils are now in the current CHIP Regulations. 5 are listed as Toxic, 32 are listed as Harmful and 17 are listed as Irritant. Whilst some of the 'harmful' oils mentioned are not used by aromatherapists, many are regarded as most useful and include Tea Tree Oil.

During 1998 this was followed by R65 - perhaps one of the most contentious notions based upon limited evidence of terpenes as dangerous for inhaling. There was one case in Europe and possibly one case in Britain. The information was not circulated. Neither was it examined or verified. The Regulation states that 3 criteria are required to classify a substance under R65 in the EU. The first criteria is based upon oils which contain '10% or more of hydrocarbons' (Addendum to letter 557 from IFRA). This letter states that the other two criteria (viscosity and surface tension) are 'not available' which is not the case, as some companies give this information. 79 oils are listed in this classification. A further curious fact is that the original documents mention aspiration which implies breathing, but the resultant legislation states 'swallowing' which is a different physiological process. It is clear that this directive has enormous implications for end users who need to be aware of what is likely to happen to the labelling of oils in the near future.

### BIOCIDES.

Even more recently (June 1998) the term 'biocide' has been introduced into the language of oils. This concept is even more devastating. One serious aspect of this legislation is that it has does not appear to have been either discussed or challenged and therefore as it is now in the public domain it is up to everyone with concern to investigate as the evidence and form a judgement. Legislation which emanates from Brussels needs to be opposed when not based upon sound scientific evidence. It is virtually impossible to discern biocides in oils unless you know what to look for. Lack of any activity or response usually means that such legislation goes through without dissent. It should not be assumed that as these committees are composed of qualified people that they are experts in essential oils. It could also have serious implications for those industries involved in fragrances, flavours and pharmaceuticals. Many current 'OTC' (Over The Counter) medicines could come within the definition and could be withdrawn immediately the law takes effect. This coupled with other legislation means that Aromatherapists, Herbalists and other therapies are at serious risk and could be limited to a one-to-one relationship with control in other people's hands. It is quite likely that other legislation could follow once it is established and made public that oils are either harmful, irritant, toxic etc.

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### Suppliers advice on what to look for

By Martin Watt

There are still new people setting up flashy looking web sites claiming to supply "the finest essential oils", cosmetics and related products. This is an update to information in other articles on this site for the benefit of new web users. Please also read Internet sales [below](#).

Many web sites are established by people who know little about what they are selling and have no sound product training. Please bear in mind that such suppliers are frequently cottage industry based operations and a flashy web site is no indication of the size or quality of a business. There is nothing wrong with a cottage industry operation provided people have educated themselves properly. However, many just read a few popular aromatherapy, cosmetics and perfume books and then commence sales to the public. Sound technical books are available but they cost a lot. These people do not buy those books as why bother when you can make cash out of a gullible public by not educating yourself properly. Some of these site owners claim to be "qualified" from this or that course, but only those who have been in the trade for many years know which courses students do not get sound education from. Other web sites are operated by people who are little better than criminals selling scam products to the gullible.

In Britain and the USA it is illegal to make "medicinal claims" on the website of someone who also sells the oils. Most of our older well established aromatherapy suppliers have been aware of and complied with this legislation for years. Therefore, if you come across a UK or US based web site making medicinal claims, it may be evidence of several things:

1. Someone who has not bothered to check the law over what they sell.
2. Someone who does not care that they are breaking the law.
3. Someone who has not undertaken a sound training course.
4. Someone who has been conned by one of the larger essential oil traders.
5. Someone new to the trade who knows little about its history.

In the USA making certain medicinal claims is illegal, but the legislation was never enforced until they clamped down on young living and doterra. Quite a number of suppliers there sell oils with labels that do not meet your basic legal requirements, particularly Wintergreen oil.

**In Canada** there are laws over what can and cannot be claimed. However, the Government agencies seem more concerned at setting up fallacious regulations and trade consultation committees, rather than clamping down hard on the rogues.

**General advice.**

**Organically produced oils:**  
Don't be fooled by those who claim they get all their oils direct from growers, that is hogwash. The essential oils trade is international and conducted mostly via big traders who then resupply the aromatherapy trade. Some suppliers do get some oils direct from growers, but they cannot possibly get all of their oils from such sources.

The same comments apply to organically grown oils. Yes some are produced that way, but only a tiny proportion compared to what aromatherapy traders sell. In addition, many OG certificates are forged or the association issuing them does not undertake adequate on-the-ground inspections, particularly in under developed countries.

Beware in the UK of traders who claim all their oils are "Soil Association certified". This OG certifying body do not check the sources of most essential oils that they grant certificates to: instead they rely on what the oil traders tell them and on useless bits of paper. It must never be forgotten that they are a trade organisation.

**Endangered species:**  
Most aromatherapy traders sell oils from trees that are on the endangered species list, they then invent all kinds of stories to cover their backs such as "we get our oils from legal sources only". In reality they simply accept what they are told by their suppliers most of which is hogwash.

**Dangerous oils:**  
Many suppliers sell essential oils with known dangers, but without any warnings. Often these suppliers are ignorant of well acknowledged safety data, or they don't care about your health as long as they get a sale. *Check other articles on this site for guidance on dangerous oils.*

**Certificates of analysis:**  
There are analysts turned suppliers who knowingly sell adulterated oils to aromatherapy outlets. There are others who claim to do analysis but have had no training in the fragrance trades or experience working for big oil distributors. Only a tiny number of aromatherapy suppliers can afford to have their oils analysed by real experts. There are those who pay for the cheapest analysis simply so they can claim their oils are genuine - cheap analysis will not detect good adulteration. In reality, this trade is awash with oils that are not all they are claimed to be. There are essential oil traders who will take a commercial GLC from a book and then give that to their customers as "evidence that the oil they supply has been analysed", yes it may have been 10 years ago, but not every batch.

**"I trust my supplier":**  
That is the biggest load of nonsense I have heard. There are those who do their utmost to only sell quality products, but there are a hundred fold more who just do not care as long as the cash is flowing. There are only a tiny number of aromatherapy suppliers that I would trust and some of those are on my web site. There are others who have been trading for years and who have learnt their trade via long experience. Be cautious of new traders as most of those come under the categories above.

**Hype on suppliers web sites:**  
Bear in mind there is no system in place for verifying the claims made on Internet sites. Anyone can say anything they like and will usually get away with it.

Beware particularly of web sites which contain numerous links. These indicate a site operator who has not checked the sites they are referring people to, but are just operating link exchange scams to increase their profile on the net.

### Cosmetic type products.

**Natural cosmetics:**  
Be cautious of those who claim their products are 100% natural. It is very difficult to produce safe, wholly natural products, because of the need (and sometimes legal requirement), that the products do not support microbial growth. There are a few natural preservatives that are being used, but there is a problem in that most of them have not been subjected to adequate testing for skin safety. That is different to synthetic preservative where extensive testing has been done over many years. Please ignore the hype over the dangers of paraben preservatives, this is all based on a single discredited piece of research. Web sites selling cosmetics and using this information on parabens, are either ignorant of the research being dismissed, or may be trying to scare people unnecessarily.

You need to be aware that **particularly in the USA** many small kitchen sink producers are using dangerous preservatives such as benzoin resin. This is often because they have looked up the subject in old out of date books and just assumed that because these materials were used in the past, that they are OK to use nowadays. So if you come across someone using benzoin, you need to ask some questions on why they are using it, and what grade they are using as some may be safe. A few people rely on spice oils such as cinnamon bark oil to help act as a preservative, however, such oils can be highly damaging to the skin unless they are part of an expertly formulated product.

**The subject of cosmetic preservation is not a job for amateurs.** This subject is a science in its own right within the 'Science of Cosmetics'. It is vitally important because badly formulated home produced cosmetics can do more harm than good.

**Helping tribes or the environment:**  
Beware of suppliers who are selling cosmetics that they claim are used by "indigenous tribes" or are "traditionally used" in certain locations. Often these contain novel herbs and extracts that have never undergone any kind of safety evaluation. The fact a product has been used traditionally can rarely be taken as an assumption of safety. We have many herbs and oils that have been banned as too dangerous to use nowadays, which may have been used a lot in the past. If you cut yourself in the jungle, using a potentially sensitising resin is less of a risk than getting gangrene, but that does not mean it is safe in regular-use products. Often these producers also make outrageous claims as to the efficacy of their products and even get scientists to try and give them validity.

**Never ever forget you can claim almost anything you like on product efficacy on a social media site and get away with it!**

Also try and find out if any of the ingredients come from endangered species, particularly jungle trees.

**Lack of appropriate education:**  
I have come across many small suppliers on the newsgroups who started by making a few cosmetics for their own use, but quickly started selling those products to other people. Many of these have not had any training, adequate training, or education, in manufacturing such products. Others have relied on what they can glean from others on newsgroups in order to develop more products. So beware, the subject is a minefield.

### Natural perfumes.

Something that seems to be increasing in popularity and thus the scammers will be jumping on the bandwagon. Another minefield where most of the above on cosmetics also applies.

Particularly beware of those who claim their training was with experts in the perfume trade. With a few exceptions the **real experts** work in-house for large companies and are not allowed to do private work. There are only a tiny number of real experts in perfumery who work for themselves and fewer still who offer training courses. Most of the real perfumers who used plant extracts are retired or dead, most modern perfumers are qualified in chemistry not natural extracts.

**So what does that leave us with?**  
1. People who have learnt what they know from old books of formulas and then experimented with the ingredients. There is nothing wrong with that, but

it is highly misleading when they then call themselves "natural perfumers". This is not really fair to those who worked in a trade all of their lives and knew the subject inside out.

**2.** People who have done some kind of aromatherapy training and then dabbled with making perfumes. Such people are formulators **not** perfumers. There is lots of fun to be had from trying out different perfumes made from essential oils for yourself, but it is another ballgame selling such products to the public. I have come across several such web sites where the people are selling perfumes containing banned and dangerous oils and some with illegal animal extracts.

**3.** People who have done some training with herbalists or other traditional practitioners. None of these are experts at making perfumes, incense maybe, but not perfumes for retail.

The scams that I have witnessed include setting up a European based web site claiming to sell extracts from animal sources, which appear in old formulation books. The site I am thinking of is targeted at a USA based audience because they hope they can fool Americans into importing such products. Of course they don't tell their customers that they could be thrown into jail for importing banned animal extracts into the USA. So beware of any web sites selling items such as Civet; musk (animal); ambergris, etc.

Beware of anyone claiming to be an expert in natural perfumery, but who includes oils such as calamus and fig leaf which are banned by the **real** fragrance trade.

#### Soaps, shampoos, etc.

Although in theory there should be less likelihood of causing harm as the product is washed off, I have come across examples of home producers who are using known dangerous sensitising oils such as cinnamon bark and Verbena at very high levels of use. The use of for example Verbena oil is prohibited in commercial products by the large producers. There are also maximum recommended volumes of essential oils that should not be exceeded in shampoos and other detergents.

These levels of essential oils in soaps and shampoos are often far lower than home producers use, but there is a good reason for fixing such levels. The main reason is this question of sensitisation where long term exposure to the oils may initiate an allergic condition. It is not uncommon for someone to use the same skin lotion or soap for many years and often on a daily basis.

Therefore, if you come across a supplier using dangerous oils, then it is a good indication that they are ignorant of all safety data on essential oils, or they don't care.

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### THE DANGERS OF SOME ESSENTIAL OILS SOLD ON THE INTERNET

By Martin Watt

First published in the NAHA newsletter

During my searches for aromatherapy related subjects, I have come across thousands of sites selling essential oils. I was horrified by the number of businesses who are selling dangerous essential oils to therapists and the public without appropriate warnings.

"Appropriate warnings" is the most important issue. There is nothing wrong with selling many of our most hazardous oils for non-contact uses. However, I consider it unscrupulous not to warn people that these products should not be applied to the skin.

Here in Britain and in Europe, we have stringent laws that control what can or cannot be sold, as well as what medicinal claims can be made. It is an offence under our Trading Standards regulations, to place any product on the market, if appropriate warnings are not attached to the product. Despite that, many traders here do still ignore this important piece of consumer protection legislation. A few even break the law over no medicinal claims.

In the USA and Canada you do have legislation over label claims, and health claims, but it is widely ignored. I have heard it said on several occasions that you prefer to rely on "individual responsibility". Well how can a member of the public be expected to ascertain if an essential oil may be dangerous or not. This is particularly important when you consider that half the 'aromatherapists' around don't have adequate knowledge themselves of such matters. If individual responsibility is the main trading criteria, then perhaps you should allow the general public access to plutonium so we can all CHOOSE if we want to make an H bomb or not!! Such ideas are usually a trade get-out, so they can continue making money selling anything they can get away with.

#### Potentially Hazardous oils.

When I talk about hazardous essential oils, I am not talking about all the unsubstantiated hype endemic in aromatherapy. I am talking about hard verifiable facts. It is interesting that some of these facts originate from highly respected USA based organisations such as the International Fragrance Research Association. Therefore, it is not as a well-known US aromatherapy teacher said "oh yes they are very over the top on safety issues in Europe". Such teachers and authors say this because they cannot stand it being made public, that their knowledge on essential oils is severely lacking.

The fragrance trade organisations do sterling work gathering data from adverse reactions reports and from testing the material in clinics around the world. **The aromatherapy trade has no central system to monitor adverse effects of raw materials.** Anyone that ignores such data is at best a fool and at worst unscrupulous, because they are toying with peoples health by ignoring valuable safety information.

When the IFRA advise a fragrance ingredient should not be used in consumer products, they are often referring to far lower levels of use than common in aromatherapy. By "consumer products" this can mean soaps, detergents, lotions, creams, etc.

Here is a short list of dangerous substances that I have seen promoted on the Internet. This list does not of course include those essential oils like ammi visnaga, ravensara, etc. and the fast growing number of 'chemotype' oils that no one knows if they are safe or not.

**Benzooin resinoid and oil** – a well documented sensitiser. IFRA recommend that only grades processed to remove the allergens should be used in consumer products. These grades are not generally available via aromatherapy suppliers. In addition, **there is no such thing as benzoin oil**; it is always a resin dissolved in a solvent which is often synthetic.

**Bergamot oil expressed** – a potent **photosensitiser** – no not just sunlight, but ultra violet light present even in dull overcast conditions. Two cases of severe skin reactions to this oil were reported to me in 2002. This is a disgrace when this oils dangers have been well documented since the early 1920s.

**Cinnamon bark oil** – an extremely powerful irritant and an even worse **sensitiser**. Still being used by home soapmakers in the USA and Canada.

**Peru balsam** – a powerful sensitiser. IFRA recommend "not to be used as a fragrance ingredient".

**Rue oil – a terrible photosensitiser and sensitiser.** Reported to be a "useful oil" by someone in the American witchcraft scene on her web site. Clearly someone who has no idea on safety.

**Sassafras.** This oil is restricted to only the minutest amounts allowed in cosmetic products throughout Europe. It is restricted to such low levels, that it effectively bans its use. The reason is because tests have shown it is a potential carcinogen. Of course, in the USA you are used to using sassafras bark in teas and flavourings, however that is not anything like as hazardous as using the pure essential oil.

**Tagetes** (sometimes misdescribed as calendula) – a **powerful photosensitiser**. IFRA say a no effect level is 0.05%. Therefore, to use it on skin exposed to the light would be foolish.

**Tansy oil (T. officinalis) – extremely toxic**, and of little if any use in aromatherapy.  
**Blue Tansy**, a different variety, is promoted a lot in the USA without any sound evidence of its usefulness and **no safety data**.

**Verbena oil – an extremely powerful sensitiser** – recommended by the RIFM "not for use as a fragrance ingredient". Massive percentages of adverse skin reactions are recorded from testing a whole range of verbena oils. The only reason most aromatherapists have not seen such reactions, is because only minute amounts of genuine verbena are around, most is semi synthetic. This oil has been promoted as being useful for years by certain aromatherapy teachers.

**Wintergreen and Birch** - two highly toxic products sold by many US sites in particular. Most without the required labelling warnings as per US law. Neither should these be considered a natural product.

**Wormseed (Chenopodium)** – extremely toxic. Banned from general sale in the UK because of the deaths reported from its consumption in the past.

#### In conclusion:

If anyone comes across Internet sites or shops selling these dangerous materials without warnings please do tell them. Often they simply may not know, and may have relied for their knowledge entirely on the popular aromatherapy novels, or on some of the appallingly poor training courses around. That is the kind of marketing that can trigger over zealous legislation being placed on everyone.

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### Notes on perfumes sold as 'essential oils' and on the people that sell them

By Martin Watt

A similar version was published in *Aromatherapy quarterly*. 1997. 54, 25-27.

**Many people that use essential oils are not well informed on the following:**

- 1) The chain of supply of essential oils.
- 2) The substantial volumes of aromatic materials supplied as "the genuine article" when they are not.
- 3) The convincing salespeople who sell phoney products as "the real thing".

I will try in this article, to introduce some information about the activities of certain perfume compound suppliers, and how selling these products as "essential oils" can have safety implications.

Some essential oil salespeople give the impression that they are very knowledgeable about essential oils. In fact few have had any training in the botanical or medical sciences. Some have a background as sellers for fragrance companies and their perfume compounds; some have fake University degrees; many have set up kitchen sink operations without knowing anything! We all know that a good salesperson can sell you people anything. As someone who used to manage a sales office, I know that those producing highest sales were often not the honest ones, but **those that were the best liars**.

Since this article was first written, some of the "salespeople" referred to above have built up what now seem to be very reputable companies. I and others in the trade know different of course. All I can say is beware of flashy looking web sites. These are often a sign that the owner is more into sales hype than selling good quality merchandise. Particularly beware of those who mislead you into thinking all their oils are organically grown. This is a pretty fair sign of a con artist at work.

A few essential oils salespeople have trained on short complementary medicine courses. This enables them to appear very knowledgeable, when in fact their depth of knowledge about essential oils is superficial. I know people, who after taking part time courses of doubtful quality for a few months then call themselves "qualified herbalists". This title is then used as 'evidence of their knowledge' when promoting their essential oils. The course I qualified from to become a Herbalist lasted 3 1/2 years full time, (similar training now gives a Degree). Ever after that training, my knowledge on essential oils was still weak. My knowledge has accumulated after years of study and involvement in the trade. Therefore, never assume a complementary medicine qualification equips someone with a sound knowledge about essential oils - often the teachers themselves know next to nothing!

This problem of perfume salespeople selling so-called 'essential oils' is a significant problem for health food store proprietors. They cannot possibly have an adequate knowledge of all the products that they sell, and so they rely mainly on what the salespeople tell them. Such information in turn gets related to their own customers. Few aromatherapists have any idea of what real oils should cost, but independent shopkeepers often do not have a clue about trade prices for genuine oils.

The large companies that supply synthetic fragrance blends know perfectly well, what they are selling. However, these perfume compounds are intended to be greatly diluted in various commercial products such as perfumes, cosmetics, soaps, & detergents. When these same products enter the aromatherapy supply chain, it raises all sorts of safety and ethical issues that I will now discuss.

#### ETHICAL ISSUES

a) If a perfume compound is marketed as an "essential oil" then this is a lie.  
b) If an essential oil is marketed as "extracted from the named plants" and yet it contains some synthetic chemicals, then the product is no longer 'natural'.  
c) If an essential oil has been '**compounded**' by assembling fractions of cheaper essential oils, it may still be 'natural' but it is not from the plant named on the bottle.  
d) If a pure essential oil has been '**extended**' by using various solvents, then it is no longer a product from 'the named plant'.  
e) If an essential oil is marketed as shall we say ylang ylang No. 1, and yet it is in fact third grade, then this is clearly dishonest. It is **extremely common to find low grades of essential oils sold as so called 'premium grades'**.  
f) Dishonest traders can damage the businesses of ethical traders by substantially undercutting the honest traders prices. This is because far bigger profits can be made by buying fragrance compounds or low grade essential oils, and reselling them as top quality products.

**All of the above plus more are rife in the aromatherapy oils supply trade.**

#### SAFETY ISSUES

The majority of REAL essential oils have been extensively tested for toxicological and dermal adverse effects. We know what safe levels of use are, we know which oils are hazardous and we know which need care with use.

Fragrance compounds containing synthetic chemicals are produced for many different products. The most important feature of these fragrance blends is that they tend to have a very potent fragrance. They are intended to be used in commercial products at **extremely low levels of use**. It must be taken into consideration, that in aromatherapy massage, relatively high volumes of these chemicals are rubbed all over the body and at this level of use, health problems are common.

Chemicals in feasible with essential oils, can be purchased in a number of different **grades**. It is not uncommon to find that the chemicals used to compound fragrances contain relatively high levels of impurities. While the action of the individual chemical may be known, the potential side effects of the impurities it contains are poorly documented. Essential oils sold with the prime objective of deceiving the consumer are most likely to be of the lowest possible quality.

The **external application** of these impure chemicals may not result in significant problems, however; if someone were tempted into taking this material as a medicine, then we are in an entirely different ball game. It is this aspect of the activities of con artists in our trade that is so serious. If a salesperson convinces a customer that the essential oils they are offering are "pure", "organic", etc. when in fact they contain chemical impurities, **they are risking peoples health**.

Some pure essential oils have been used internally as medicinal aids for around 200 years. If someone is convinced that what they have got is real, then it is perfectly reasonable that some people will ignore what the label says, and take the oil internally. Such internal use of compounds containing chemical impurities adds a heavier burden to the bodies existing stock of toxic substances such as xenoins and organophosphates, with potentially catastrophic long-term effects.

Ask your trade associations what public advice they have issued to warn people about the dangers of using aromatherapy grade essential oils as internal medication?

Ask your trade association what verifiable sources of safety information they use and are their teachers required to provide referenced information to new students?

#### So, what can be done to inhibit the activities of the unscrupulous?

In the UK our Trading Standards departments have had samples of essential oils analysed. However, few prosecutions have resulted from them finding fake oils on sale. I tell students, that "if they are unhappy about the genuineness of their oils, to take them to their local trading standards department, but don't hold your breath to see the trader in court!"

Trading standards departments need to be supplied with information on who they can get to analyse the oils correctly. The aspect of **correct analysis** is critically important. Many essential oils are manufactured so expertly, that only a trade analyst with great experience and who knows the cost of substitute chemicals can determine the phoney essential oil from the genuine. However, most such experts are in the employ of the companies manufacturing the oils.

Unfortunately in the UK, the definition in law of what constitutes the term 'natural' is somewhat vague. Other countries however have successfully tackled that problem and defined in law what the term 'natural' should mean.

Most countries have governmental systems in place designed to prevent fraud. If a salesperson has implied that their product is the genuine article and it is not, then this is **fraud**. Therefore, if you own a shop, or retail essential oils, ask for written confirmation that the oils supplied are genuine. Never ever, accept a salespersons word. I am sick of the number of times on aromatherapy newsgroups I have seen people say "I trust my supplier". This trust has often been built up by efficient order handling; customer relations and sales hype, NOT by knowing if the oils are the real deal or not.

If you are in a shop and you hear an assistant advise a customer on the internal use of essential oils, then don't be afraid to interrupt. Ask for confirmation of the assistant's qualifications and on their ability to prove that their oils are suitable for internal consumption.

Ask your trade publications why it is, that when dishonest essential oil traders are sent to prison for fraud. That no mention appears in any of the aromatherapy journals?

Ask your **trade publications** why it is, that they will not publish articles by people with the ability to prove how widespread misinformation is on essential oils. Are these journals there to protect trade business interests, rather than you and your clients?

Ask your **trade associations** what precautions they have taken, to prevent therapists from being educated by ill-informed salespeople. These people will and do lie or embroider the truth in order to sell their products?

Only with increased knowledge on how to go about governing the con-merchants in aromatherapy, can we hope to inhibit governments around the world from stopping the free availability of our wonderful **genuine** oils.

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### Aromatherapy suppliers and web sites in 2019

By Martin Watt

[Essential oils & suppliers. UK legislation.](#)

In 2019 I found another big increase in web sites and blogs that get round medicinal claims laws by utilizing an author with their own web site. The author is free to make outrageous claims because they do not sell the oils, but instead add links to suppliers on Amazon, Ebay and similar. That way the oil **suppliers** are unlikely to be accused of making medicinal claims. The referring blog owner then of course makes money via clicks. This has become an epidemic, mainly due to many people who only use social media for their information resources and where marketing lies predominate. Frequently the referral service owners have no training in the subjects they write about. After checking many of the claims made, nearly all are identical with most being gleaned from the popular (fault ridden) aromatherapy books or by copying other web sites.

#### A few examples that I found:

<https://everphi.com/2018/11/30/cedarwood-essential-oil>  
The chemical composition of the *seeds* is given which no one uses to produce the essential oil.  
Medical use recommendations are made for serious conditions which would be illegal for a promoter to make, as well as unjustifiable claims such as: "**Kidney disorders, promotes urination, eliminates toxins from the body, relieves white blood cells and immune system from stress or malfunction, tightens loose muscles, it also hardens the muscles of the digestive system, eliminates harmful toxins, excess water and body fat**". Just a few of the claims made but of course with the suppliers recommended to get the oil. This site contains huge amounts of false and misleading information particularly on the traditional uses of the herb which are then claimed for the essential oil.

<https://botanicallyrooted.com/our-products/essential-oils/cedarwood-atlascedrus-atlantica-morocco>  
These people throw in every condition they can think of but with some dangerous ones such as "**urinary tract infections**". No mention that such conditions cannot be treated via the external use of the oil and to use it internally would be dangerous because most Atlas cedarwood oil is modified in various ways including using synthetic modifiers.

<https://healthyfocus.org>  
The frequently repeated nonsense about cedarwood oil being used in biblical times. Yes the infused oil may have been but **not** the distilled oil.  
"**Because of its astrigent properties, cedarwood essential oil can be massaged into your body to tighten the skin and improve the quality of your muscle tone leaving you feeling firmer and genuinely rejuvenated**". Unbelievable, do people really believe that an externally applied essential oil can "tighten muscles". Massage might, but no essential oil can do that, particularly as no essential oils are "astrigent".

"**Cedarwood essential oil has natural diuretic properties**"  
Not from external use, but anyway they fail to define which cedarwood oil they mean and the different types are as different as chalk and cheese!  
"**Cedarwood oil also has anticancer potential**."  
As is often the case with misused research references, they are **only** to cell culture testing.

"**The wood oils used were Juniperus oxycedrus, Cedrus libani**,"  
Cedrus libani essential oil has not been commercially available for a generation or more and the tree is a protected species. Any tests are on samples where the source of the oils is not stated, but of course you don't tell people that if you are trying to persuade vulnerable people to buy your oils!

If we look at the number of suppliers selling Atlas cedarwood it would require forests the size of Siberia to supply them all. Therefore please do consider available supply and check the Internet for conservation issues.

I hasten to add the sites above are just the tip of the iceberg on a vast industry of hype, lies and people who do not really care if they mislead the public and may cause them harm as a result of their wrong information.

The below was first written many years ago and was updated several times although little has changed.

There has been an explosion of social media blogs making outrageous, illegal and dangerous therapeutic use claims. The enforcement authorities have done little to enforce laws despite being informed of the breaches. Only when the FDA in America clamped down on young living and doterra and their distributors did the situation improve there. Instead they started spreading their lies to other countries where enforcement action was weak-see article on doterra in Europe.

This is mainly for the benefit of new people who are not familiar with my past efforts to expose the dishonesty in aromatherapy. Aromatherapists can be wonderful caring people, but are rarely backed by accurate education on the products they use.

#### Aromatherapy web sites and blogs

The Internet is great in many ways, but it is an open book for the scammers and cheats. **You must always remember that there is hardly any regulation of what people say on web sites and blogs**. Therefore, suppliers, teachers & therapists will say anything they like to ensnare gullible people. Never believe therapeutic claims made for essential oils or hydrosols unless the supplier can point you to referenced data. References to the popular books are mostly worthless but are used by many sites to cover their backs in case a claim is challenged; "well that's what xxxxx author says".

**In the UK**, if you see a site making medicinal claims these are illegal, and a good sign of an outfit that are deliberately ignoring the laws which older businesses have complied with for years. It can also be an indication of a supplier who knows nothing on the laws relating to what they sell.

**In the USA and Canada** the claims made on web sites are frequently preposterous and are made simply to sell oils. Most of their medicinal claims are taken straight from books on herbal medicine and are irrelevant to the external uses of the essential oils. There are laws relating to consumer safety under which essential oils fall, and on medicinal claims. However, the enforcement authorities have been lax in enforcing them. Thus the consumer is sold all kinds of quack medicines by con artists.

In Oct. 2010 I decided to do an Internet search on Juniper essential oil. The web sites continue to promote the sale of their oils **intended for external use**, but with therapeutic uses drawn from the respective herbs or oils as internal medicines. This grossly inaccurate aspect of aromatherapy never changes, mainly because it pushes oil sales. **To this day, most schools and web sites continue with their nonsense on the properties of essential oils, and most of their readers believe them.**

Below are examples from just four web sites, searched again in Nov. 2012, but a search will find hundreds of others making similar outrageous and dangerous claims. This is not an attempt to discredit any particular site, but just to give examples of the dangerous and misleading information out there. **2014 update**. If you find the sites below have subsequently changed their claims, it means that originally they did not know **or care** about what they told their customers, so I am leaving this as an historical record.

#### KEY:

Black text = their claims  
Blue text = my comments.

[www.essentialoils.co.za](http://www.essentialoils.co.za): "It is helpful when the prostate gland is enlarged and is used to help with the inability to pass urine, in cases of cystitis and kidney stones."  
**This is dangerously misleading. Even if used as internal medicine it is doubtful and very dangerous.**

"For the liver, it has a tonic effect"  
**No essential oil applied to the skin can have such an effect.**

"Juniper oil generally helps with the digestive system, particularly in cases of obesity, overindulgence of food". **What when applied to the skin??**

[ehow.com/way\\_5333615\\_uses-juniper-oil.html](http://ehow.com/way_5333615_uses-juniper-oil.html): "Those who suffer from **kidney stones**, bloating or high sodium levels benefit by using it. Ulcers may also be prevented through the use of juniper, since it regulates bile to reduce the effect of acid on the stomach lining. It also detoxifies the blood, which helps to remove additional toxins like pollutants and **metals that find their way into the blood stream**."  
**No essential oils can "detoxify the blood". As with the site above, we have this dangerous nonsense about kidney stones.** This site's claims are typical of those that masquerade as genuine consumer information sources, but in reality all that matters to them is the advertising revenue.

<http://beauty.indobase.com>: "Juniper oil is extremely beneficial in treating kidney stones. It aids in retaining the fluids in the body, thereby preventing the body from being dehydrated." **Kidney stones once again!**  
**As to it retaining moisture in the body, that is abject nonsense. Given internally it has an irritating effect on the kidneys causing expulsion of urine, the opposite to their claims.**

"Juniper essential oil can be used as an astrigent. Hence it is used to cure toothaches and strengthens the gums too. Juniper oil can cause the blood to contract during emergency and prevents hemorrhages."  
**Crazy dangerous nonsense, do not believe any of this!!!**

<http://100pureessentialoils.com>: "Juniper oil is used externally to cleanse the body, ridding it of excess fluids, and is helpful with kidney and bladder problems".  
**Same comments as above, total nonsense!**

"Pure juniper berry oil is also listed as helpful in obesity and cellulite as it is known to remove toxins, is a diuretic, and has (physical) cleansing properties". **Nothing but sales hype. There is no evidence whatsoever that juniper oil is useful in obesity, or acts as a diuretic if used externally.**

#### Is the information on such sites deliberately misleading?

In many cases the answer is yes. Many are there just as sales outlets, not really to aid peoples health.

Is it because the site owners are not aware their claims are wrong?  
Yes this can be the case, especially where the owners have taken the many lousy courses around, or had their minds controlled by the cult building methods used by companies such as Young Living and DoTerra.

#### Why does no one tell them they are wrong?

Mainly because most of those who know better, are also traders and do not want to offer competitors good information. Also, because most trade associations do not monitor what their members do or say.

#### Should I inform regulatory authorities?

Yes, but don't hold your breath that they will do anything, especially in the USA and Canada.

#### Are these errors you report not just one persons opinion?

This is something my opponents will hide behind. There are facts and there are opinions. I base reviews on facts that I can prove. However, after having these articles online for around 25 years I can count on the fingers of one hand the challenges made to me; none of which have got anywhere because I can prove what I say, they can't.

## Legislation

Difficult to be precise here because this varies a lot around the world. Most countries do not have National approved standards for aromatherapy. For example, there is often legislation over massage, and increasingly a lot of legislation over the sale and supply of essential oils. Anyone interested in training needs to check out the laws in their own country. Anyone supplying essential oils in the EU in countries that comply with the community laws, is now burdened with a lot more legislative hurdles and need to be ultra cautious.

Sadly, numerous aromatherapy suppliers continue making unfounded and illegal medicinal claims to sell their oils, frequently because they have either no training in the subject, or have taken one of the many appalling quality courses. Never forget anyone can set up a flashy Internet site and start selling essential oils. Rarely are illegal operators prosecuted by the enforcement authorities. Even in the UK, with our old laws on medicinal claims, the MHRA agency of the Department of Health are not fit for purpose and can take a year to take action against rogue companies.

## Essential oils & suppliers

I could write a book on the aromatherapy suppliers trade as it has grown at a fantastic rate since the 1980s. What most therapists are not taught is that aromatherapy suppliers are tiny fish in an International trade in essential oils. Below is the structure and function of the traders as a guide. See *other articles for more*.

It first became a way to make a fast buck back in the 1970s. The small aromatherapy suppliers mainly bought their oils from large fragrance trade companies. Many of those sold blended and semi synthetic oils because their primary business was supplying the fragrance trades; aromatherapy suppliers were at that stage a nuisance but a way to boost sales. Sometimes the aromatherapy suppliers were told what they were buying, sometimes not. The aromatherapy suppliers were often business people, or therapists, who by and large had not the first clue about the **real** essential oils trades. They assumed what they bought was the real thing, or they did not care and told their customers their oils were 100% genuine.

The trade continues selling its adulterated oils as much as they ever did. The one big change is that many more traders are claiming to sell "organically grown" oils. These scams were being endorsed by the once respected UK Soil Association. Several aromatherapy suppliers have joined this organisation in order to fool their customers into thinking all their oils are "OG" and certified as such. **The Soil Association were proposing giving certification of organic production based on paperwork furnished by UK oil traders, or discredited overseas OG certifying bodies.** The Soil Association - like many other certificate issuing organisations in the field - seem to have been taken over by University educated clones who only want to deal with pieces of paper and "work with the trades". As to real monitoring of the scams of traders - forget it.

Beware of essential oils originating in far flung countries where "organic certification" is being offered. Do not believe a fraction of what essential oil suppliers will tell you on this issue. Most aromatherapy traders do not have a clue on the true origin of their oils because they purchase most of their stock via middlemen who will lie through their teeth to make a sale. Many will claim to get ALL their oils direct from artisan producers. This is a lie, they may get some oils that way but certainly not all.

In the **UK** the ATC claim to represent suppliers. Last time I checked two years ago I found over 300 web sites in the UK alone selling essential oils. Admittedly some of those were buying oils from a few ATC members, but there are still many who buy from a plethora of other sources, many of which are highly suspect as far as quality is concerned. The ATC did enforce the medicines laws on its members which is a fine thing. Therefore, if you come across a site making medicinal claims, please report them to the MHRA: [mhra.gov.uk/](http://mhra.gov.uk/)

UK organisations representing the trade in essential oils and herbs always opted for compromises instead of fighting attempts by the EU to restrict our fundamental rights. These organisations never inform the public of what they are doing until everything is too late. Of course, if you fight the bureaucrats and tell them they are wrong, you do not get the cushy jobs, funding or Queens awards do you! The EU have produced a mountain of regulations which (for those who adhere to them) makes selling essential oils or natural cosmetics a nightmare of red tape.

In the UK most enforcement of laws is the job of the police or local Trading Standards department. In both cases these organisations do not have the resources to go chasing rogue traders in aromatherapy, or enforcing the associated legislation on labelling, cosmetic ingredients, etc. I know that Trading Standards departments around the country have had essential oils analysed and found them to be fake, yet only a few magistrates court cases have occurred. The fraudulent sale of fake essential oils has never been addressed industry wide by UK authorities as it can be difficult to prove. The same applies in most other countries.

**Producers:** These are mainly large agricultural concerns producing essential oils by the ton. Some such as Turkish rose, are produced via small growers all feeding into a central processing factory who then sell in bulk. We also have a number of small scale growers who sometimes do their own distillation. However, the vast bulk of the worlds essential oils originate from the big agricultural producers and not the tiny growers as many aromatherapy companies would have you believe.

**International dealers:** These large organisations deal mainly with the big producers. Some 'deal' in essential oils as commodities like coffee and tea and rarely involve themselves with handling the oil. These traders seldom involve themselves with aromatherapy suppliers as that is too small volume for them. They tend to supply the big essential oil users such as food and flavour trades and perfumers.

**Middlemen wholesalers:** There are a variety of different sized operations here. Some also do not deal with aromatherapy as it is too small, but instead they resupply the smaller wholesalers. It is frequently the middlemen who will modify the oils adding cheaper synthetics or fractions of cheaper oils in order to make a better profit, or sometimes to meet a customers maximum price request

**Aromatherapy suppliers:** Again a huge range in size of businesses ending up with many one person, kitchen sink operations. Incidentally, that is how most aromatherapy suppliers who are now big names started up. **Often without any knowledge of what they were really selling.**

Some aromatherapy suppliers will buy small volumes of oil direct from producers, but often those sales are only a tiny part of their total sales. The remainder come from middlemen wholesalers many of which cannot be trusted on quality issues. Some of these middlemen will tell aromatherapy suppliers anything to achieve a sale. Many (if not the majority) of aromatherapy suppliers, just regurgitate on their web sites what the oil trade con artists have told them, or regurgitate what they have read in aromatherapy novels.

Some aromatherapy suppliers will do their utmost to ensure they only sell genuine oils by having basic analysis done, and by dealing with a selection of small producers directly. The problem is that essential oils adulteration further up the chain can now be so sophisticated that only expensive analysis by a trade expert can detect good fakes. That kind of cost is beyond the financial means of most aromatherapy suppliers. There are of course other aromatherapy suppliers who will buy the cheapest junk they can and resell it at the highest price they can get away with. It is very much a case of **buyer beware** and ask questions. When I was on the newsgroups I got so tired of those saying "I trust my supplier", yet I knew some of these suppliers were liars and worse.

**Beware of flashy web sites covered in logos of conservation and genuine organisations, all designed to fool the eye and deceive you.** A genuine supplier will answer questions on their oils except giving you the name of the producers or suppliers they buy from.

**The market is now flooded with semi-synthetic sandalwood oil** due to the shortage of the real thing. The aromatherapy trade is only a small part of the huge criminal trade in real sandalwood oil, but I thought aromatherapists were supposed to be caring people??? There is a little oil from sources claimed to be sustainable but about which there are grave concerns. Also the variety of trees is different from what has been the major source in Mysore and so is the chemical profile. I still see numerous web sites claiming to be selling "Mysore sandalwood oil". Some claim to have stocked up on it some years ago - most are simply liars or misled by wholesalers.

**So take a look at what your supplier claims on the above issues.**

Martin Watt. "Oh he is always so negative" - the common comment you will hear coming from the aromatherapy trade con artists, or those who have this mad idea that to criticise wrong doing is politically incorrect, or that everyone has a place in this trade.

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## Health care referral web sites & their link scams

By Martin Watt

At the foot of this article I have added the URLs of those who have added links to my web site without asking. Also, those sites that are clearly marketing companies dredging up any old links and adding them to their customers web sites. I recommend avoiding those who have a "Health Directory" including numerous links. You can bet most of those businesses have not been assessed for quality or honesty. These marketing companies only care about making money from link clicks, and not providing a valuable health referral service.

Avoid dealing with sites that refer you to diet pills. Avoid sites that direct you to penis enlargement sites. Avoid those sites selling or linking to herbal products making outrageous medicinal claims. All these terms and more indicate a link marketing companies involvement.

Particularly beware of the paid links that Google put on some web sites. These are paid for per hit by the web site concerned. Some UK aromatherapy suppliers are linking to sites that give dangerous and incorrect advice. Such sites that ignore the laws of their country, and on the properties of their goods, suggest a business out to make money at any cost - including posing a danger to their customers health. This paid-for link system is deliberately set up by unscrupulous businesses as a quick way to get themselves to the top of search engines. In turn that leads many to assume they are established businesses.

**For those that may be new to the Internet and even to some old hands**

There has been an enormous growth in web sites that provide links to health products, health advice and similar kinds of web sites. Many of these link sites seem to be offering the public a useful service. However, **beware most of them are a scam** aimed at listing as many links as they can in order to make money from advertisers. When I have checked them I have been horrified by some of the web sites they direct you to. They can be some of the biggest scam artists on the Internet.

These links sites may add a link in their pages just by obtaining the URL of an appropriate sounding web site using search bots. They then tell you they have "added your URL" and request a link back to them. This can all be done automatically and on the cheap; some of these sites are almost certainly run out of teenagers bedrooms! They make their money from advertisers based on the number of hits they get and on the number of referring links they provide. A stack of money can be made this way without moving from someone's office or bedroom.

**Some consumer advice organisations and medical web sites are using this method to raise their profile.** Most are not attempting any kind of checking of the sites they refer you to. I have queried the ability of some of these organisations to police their referrals. The only answer most can give is "we send a questionnaire to the respective site owners and rely on their honesty" - what a joke!

Please bear in mind anyone can register themselves as a www.something.org This suffix does not provide automatic credibility to who is operating the web site. Therefore, please be very careful in what you believe on any health care sites that seem to have lots of links on them. The chances are high that it is a site run simply to make money and is not a reputable source of information, also there may be no organisation involved at all as the title may suggest.

On my own website I once had a link to what seemed a good Complementary Medicine links site. A year or so after they commenced I had to remove them. They were adding links to Young Living distributors, and when I questioned their wisdom of doing this, there was no answer.

**The reason you need to beware is because so many people are assuming that web sites they come across using these link sites are above board and honest.** This is critically important when dealing with matters of peoples health. Yet many of these sites just want to sell you quack medicines and mind control people with their convincing sales hype. The number of sites selling herbs and essential oils now is staggering; **often the owners have no training of any kind** and will just regurgitate incorrect information gleaned from other sites and popular books. Some even dispense health advice without having any experience or training in anything to do with complementary medicine. So do be careful when visiting such sites with what you believe, and be even more careful when buying health care products from them.

Beware also of those sites that seem to be genuine, but which have a column of links to various advertisers. Those site links are probably dumping a load of spyware into your temporary Internet folders and into the cookies file. You would be well advised to use a cleaning program after you leave **any web sites**.

**I must emphasize that the links below are just a sample from 2009.** There are many more link requests that I could not be bothered with and just bounced them back to origin. These are ones who added links to my site without asking - of course there are many more around who do this. After taking another look at these sites, it looks like at least 5 are linked to the same marketing company.

[www.herbsfragrance.com](http://www.herbsfragrance.com) **Gone in 2018**  
[www.kingbionline.com](http://www.kingbionline.com) who sold bodybuilding steroids **Gone in 2018**  
[www.anabol.com/directory](http://www.anabol.com/directory)  
[www.wbstarttoday.com](http://www.wbstarttoday.com) **Gone in 2018**  
[www.naturalhealth.com](http://www.naturalhealth.com) **Gone in 2018**  
[www.brampontparr.com.au](http://www.brampontparr.com.au)  
[www.roperandpages.com](http://www.roperandpages.com) **Gone in 2018**  
[www.diet444.com/v/links/index.html](http://www.diet444.com/v/links/index.html) **2018** links to herbalife  
[www.samsonsecret.com](http://www.samsonsecret.com)  
[www.clickhealthfit.com](http://www.clickhealthfit.com)  
[www.torontowebservices.com](http://www.torontowebservices.com)  
[www.addlisting.net](http://www.addlisting.net)  
[www.pagemedicine.com/Alternative/Aromatherapy](http://www.pagemedicine.com/Alternative/Aromatherapy) **Seems gone 2018**  
[www.naturalhealth.com/dir/cosmetic-resources5.html](http://www.naturalhealth.com/dir/cosmetic-resources5.html) **Gone in 2018**  
[www.aucourant.com](http://www.aucourant.com)  
[www.bodiesinmotion.com](http://www.bodiesinmotion.com)  
[www.ondrugs.org/links.html](http://www.ondrugs.org/links.html)  
[www.health4care.com](http://www.health4care.com)  
[www.premiunseoearch.com](http://www.premiunseoearch.com) **Gone in 2018**  
[www.mycacneforum.com](http://www.mycacneforum.com) **Gone in 2018**  
[www.healthwebidirectory.com](http://www.healthwebidirectory.com)  
[www.morehealthcare.com](http://www.morehealthcare.com)  
[www.healthygreat.com](http://www.healthygreat.com)  
[www.directorymedical.com](http://www.directorymedical.com)  
[www.alltopwebsites.org](http://www.alltopwebsites.org) **Gone in 2018**  
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## Natural Perfumery vs Synthetics the truth and the trade hype

By Martin Watt

People have asked me about several issues surrounding the use of natural extracts and synthetic chemicals. As also there seems to be many people who believe everything that suppliers and course providers tell them, I thought this article might help clear up some important issues.

The following are my opinions based on a good knowledge of the natural extracts trades as well as the historical aspects of perfumery and a fair knowledge of synthetic fragrance production.

### 'Natural' perfumes and those who make and teach about them

1. The term 'Natural' in perfumery does not just involve the use of plant extracts. It can involve the use of animal products. Unfortunately, there are suppliers around who will sell and use animal products banned under International conservation treaties. So never assume that because a perfume is stated to be "natural" that it does not include ingredients that are illegal. In May 2008 a BBC TV programme showed a reporter being told by an incense musk and other ingredients which are illegal to import into countries who are members of CITES. Clearly the program makers did not consider editing out these comments or adding a note at the end of the program.

The traditional maker of incense blends in the above, was a good example of how traditional products should never be assumed to be safe or legal which many people just assume to be the case. I have particularly noticed this ignorance among some natural perfumers, home soap makers and web sites in the USA and Canada.

2. **Natural does not mean safe:** Many of the people calling themselves "natural perfumers" have acquired much of what they know out of old books. These old formulas can be great, but they can also be the light of modern knowledge be extremely dangerous. I have seen some of these perfumes on sale which contain ingredients considered too dangerous by the big perfume makers, for example cinnamon bark oil, costus absolute, verbena oil, expressed citrus peel oils, etc. If some of these people had obtained proper training or research information, they would have possessed the knowledge to assess the safety or not of old formulations. Clearly safety is not an important consideration among many of these people.

3. Some of the web sites run by the supposed natural perfumers and cosmetics trade. This is because they present significant risks of causing skin reactions and extracts. Be on the lookout (particularly in the USA) for Costus and Verbena absolute. If you see that being sold it is an indication of two things:  
**1. Someone who does not know or care about safety issues.**  
**2. That in reality the product may be a safer synthetic version and not the real thing as the web site will claim.**

4. The training to be a proper perfume formulator takes many years. Often they are University graduates in their chemistry and nose move on to working in the fragrance trade and develop their knowledge and then until they are recognised by the trade as top "nosers". These people have an intimate knowledge of fragrance chemistry often including natural extracts, they also have the underpinning knowledge on safety issues via their trade organisations.

On the other hand, anyone can call themselves a "natural perfumer" without any training, or after having taken a course run by teachers who themselves have had no sound training in the regular perfumery trade. Some even pick up snippets of information from newsgroups over the years and then give others the impression they are very knowledgeable. To do proper perfumery training costs a lot of money, so why bother when they can fool people into thinking they are so experienced by setting up websites, newsgroups, blogs and Guides **which they own and control.**

There was a link here to a review of one of the teachers referred to above, however, after threats from this person, the author took her article down. Certain members of this organisation have had no adequate training in the subjects they teach and have written several of the trades "novels" on aromatherapy that I refer to in other articles on this site. At least one sells banned animal extracts and others have or do sell synthetic fragrance blends as "pure essential oils or absolutes". This organisation is typical of those who will take any unscrupulous businesses into their membership in order to bolster numbers and make themselves look representative to the world.

Beware of those who claim 30 years experience of natural perfumery without giving you any idea of how that experience was gained - could it be a lie to snare those who really believe everything on web sites and in publicity?

Beware of natural perfumers who imply they are associated with an popular authors in aromatherapy. Other articles on this site give you an idea of what I think of the level of knowledge of most such authors! Most aromatherapy authors have no training in the perfumery trade. That in itself is not a major problem, but it is when you are misled into thinking these people are very knowledgeable and experienced.

5. Like any trade, an individual should know what they are using and what they are advising others to do. From my observation of the burgeoning 'natural perfumes' trade this is far from the case. It is the blind leading the blind in many cases.

### Natural versus synthetic

There is an awful lot of misinformation on this, particularly on the Internet. Some web sites give the idea that any synthetic fragrance is going to give you all kinds of health problems, some do that just to sell their products.

**First I want to cover synthetic fragrances.** These can be made using a variety of starting materials including natural ones such as turpentine distilled from tree stumps skinned for timber. Most individual fragrance chemicals have been tested for skin safety and toxicity and many are safer than their natural equivalents. One reason for this safety factor is that these individual molecules can be so potent that manufacturers only need to use tiny volumes in their products. Admittedly over the years a few such as synthetic musks have been found to be not as safe as first thought. However, that differs little from essential oils some of which were used liberally years ago, but which we now know are dangerous, i.e. expressed bergamot oil.

**Some say "what about these chemicals when blended in exotic combinations"?** The answer to that is all of the large companies test their products on panels of humans, on cell cultures and sometimes on animals. Therefore the toxicology and safety are known, in many cases better than with natural extract blends.

**What about environmental issues of synthetics?** This is the one area that as a rule turns me against them. All chemical processes use huge amounts of energy and often leave us with eco persistent wastes and high CO2 emissions. However, not all fragrance chemicals do and it is wrong to damn them all just because some may be environmentally unfriendly.

**So what is the problem?** The biggest problem is the way the public and most aromatherapists are hoodwinked into thinking anything synthetic is bad. In the case of synthetic fragrances they have their place and that is for scenting a vast range of products safely and effectively. There is very little evidence currently available that most of these fragrances present significant hazards to most of us if used appropriately. It is this question of **inappropriate use** which is the big stumbling block. While it may be fine to use a tiny volume of synthetic Lily of the Valley in a candle, or soap made by a large commercial company, it may NOT be acceptable for untrained people making home made body care products. People often forget that these are powerful fragrances intended by the manufacturers to be used at a few parts per million. They were never developed for use in body care products at the kind of levels home produce makers sometimes use them. There could also be problems if regularly used in fragrance dispensers such as are often used for essential oils.

**So what's wrong with just using essential oils?** One can make lovely natural perfumes just using essential oils and absolutes in alcohol, or in a light fixed oil. Just a good Turkish Rose oil diluted in a solvent makes a delightful perfume. Simply adding some good Egyptian Jasmin absolute to alcohol also makes a wonderful fragrance. You can blend essential oils, absolutes and resins to create perfumes of festivity. However, to do this safely you do need to know a little chemistry and certainly what extracts should never be used on the skin. It is that aspect which is a concern with home producers as I know they are often lacking in this knowledge.

In addition to the above, it is common knowledge among the essential oil wholesale trade that adulteration of oils is the norm. Some of the adulteration with synthetic chemicals is so well done that only expert analysis will detect it. As I have said in other articles on this site, adulteration is something aromatherapists do not like, but are in most cases completely unaware of. This has been going on since the beginning of aromatherapy as a popular therapy and puts massive question marks over many of the therapeutic claims made. **It is particularly common with absolutes which these people who call themselves 'natural perfumers' seem to love so much. Of course they love them, they smell delightful because they are manufactured for the real perfume trade and are mostly blends of synthetic chemicals with some naturals.**

**What about environmental issues of natural extracts?** This is where we also get an awful amount of hype from the oil supply trade. There are other articles on this site over these issues. Personally I would rather use a synthetic Sandalwood to make a perfume than use the real thing. The real thing is far more damaging to the environment and ecology than the synthetic in this instance. On the other hand, I would not use that extract for any therapeutic purposes, but rather would find other oils that will do the job required.

**So after all that what is the answer?** It has to be use the correct fragrance material for the correct purpose. If you are using a known synthetic fragrance in a candle or soap, check with the suppliers as to what the recommended volume to use is. If they don't know **exactly** then I suggest you do not buy from them as clearly they are just middlemen without adequate product knowledge. If you want to use that same fragrance in a body care product then you must be ultra careful in how much you use, and with your labelling.

**If you want to recreate a natural fragrance blend from old books be very cautious.** You must check the safety issues of every ingredient and if possible the combination of ingredients. It's one thing doing it for your own use, but another ballgame if selling it to the public as is common in the USA. In Europe, in theory, all such cosmetic products must be licensed and have a safety evaluation.

Try to purchase your oils from those who are prepared to supply data on their authenticity. Never deal with a supplier that also sells animal extracts, particularly if they are based in Europe or the Far East. Most countries in the world are miserably at enforcing conservation treaties and trade always comes first, ethics last.

**In order to do all this you cannot just rely on the Internet and newsgroups as a source of information. Many are now doing that, including some teaching the subject.**

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## The need for Public access to Essential Oils

First published in a NAHA newsletter

By Martin Watt

The use of essential oils for their relaxant or stimulant effects on the emotions, for relieving symptoms of ailments such as coughs, colds, flu, catarrh, sinusitis etc. can be an extremely simple process and requires little if any training to achieve excellent results. The addition of a few drops of Lavender oil to a bath is in fact **aromatherapy**. Of course, in certain cases, the desired effects can be substantially enhanced by the additional use of massage for which training is necessary. However, there is absolutely nothing wrong with most essential oils being available for retail to the public in shops, provided simple safety precautions and simple instructions are provided with the oils.

Many governments around the world are permitting, or actively promoting self-medication for simple ailments. This has been forced on them because of the huge escalation in the costs of government funded health care programs. I am certain that the availability of essential oils results in a reduction in unnecessary visits to the doctor for self limiting ailments. Particularly for flu, coughs, colds, mild depression, etc. Of course in America some private doctors would not want to lose business, but for many people on income support programs, a reduction in federal health care costs would be welcome by government and overworked medics.

An excellent example of how self-medication using essential oils can be beneficial is mild depression; this starts as generally feeling pissed-off with everyone, your life, the world etc. If the simple use of some wonderful fragrant oil in a bath can lift that depression, even if only for a few hours, then this may prevent a drift into deeper clinical depression with all its associated drug and ultimately hospitalisation costs. Perhaps lavender oil should be given away **free** by health care authorities. That would save them a fortune in drugs and medical fees.

If a limited range of safe essential oils were available on the toiletries shelves in supermarkets, we could well end up with one or two deaths due to silly people who did crazy things like drinking a whole bottle. However, this extremely slim chance must always be weighed against the thousands of deaths and severe illness resulting from misuse of over the counter drugs, from prescribed medication, or from ordinary household products. On the other hand, I would bet the attempted suicide rate would decline, and the people who pop the bottle or two of booze in the shopping trolley for emotional support may also drop in number.

Many Aromatherapists will of course insist that essential oils are only safe in their hands. This attitude is patent nonsense as the vast majority of essential oils have been approved as G.R.A.S. substances in the U.S.A. This classification means 'generally regarded as safe' when used by various trades at their normal levels of use. Some of the oils aromatherapists are told are "dangerous" are in fact permitted food flavours at higher concentrations than are used in massage. Whereas other oils recommended on many aromatherapy courses are in fact hazardous when applied to the skin. Clearly therefore, before essential oils were made more freely available, there is a big education job to be done to prevent the marketing of hazardous oils.

Aromatherapists should not be afraid of the general public using essential oils; I believe it to be a misconception that such an action would put aromatherapists out of business. The reason is because once people learn about how beneficial essential oils can be, a percentage will want to take this further and perhaps go for a massage.

I have encountered several people (particularly men), who would say "I don't like smelly perfumes," but once persuaded to have a bath with some oil, or have a back massage, 9 times out of 10 they were hooked and the fear of someone unknown touching them with one of these 'effeminate oils' was swiftly forgotten. I am sure many therapists will have had similar experiences. I know that the way I got interested in Herbal medicine years ago was because I purchased some anti-hayfever herbal tablets in a health food store. When I realised that they seemed to be helping my severe hayfever better than the drugs, my next action was not to go out and get some more, but to look in the phone book for a qualified herbalist who I hoped (rightly) could help me even more.

All aromatherapists should arm themselves with accurate referenced information on the hazards associated with using essential oils. They can then promote, or defend the free availability of the safer oils.

**Addendum:** Since writing this a few years ago, things have moved at an alarmingly fast pace to get traditional remedies restricted. Around the world various regulatory bodies (driven by pharmaceutical interests), are persuading legislators to restrict the public access to traditional remedies. Many restrictions being imposed are **not based on sound scientific evidence** of adverse effects, but rather are on the advice of committees whose members tend to be all people trained in the chemical sciences. I do not know of any advisory committees in the European community that have any traditional healers sitting with them. **Only the general public can do anything to stop this insidious take-over of natural medicines by the International pharmaceutical interests.**

Lobby your politicians, tell them you will not vote for them if they allow your freedoms to be restricted by people who have no interest in your rights. Already in Europe only a minute percentage of the population vote at EU elections. The politicians really are so ignorant that they do not understand the

low turnout is because the general population simply do not want them. Britain has voted to leave that anti democratic club, but doubtless many of their crazy laws will remain.

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## MARKETING ISSUES SURROUNDING THE SALE OF ESSENTIAL OILS

By Martin Watt

Originally published in the IATA journal Canada.

There is legislation in both UK & EU covering the sale and supply of essential oils. E.U. legislation has pretty much replaced our own, but enforcement of EU law is weak. However, not all of these regulations apply to every trade that needs to use essential oils in their products. The definition of what can or cannot be supplied or used, rests largely with the intended final use of the oil concerned.

As far as Medicinal use is concerned, most people in the UK should by now be aware that most essential oils may not be retained for treating specific health problems without a medicines license. What constitutes 'medicinal use' is defined under the UK 1968 Medicines Act and updates as well as in several pieces of EU law.

It is important for our trades future to examine the differences between:

### 1. Illegal sale.

### 2. Inadvisable or unethical sale.

1. This will depend on each countries legislation. For example, the only essential oils that are prohibited for resale to the public in the UK are: Chenopodium (American wormseed), savin oil and croton oil. These oils may only be distributed to the medical profession from licensed pharmaceutical premises. Despite those restrictions having been in place since 1968, at least two well-known companies in aromatherapy were selling American wormseed oil openly until about the mid 1990s.

Another oil that is 'effectively' banned in cosmetic products is sassafras oil. By 'effectively' banned this is because the E.U. only permit safrol in products at below 100 ppm. Since raw sassafras oil contains about 870,000 p.p.m. of safrole, this means that in aromatherapy you would have great difficulty in diluting the oil to a safe and LEGAL level of use.

### 2. The differences between inadvisable and unethical sale are a grey area.

There are a number of essential oils which represent significant hazards if inappropriately used by a member of the public, or a badly trained therapist. Therefore, we need to examine the wisdom of whether such oils should be supplied at all, or if, provided they are ethically marketed, potential risks are slight.

In the case of aromatherapy where skin application is likely, my belief is that it is **unethical** to market and supply any know hazardous essential oil without appropriate warnings. I am here thinking about oils like **expressed bergamot, bergamot, benzoin, cinnamon bark, expressed lime, verbena**, etc. In such cases, the safety data is crystal clear; such oils should not be applied to human skin. This safety data is backed by International research organisations such as RIFM and IFRA who advise their large member companies on safety issues of raw materials.

The legal position of anyone that supplies, or uses such oils without appropriate warnings requires examination. There is little doubt that if someone used an essential oil with well-documented hazards - in the volume that is the norm in aromatherapy - and then their client suffered from a side effect, such a client would have an extremely powerful legal case to argue. If the harmed individual can prove that a major research organisation such as RIFM, has advised the large fragrance companies against the use of such materials for many years, they will have a strong case. A court might deem it 'unreasonable', for an aromatherapy supplier to sell such material without adequate warnings. It would probably also be deemed 'unreasonable', for a therapist to use the material contrary to the practice of the International fragrance trade that DOES understand safety issues. In my opinion if they did this, then their insurance company would very likely refuse to stand by them and cover any subsequent damages awarded.

### Unfortunately, there are still many companies in the aromatherapy business, that supply such hazardous products without any significant warnings, and many others whose warnings are inadequate.

Some suppliers try and hide behind their policy of only supplying hazardous oils to "trained therapists". As someone that has been deeply involved in publishing and teaching on safety issues for many years, I can tell you that policy is utterly fallacious. The fact a therapist is trained in our industry most certainly does not mean they have been equipped with adequate safety data. If they had been, then the oils I mentioned above would not have formed part of the tuition requirements of many aromatherapy courses for years.

### THE TRADE HYPE

The people in aromatherapy who promote the use of essential oils with well-documented side effects, often try and hide behind "well we have used this oil for 20 years and never seen a problem". My arguments against this are as follows:

1. Aromatherapy does not have a centralised data collection system such as that used by doctors. Therefore, no one is certain of the percentages of clients and therapists that get adverse reactions to essential oils.

2. The huge majority of aromatherapists do not treat enough people to be able to obtain accurate statistical information.

3. If a client has a mild adverse reaction following a massage, the chances are they simply will not go back to the therapist concerned and the reaction is undocumented.

4. Adverse reactions to essential oils do occur, but are mainly to the therapists themselves. I have had several aromatherapists contact me for advice about a variety of skin problems caused by essential oils. In at least two cases they have undergone clinical dermal sensitisation testing that confirmed sensitisation to certain oils. Such cases rarely get reported to the trade associations and so again statistical data is being lost.

5. Others promote the use of hazardous oils because "medical doctors in France use it all the time". They fail to appreciate that registered doctors in most countries are legally free to use whatever substance for their patients they wish. Aromatherapists are not registered doctors or anything like adequately trained in clinical medicine. Yet despite that, some aromatherapists do a little training with these doctors in France, or take courses run by their followers. These aromatherapists then go away and merrily start using essential oils in the same manner that the Doctor has shown them, without a second thought about their own legal position. Don't be fooled by thinking your insurance policy covers you. Insurance companies are notorious for trying to get out of paying a claim in any way they can. If there was the slightest hint that you had done something contrary to "accepted trade good practice" they will use that to get themselves off the hook.

6. In certain cases, such as the application of verbena oil to the skin, the adverse effects are unequivocal. If aromatherapists have used so called 'verbena' oil regularly and seen no adverse reactions, then the question must be asked, "were they using pure, natural, unmodified verbena". I would bet the answer is no, despite what the supplier/s says.

### My opinions on unethical and inadvisable supply practice's

I consider it unethical to sell to the public any essential oils with well-documented side effects, without providing scientifically verifiable and clear safety information.

I consider it inadvisable to sell the same oils to aromatherapists without clear concise warnings.

I consider it unethical to sell to anyone for skin application, essential oils that have not undergone Internationally acceptable safety testing on humans.

I consider it scandalous when such 'untested' oils are promoted and sold for internal consumption. In this category we have the seemingly unceasing supply of so called 'chemotype' oils, which have only been used by a handful of people compared with our tried and tested oils.

I believe that only **unscrupulous traders** will have oils like cinnamon bark, rue, sassafras, tansy, thuja, verbena, etc. available in the same lists that they supply to aromatherapists as well as to the public. The uses for these hazardous oils in aromatherapy are insignificant compared to their potential to cause severe harm. There is nothing wrong with some of these oils being sold to people such as candle manufacturers, to other trades where the resulting products are safe, or for their use in oil diffusers. However, such customers should in my opinion, have totally separate price lists. (not a difficult thing to do in this age of computer word processing).

### Unethical labelling of essential oils

The mislabelling of essential oils for financial gain is common. Instances that I can immediately think of are:

**CHAMOMILE MOROC.** Often labelled just as "Chamomile oil". This particular oil was originally only sold to the fragrance trade, and yet despite that, it has not undergone Internationally acceptable safety testing. It has no verifiable medicinal uses, or traditional uses. Its chemical profile is substantially different from our well-tested and tried Roman chamomile.

Why did it find its way into aromatherapy? Because some years ago it was half the price or less of Roman chamomile and big profits could be made by selling it as "chamomile". Then the aromatherapy fantasies machine on this oils uses kicked in, promoting its use.

**LAVANDIN** sold as **LAVENDER**. There are plenty in this trade that will argue that there is nothing wrong with that. Some years ago I paid for oil to be analysed from a well-known company that was new to the field at the time. Their oil sold as "lavender" was in fact lavandin. Yet, they had a well-known aromatherapy figure advising them. Oh, perhaps it was a packing error !! The fact is they are two significantly different essential oils. Only a few years ago, lavandin was sold on the commercial market at a far lower price than genuine lavender. That is the **ONLY** reason that the oil was sold to the public as lavender.

**PATCHOULI**. Available from the large suppliers in a number of **grades**. Some years ago I paid for analysis of the oil supplied by a small aromatherapy school who "only sell the finest grade oils from France". What was this fine oil - around 40% gurjun balsam, something that the real essential oils trade would consider the **lowest grade patchouli**. This company were promoting their products to nurses for use on ill people. It might be safe, but I don't know, and what about all their other oils. Unfortunately, I could only afford the cost of one oil to be analysed. According to their own literature, all their oils were carefully analysed, I can only presume they meant by the firm that **made them !!**

**ROSEWOOD**. The little genuine rosewood oil that is around is probably illegal. This is because the rosewood species that have been used for logging and oil are classified as "endangered species" under International agreements. To get round this, traders are labelling the essential oil from the **leaves** of the trees as "rose-wood oil". How can an essential oil that traditionally has been extracted from the heartwood of a tree be sold as a **WOOD** oil when in fact it is a **LEAF** oil. In my view that is like saying that petigrain oil is the same as neroli, "well it all comes from the same tree doesn't it", what do you think?

**YARROW**. Another essential oil that **has not undergone formal safety testing**. So, why is it used in aromatherapy? Because it was half the price or less than German chamomile. Because ill informed aromatherapy teachers and chemists presumed that because it contains a lot of azulene's, that its activity will be similar to German chamomile. As it is cheap it is used to 'extend' genuine German chamomile. Therefore if an oil is labelled as "pure German chamomile" but it is 'cut' with yarrow, it is obviously not genuine, may have unknown effects on the skin, and may not work for the conditions you want to use it for.

**YLANG NO. 2** or **3** sold as **Ylang No. 1**. Oh yes very common that one. Few aromatherapists in their training are exposed to the smell of the different grades and qualities of essential oils, so you can't always rely on your nose.

These are just a few examples of misdescription of essential oils which can significantly affect what you intend using them for. This of course does not even begin to attend the problem of synthetic chemicals and solvents added to essential oils.

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## A selection of emails to newsgroups such as: IDMA; ATFE; oils\_herbs\_etc. There are many others buried in my files.

By Martin Watt

### Not in dated order.

### There are many emails in the zip file 'oldemails' which you can download.

October 2000

### To those that feel despair and despondency after reading my articles.

Do not despair about the effects of essential oils. They can be wonderful healing agents in a number of ways.

Do not despair and think aromatherapy does not work, it does, but not necessarily in the ways you have been taught, or for the conditions you are told it will help.

Do not despair and think you can't help friends, family and clients by utilising aromatherapy. You can, and they will be enormously grateful.

I hope that helps the despondency a little.

**The despair comes in with:** Aromatherapy book publishers who don't give a damn if what they publish is accurate as long as they are making big bucks. A few aromatherapy books have made a small fortune for certain publishers; writers of course are lucky to get 10% of the cover price.

The trades associations who cannot get to grips with quality control on what teachers are telling students. This is because most of their teachers have not got a clue themselves.

The aromatherapy journal publishers who prefer to print the pretty poetic articles, because they know that is what most of their readers really want.

The teachers who just read aromatherapy books and regurgitate their contents without a second thought.

The well-known figures who take snippets of sound science, and weave a whole load of inaccurate pseudo-science around it to make themselves look knowledgeable.

### How can a student sort the wheat from the chaff?

See if an aromatherapy book contains references to scientific articles and books, or just to other aromatherapy books. Are those references to the use of the oil, or another herbal extract and not relevant.

Purchase **sound referenced safety information**, never accept such information from unreferenced aromatherapy sources. I do get very irate with the numbers of people who ask safety questions that could be properly answered, if only they took the bother to purchase one of the 3 or so publications on the subject.

Do your best to check-out references for yourself. Major libraries can obtain copies of research articles. Yes of course this costs money, but if you are involved in a profession that is dealing with health care issues, you owe it to your clients and yourself to make sure that what you do is safe and effective.

Stop being lazy and think you can learn all you need to know from taking a few weekends classes and reading a few books - you can't. The study of essential oils is a lifetimes learning. I will never stop learning myself about this vast subject. I have never taken an aromatherapy course, only massage. OK I found out a herbalist which equipped me with a basic knowledge. However, I trained as most I know about aromatherapy by ferreting it out from all kinds of places. No reason others can't do this if they have a reasonable level of intelligence. And yes I do share my knowledge with others via IATA, but I will not under any circumstances share everything I have got via the current aromatherapy set-up.

Ask your teachers pertinent questions. If they can't give you an answer and particularly if they try to demean you, then think twice about if you wish to waste more of your money on their classes.

Get angry if you find out the wool has been pulled over your eyes. Don't just give up and put it behind you. Get evidence if you think you have been lied to and cheated. Only by gathering **intelligence** can you have any hope of turning this trade around from its long history of gross dishonesty.

### Trade censorship.

In the past, and to a degree still so, the aromatherapy press has been the subject of self-censorship. Journals have not dared print certain articles criticising the icons of the trade and of course they did not want to loose revenue from their advertisers. Only a couple of Journals had the guts to publish such articles; when they did, they immediately came under fire from 'trade interests'. This is what is so great about the internet-uncensored views, like it, lump it, or sue me!

My articles give a different picture of this trade than the rose tinted fairy tails that are the norm. Aggressive they are, yes, **I always get angry when I know people are being swindled out of their hard-earned cash by confidence tricksters**. I will never tone down my material "because you can hook more people with honey", that's not my style. I just hope those that read my materials have enough brainpower to read the stuff, even if they don't like what they hear, and then to check out what I say for themselves.

I have little financial gain from attacking bad education. The gain is exposing the trades endemic poor standards to public scrutiny. *Martin Watt.*

### My harsh words.

I have been involved with this trade in various capacities since 1985. During that period I have known many of the leading members both personally and indirectly from their work. I have also had a good exposure to the supply side of the oils trade. So when I come out with statements like con artists, fraudsters, etc. I know exactly what I am talking about, and I am **not referring to people like this just because they have different opinions to me**. Such people have made certain they get themselves into positions of influence within the trade by charming the pants off people. There is nothing different in that respect between aromatherapy and many other trades. However what is different (as I have said time and time again) is that aromatherapy treats **health problems**. In that case we should try and ensure we get the finest information resources and products possible. Sadly that has historically not been the case, and the market is flooded with false products and appallingly inaccurate and dangerous education.

It is also true that in the essential oils trade, and aromatherapy education, are many people who do not know what the word 'truth' means. **In some cases they have become such expert liars I am sure they believe themselves**. One reason has been that until newsgroups formed, rarely were their statements ever challenged.

My position is this: I am always ready to help and support people who have been misled and genuinely want to get their act together. Several people on this group can confirm that. However what I have always steadfastly refused to do is to help re educate people that for years have been extracting cash from gullible people by selling rubbish services.

That is where I part company with people who believe that you can make honest people out of crooks by re educating them. For example as soon as I saw suggestions on this group that people should help educate Young Living distributors, and give Gary Young a voice at a conference, then I cut my ties with those promoting these ideas. In my opinion, trying to re-educate people with a consistent history of lying and cheating just gives them greater professional standing and a license to print money.

I am often accused of being negative, my reply to that is my **positive contributions** to this trade have been bigger than many people know. For many years I have been banging the drum of safety and I know that has influenced some of the associations and companies. I also have a huge amount of information resources that I use for education purposes.

So what is the answer? To be honest the easiest one for me is to get out of the trade and let the con artists carry on unchallenged. If I could find myself a job I liked, I would do that tomorrow.

It seems to me most of the trade associations in the UK and the USA have no real desire to turn aromatherapy into the respectable and useful profession it should be. All they do is tinker around with things like length of training, subjects taught, and desperately trying to win influence and power at all costs. All of this is setting the cart before the horses. You can never hope to have a truly professional trade until you ensure that tuition is accurate and goods being used are genuine. You also need to ensure that there is a limited intake of students. Of course in the UK this would mean probably 70% of schools having to close-great! Historically aromatherapy schools have only continued in existence because of the massive numbers of practitioners leaving it. People qualify, but soon realise few can make a good living because of all the hot competition-uncontrolled by any trade associations.

Yes this is all gloomy and negative, I do not see any significant changes coming along and I really do not know how aromatherapy will end up. It is a real shame because aromatherapy has got so much to offer with treating a wide range of health problems. For my part all I can do is continue producing materials that I shall from now on be mainly targeting at the medical profession. The only reason being because only they have got the kind of training necessary to treat some of the conditions essential oils are ideal for. Believe me I have no love of the medical profession, but on the other hand I can't see the average aromatherapist being competently trained in health matters in the foreseeable future.

I have been delighted to see on this group a huge growth in people willing to challenge trade organisations and the way they function. It is only by the members continually challenging these people that the trade has any hope. Keep it up, and to those that curl up and die when they hear dissent, I would say you should not be in the business of helping people with health problems. Suppressing whistle blowers is what has lead to thousands of cases of medical negligence. Regrettably suppressing dissent is also very common in the whole of complementary health care. *Martin Watt.*

Date May 2004  
to: ATFE or Oils-Herbs?  
**Academic studies on plant extracts.**

Just a few words of caution for those not familiar with evaluating scientific studies such as those Liz Tams pointed you to.

When reading such papers it is critically important to \*not take at face value\* what they say. Time and time again I have come across major errors that make the authors conclusions of academic interest only. Here I have thousands of copies of studies which on first glance look convincing, but upon closer examination I have not included them in my own database on oils for a variety of reasons.

Here are just a few factors to examine:

1) Has the trial been done using an essential oil or another type of plant extract?  
It is very common for aromatherapy authors and teachers to confuse this. A superb trial on a herbal extract used internally, suddenly gets turned into "this essential oil does the same thing if rubbed onto someone's skin in aromatherapy".

You will often find tests where hexane or chloroform is used to extract the oil from a plant. In such a case any results may not be applicable to the distilled oil. With the cooking process of distillation new chemicals are produced and other important ones are destroyed. Therefore you cannot assume one type of extract will give similar results to another.

2) Is the essential oil used in testing the real thing?  
It is common to see in scientific studies that the oil has either been supplied by a laboratory reagent company, by purchase in a local market, or from a trial distillation from plants grown in the local botanic garden. In all these circumstances the results may well not have any connection with the use of a commercial oil.

3) Has the researcher had the oil they are using analysed?  
Frequently not and therefore they have no idea on what they are using. Please do not forget that such tests are often done by undergraduates who main interest is getting a convincing set of results for their degree and then getting out to the local bar asap :)

4) Have the tests been conducted on cell cultures and then assumptions made of activity within a living body?  
This is becoming increasingly common and I have grave doubts that you can extrapolate such results to real people. This is particularly so where anti viral actions are being tested. This type of testing is why increasingly the scientific community are misleading the legislators over the toxicity of herbs and other so called "toxins".

5) Has the research been conducted just using individual chemicals that occur in an oil?  
Again increasingly common and sometimes is valid, but not always because it leaves out of the picture the other 300 plus chemicals occurring in the whole oil. Such research can be a useful guide to the efficacy of an oil, but it flies in the face of what ought to be considered 'natural medicine'.

6) Has the chemical used in the tests been extracted from the oil, or is it from a laboratory chemicals supplier?  
That one is very common indeed. Lab. grade chemicals are often impure and any results derived using them are most unreliable when compared to the natural extracted chemical. To get purified synthetic chemicals is possible, but they are very costly indeed and therefore most labs use the cheaper grades with all their impurities.

Do not be fooled that a paper has been "peer reviewed". That system is only as good as the "peers" doing the reviews, often such people do not have the first clue about the trades involved with essential oils. I have seen several articles in nursing journals that were not worth the paper they were printed on simply because the publishers chose reviewers who they thought knew their subject but did not.

The above are just a few of the things I have to be on the look out for when adding scientific studies to my database. At least I try my hardest to get it right while others just throw together irrelevant studies to bulk out what they publish or give to students on their courses. *Martin Watt.*

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