

History of Aromatherapy

by Trish Kershaw

HISTORY OF AROMATHERAPY

Imagine a world where you cannot smell anything - of course, there are smells we would rather not smell, rotting food, body waste, food we do not like but there are also many other wonderful smells – the sea, food, flowers, grass etc. The memory can invoke in us a sense of well being and remind us of good times. It is difficult to describe a smell with mere words, for instance, the smell of a small baby - how can one put that into words:

THE EGYPTIAN'S

In 2800 BC the Egyptian's wrote papyrus manuscripts that gave details of medicinal herbs used in that time.

The Egyptian's used essential oils and herbs for a remedy called 'Kyphi' containing 16 ingredients, which could be used as a perfume, as incense or taken internally as a medicine. Kyphi was reported to be antiseptic, good for the chest, soothing and as a remedy against poisoning. The Egyptian's also used aromatic oils such as myrrh and cedar during the embalming process which can still be traced 1000's of years later. Frankincense was also found in cosmetic preparations that were left in the tombs in beautiful jars and pots.

THE CHINESE

It is recorded in the Yellow Emperor's Book of Internal Medicine, in the time more than 2000 BC, that the Chinese used herbs alongside acupuncture. The herbs used included opium and ginger. Aromatics were and are still often used during ritual religious ceremonies.

THE JEWS

The book of Exodus in the bible describes the Jewish people's exodus from Egypt to Israel in the year 1240 BC, approximately. The bible tells how the Lord gave Moses the formula, which was to be used as special anointing oil. The formula contained cinnamon, myrrh, olive oil and cassia amongst its ingredients. This anointing oil was used to consecrate Aaron and his sons into the priesthood, a tradition that was used from generation to generation.

THE GREEKS

Herodotus and Democrates visited Egypt in the fifth century BC and learnt about perfume and natural therapeutic practices, and they transferred this knowledge to the

Greeks on their return. Herodotus was the first person to record the method of distillation of turpentine in 425 BC.

Dioscorides compiled a five-volume materia medica called the Herbarius, which contained detailed information about the sources and uses of plants and aromatics that were used, by the Greeks and Romans. Hippocrates, born in Greece in approximately 460 BC, is known as the 'father of medicine' and he prescribed fumigations made of perfume.

THE ARABIC INFLUENCE

The Arabs produced many great scientists in the time between the seventh and thirteenth centuries. One of these was Avicenna (AD 980-1037). Avicenna was a great physician and scholar. He wrote over 100 books during his life span, one of which was purely dedicated to the rose, which is highly prized by Islam. Avicenna was credited to have further refined the refrigerated coil, which was an important discovery for the process of distillation of the essential oils. Arabian perfumes, particularly rose water was found extensively throughout Europe by the 13th Century.

THE GROWTH OF AROMATHERAPY IN EUROPE

In the Middle Ages people carried posies (nosegays) to help protect themselves against infectious diseases such as the plague. The people of Europe gradually began to experiment with herbs of their own country, such as Lavender and Rosemary and during the 16th Century apothecaries began to supply lavender water and essential oils which were called 'chymical oils'. The invention of the printing process in the 15th Century meant that books, which detailed the distillation process, could be found, such as the Grete Herball in 1526.

The next few centuries saw the properties of many more essential oils being analysed and carefully recorded. In Grasse, in France, there was a large commercial growth in the perfume and distillation industry.

The growing popularity of the scientific chemical industry, in the 17th Century, meant that the interest between body and mind began to dwindle. The herbal therapists and aromatic remedies were out of favour, as the 'Professionals' rather than the individual were prescribing treatment. By the mid 20th Century aromatic oils were being used primarily for perfumes, cosmetics and for food.

In 1928, Gattefosse, who was a French chemist, was working in his parent's perfumery, when he badly burnt his arm and used lavender oil on it. The hand healed brilliantly and the scarring was minimal. Gattefosse became subsequently intrigued by the therapeutic possibilities of the essential oils and devised the term 'Aromatherapy'.

Another French man, Jean Valnet, who was a doctor and scientist, used aromatic oils to treat patients with psychiatric and medical disorders, the results of which were published in Aromatherapy in 1964.

Source: [www.onlinehomestudies](http://www.onlinehomestudies.com) and www.lifestudy.com

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