

EIGHT

HOW TO APPLY ESSENTIAL OILS

Topically



The Power of Dilution

Applications with a Base Oil

It is important to realize that the main reason to use nonirritant essential oils undiluted is generally convenience. The assumption that undiluted essential oils will work more efficiently is generally not true. Perhaps surprisingly, experience often indicates that diluted oil is more effective than undiluted. Such observations can be explained chemically in that certain molecules rearrange into less active forms when they are present in high concentration. The molecule curls up because it sees too many of its own kind. Diluted, it sees more molecules from other oils and it relaxes into a more stretched out and active form. It appears that increased efficacy upon dilution is a phenomenon observed mostly with authentic oils.

As convenient as it may be to take a drop of essential oil directly out of the bottle there are situations where dilution with a base oil (such as sesame, hazelnut, or almond oil) is preferred (see Dr. Pam Taylor's "Formula to Make a 2% Essential Oil Blend" on p. 76). For actual treatments it is often necessary to apply essential oils over long periods of time. In such cases a stock bottle with essential oils diluted in a base oil should be prepared.

INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE

Ernst Mayr

Ernst Mayr is professor emeritus of zoology at Harvard University. He ranks among the most eminent biologists of the twentieth century and has given evolutionary biology many important impulses. He is author and editor of many books in his field. In 1997 he published *This is Biology*, an eloquent and immensely readable introduction to the character and development of biological thinking and the science of life itself.

Other Diluents

A condition where dilution is key is eczema. However, fatty oils are often not the choice of eczema patients, as their oily feel is perceived as distressing. For eczema treatments it is best to integrate essential oils into a nonoily base. One possibility is to use a water-based acrylic gel; even though such gels are synthetic, they provide an effective and convenient means of delivery. Dogmatic insistence on natural carrier materials often leads to abandoning the treatment and may be self-defeating.

An easy way to prepare essential oil remedies for eczema treatments without the potentially cumbersome procurement of acrylic gels is to mix the essential oil component with aloe vera gel. Another option is to disperse a drop of the undiluted blend with the help of some hydrosols such as Myrtle, Lavender, or Everlasting.

ESSENTIAL OIL JOURNEY

Helichrysum



Helichrysum italicum growing
in Salagon, France

The classic example of an essential oil that is highly effective in dilution is *Helichrysum italicum*, the oil that may be aromatherapy's most easily recognizable success story. Its undisputed ability to heal skin tissue steadily increases the demand for this oil. The aromatherapy literature is full of praise and testimonials for this oil. Exploration of this essential oil, also known as Everlasting or Immortelle, offers a nonthreatening experiment. It impresses with its extreme gentleness and high efficacy. There is hardly a better wound healer and anti-aging agent than this oil.

To verify this contention, a drop of the essential oil is applied to a random reddish area we may have on our hands or arms, simply to notice the nonevent that follows. Either nothing happens or symptoms of irritation diminish or disappear.

Helichrysum italicum essential oil is so mild that it can be put on the skin undiluted, which sometimes is the preferred option for the immediate treatment of injuries, especially bleeding wounds. Dropping the oil into a bleeding wound sanitizes the wound, speeds its closure, and quickly stops the pain.



Generally, though, the essential oil of *Helichrysum italicum* is best used in dilution (low concentration). For most of its intended purposes it is equally as effective in a 1 percent dilution in sesame oil as it would be at higher concentrations. Given that the oil is not entirely inexpensive the remarkable efficacy of even the smallest amounts make treatments with *Helichrysum italicum* essential oil quite affordable after all.

Above left: *Helichrysum italicum* from Corsica
Above right: *Helichrysum italicum* from a hillside in Herzegovina

Sources and Efficacy

Prior to the war in 1992 large quantities of *Helichrysum* essential oil were distilled in the former Yugoslavia. Demand came mostly from Grasse industries, which employed the oil as an important part in fragrancing/flavoring pipe tobaccos. Aromatherapy was only beginning to discover *Helichrysum*, and its popularity grew right around the time when the supply from the Balkans dried up due to the war. The only remaining production then came from Corsica, which could not satisfy the demand, and prices began a steady climb.



Helichrysum italicum
growing on the
shores of the
Mediterranean

In the past ten years production of *Helichrysum* from the hillsides of Croatia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina has returned to the market. This has not necessarily led to a decrease in prices, as a large multinational corporation has launched a skincare line based on *Helichrysum italicum* essential oil. *Helichrysum* has remained the subject of a sellers' market.

Oils purportedly originating from mainland France appear to be spurious, as it is illegal to harvest the plant there. *Helichrysum* oils labeled to be of French origin have a higher likelihood of having had at least a minor stay in a laboratory or to be a blend of oils from different growing areas—fabricated in Grasse!

It appears that oils from Corsica and Bosnia-Herzegovina (or other areas of the former Yugoslavia) work equally well for wound and scar treatments despite the fact they have moderately different chemical composition. Recent analyses have shown no oxygenated components (this means no so-called di-ketones) in the Bosnian oil. This is probably a consequence of harvesting at the earliest possible time, as buyers from France crisscross the growing areas, leaving those who start late with no plants to harvest.

This suggests that oxygenated compounds accumulate in *Helichrysum* oil later rather than earlier in its flowering state. Even though conventional thinking attributes the qualities of *Helichrysum* essential oil to its content of di-ketones, the oils without di-ketones work equally well. It would appear that the undisputable qualities of this essential oil are better explained by organicism than by identifying active ingredients: the wound-healing quality of *Helichrysum* oil arises at the level of the whole plant and not at the level of a specific molecule.