

Quality and Essential Oils

Quality is an important issue for those wishing to practice true aromatherapy. Since there is no regulation on the sale of essential oils in the United States (and many other countries) many people wonder, and rightly so, how they can find good essential oils, ones that they can trust to be what the label says they are.

While it is impossible for anyone in any company that is not government regulated to promise that they can absolutely assure you of 100%, undiluted, unadulterated essential oils, there are some guidelines that will help the selection process:

- If the company says ‘we are the only provider/source for good quality essential oils’ they are conveying ‘marketing-speak’ and not fact. If one studies the industry, one quickly discovers that there are certain growers, certain distillers, many of which have been in business for hundreds of years or more and most buyers go there for what they will re-sell at the wholesale, retail or multi-level quantity and price. No one can own enough plant producing land in enough countries in the world to be able to claim exclusivity on all the products they offer. If they are making false claims, they might not be honest about other things, so you may want to look elsewhere.
- Companies that do their homework, meaning they attempt to ensure purity by asking for GC/MS information on the oils they purchase, may be more reliable than those that do not. These companies will offer you the GC/MS information when they are selling their product, too.
- There are certain standard ballpark costs for certain essential oils which reflect what the supplier had to pay for that oil. For instance, Lavender, at this time, may have a ballpark price of between \$18 and \$20 for 10 mls. If someone is selling at much below that price, such as \$8 for 10 mls, you might question the quality. The only time a much lower price is justified is when the supplier has bought a huge quantity of the essential oil, or has been able to buy directly from a grower or distiller, thus paying a much lower price than the going rate themselves. One can familiarize oneself with current prices by searching the catalogues of different essential oil companies online.
- Always avoid essential oils that are sold for the same price for the same quantity, no matter what the essential oil is. For instance, if a company sells Patchouli for the same price as Sweet Orange, there is something wrong with the picture. Due to growing locations, amounts of plant material needed for a good yield, method of extraction and so on, essential oils can and will differ greatly in price. Essential oils should be sold in amber, blue, green or dark purple glass bottles as they are very sensitive to UV light. Avoid purchasing oils that have been stored in clear glass bottles or have been kept in or near a window.

- Look at the label and make sure that the information there contains more than just the common name. The label should also have the Latin binomial (or Botanical name), the country of origin, method of extraction, and for certain essences, such as Juniper, the part of plant used and for others, such as Rosemary, the chemotype.
- If a company is boasting that their oils are ‘therapeutic grade’ that is more ‘marketing-speak’ since there is no such classification in the industry. This does not negate the actual quality of their essential oils, but shows the company either lacks knowledge about the industry or is sending a miscommunication or both.
- Join a professional organization like NAHA that sends news to members so you can know if an essential oil is endangered or there are other issues which suggest finding a good quality product for that specific oil is unlikely.
- Look for companies that are members of professional organizations who focus on true aromatherapy, education and safety, like NAHA. This can indicate that the supplier is concerned with providing the best possible essential oils.

Ultimately, the nose will convey if there is something wrong with the essence in the bottle so one should always trust their instinctive and experiential judgment and not be afraid to question a product that doesn’t seem right. A good supplier will be happy to explain, send information or accept a return and give credit toward a future purchase.

This information was written by Shellie Enteen BA, RA, LMT NAHA Vice President for NAHA website 2010 update.