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## Aromatherapy: Good Common Scents

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Some days, you wish you could just press the pause button on your fast-forward lifestyle. You can. And you should. Taking time to smell the roses is more than just good advice. It can actually help you create balance by restoring your body, mind, and spirit. That's what aromatherapy is all about. The word aromatherapy is derived from aroma, meaning smell, and therapy, meaning treatment. Thousands of years ago, ancient civilizations used aromatic massage oils derived from plants to enhance their mental and physical health. Even Hippocrates, the father of Western medicine, believed that "The way to health is to have an aromatic bath and massage every day."

Today's busy executives may not be making strategic business decisions while soaking in a rose-petal bath of milk and honey as Cleopatra did while ruling ancient Egypt. But they are taking time away from the office to enjoy aromatherapy treatments at spas fit for kings and queens.

In Florida, the Spa at Amelia Island Plantation reflects its seaside location by offering a full range of hydrotherapy treatments utilizing aromatherapy: a Anti-Stress Aroma Bath, a Purifying Aroma Bath, a Aromatic Salt Glow & Vichy Shower, and even a Watsu Massage and Aromatherapy Wrap. But my favorite is their Aromatherapy Massage, which uses high caliber blends of essential oils from London-based Aromatherapy Associates. Choose from 9 unique formulations to meet your specific needs. During the massage, your therapist will use a combination of spinal pressures, muscular release, lymphatic drainage, and foot reflexology techniques to target the nervous system, affecting every area of your body. Essential oils absorbed through the skin work at a physical level, while the aromatic effects of the blend balance your mind and emotions.

But the best is yet to come. Once you've experienced this traditional aromatherapy massage, the link between smell and memory ensures that whenever you use the same aroma blend at home, your mind and body will remember the original treatment and respond

even more powerfully. Suspecting that this claim was just a clever way to sell products from the spa shop, I nonetheless purchased a bottle of Bath & Shower Oil in the De-Stress blend that I had selected for my massage. A few nights later, when I slipped into a bath imbued with this lavender, rosemary, ginger, and black pepper oil blend, I was amazed at the effect: I emerged feeling as if I had just had another massage.

Studies are beginning to show that using aromatherapy is more than just good scents. Lavender allowed patients suffering from insomnia to fall asleep more quickly according to the British medical journal, *Lancet*. Vanilla aromas, when introduced into a MRI capsule at the Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, lowered anxiety levels for patients who complained of claustrophobia. And peppermint oil diffused into the classrooms of Japanese students while learning, and later during testing periods, resulted in a 28% improvement in test scores.

Good aromatherapy products are not cheap and cheap aromatherapy products are not good. Look for essential oils extracted from organically grown, single species plants, without chemical or synthetic additives. Avoid those that list ingredients like fragrance. They may only provide a fraction of the benefit supplied by high quality essential oils.

Many plants and flowers used to produce quality essential oils are hand-harvested and require staggering quantities to produce highly prized aromas. It takes 125 pounds of rose petals to produce an ounce of rose oil, making it one of the most expensive aroma oils you can buy. But think about how much easier it is for you to tap into the power of aromatherapy than it was for Cleopatra. She once carpeted an entire room knee-deep in rose petals to receive her beloved Marc Antony. And all you need to do is relax and enjoy the pleasure that awaits you at your nearest spa.

*Spa specialist Denise Reynolds, whose column "Spa Pleasures" brings you reports on spa treatments from around the world, invites you to visit [www.spapleasures.com](http://www.spapleasures.com) for more information on the pleasures that await you at today's spas. Copyright © 2004*