

## Plants can be herbs, but not all plants produce essential oils.

Recently we had an inquiry asking us what different oils you can get from herbs. Asking about plants like [Lavender](#), [Geranium](#) and other plants. Many of the plants were flowering plants.

This brought up the subject of Herbalism, Herbalists, Aromatherapy, Essential oils and Aromatherapists.

There is a big difference between Herbalism and Aromatherapy. Although they do have one thing in common and that namely is Plants!

In Aromatherapy, we use the very concentrated and volatile [essential oils](#) extracted from various plants and their parts by steam or hydro distillation. Although there are [essential oils](#) extracted by CO2 and other solvents, by far and large, steam distillation is the most common method for extraction. A person that studies, suggests and uses these essential oils for 'therapeutic' applications for your health and well being is called an Aromatherapist.

Herbalism, the use of Herbs, uses fresh or more commonly dried plants and flowers, typically just the leaves, stems and flowering part, although there are some roots and such that may be used in herbalism too. For the most part Herbalists use plants in whole or part by grinding them into powders or make them into elixirs, teas and tinctures, etc. The person that studies and uses these components for health applications are Herbalists.

In Herbalism, the plant constituents will include the water based and a tiny amount of the essential oils if available. The water based constituents can be very, very powerful just in the plant alone. The essential oils in a whole plant will be very minimal. Herbalism involves the use of thousands of different plants. Some of which should never ever be used together. The study of herbal use of plants for health is a very long course of study and often times you need a college degree and years of practice and apprenticeships or mentoring. Herbs are wonderful but are very different in their properties than essential oils.

Not all plants produce [essential oils](#) or they have such small amounts it is not cost effective to try to distill for essential oils. Lilac, for example, the flowers, although extremely fragrant produce no usable essential oil. There are other flowering plants that do not produce essential oils by steam distillation but only through a time and labor intensive procedure called enfleurage. These again are rare finds as most suppliers do not have the time, plants or manpower to make it worth the exorbitant costs.

In the plant kingdom there are more than 250,000 plants. Of those, there are about 450 plant species that produce useable [essential oils](#). Of these only about 125-150 can be used in Therapeutic Aromatherapy. Many more are used in perfumery and other industries than are ever used for therapeutic aromatherapy.

Plants used in herbalism by herbalists' number in the thousands. And since we are not herbalists we cannot tell you about those. Even the most common Culinary Herbs (those used in cooking) will produce useable essential oils but the essential oil and the dried or fresh herb do not necessarily have the same flavoring capabilities.

[Essential oils](#) are so much stronger and higher concentration they usually cannot be used in cooking unless well diluted. So for cooking and baking use the fresh or dried versions of these delightful plant flavorings and don't even attempt to use the pure essential oil (unless you are prepared that it may not taste right and end up throwing it out!)

There are many, many plants in the world. Only a tiny fraction of those plants will produce usable [essential oils](#) for 'therapeutic' or medicinal applications. Of those thousands of plants many of them can be used in herbal applications in their whole fresh state or dried and made into other usable forms like powders, teas and such that will have different yet very powerful constituents for your health and well being.

Herbs and [essential oils](#) although both obtained from plants have very different roles and applications. The same plant can produce essential oil and also be used as herbs. But [essential oil](#) and the herb may not produce the same results or health benefits as the other.

The properties of a whole Herb and that of a pure concentrated [essential oil](#) may not be useful for the same ailment. We find in many of the older Aromatherapy books, the authors have applied herbal remedies to the use of essential oils. This is where many aromatherapists have been educated wrongly.

The herbal application and the essential oil application can and often times will be different. Keep this in mind when you read an aromatherapy article or book and have not seen the results that may have been suggested as an outcome for that essential oil. This same holds true about Safety issues. Some herbs may have more potentially dangerous side effects whereas the essential oil may not have those same effects. And of course Vice Versa!

The Herbal application of using the whole plant consisting of water based constituents and just a little essential oil may be very different. When used in or on the body the herbal preparation will likely have an entirely different outcome than the concentrated essential oil. (Don't use undiluted essential oils on the skin.)

Herbs are usually ingested in various forms, but not always. They are ground and pulverized to be used in capsules or made into teas or tinctures. They are sometimes blended into salves and pastes to be applied to the skin.

[Essential oils](#) are most powerful when [inhaled](#). And can bring about wonderful results when mixed with [carrier oils](#) and [lotions](#) applied to the skin. Essential oils should never be ingested in their full concentrated strength. They are and can be used for flavoring but only if properly diluted into safe concentrations. Most folks are not skilled to do this.

Herbs and Herbal preparations are great to use for many health concerns. Their applications will often times be different than the same essential oil that is produced from the same plant. Please consult a licensed herbal practioner for safe use of herbs for your health.

Essential oils are wonderful for your health and well being and are very powerful and concentrated. Please consult a [certified Aromatherapist](#) for the proper and safe use of essential oils when used for health applications.

Please use both Herbs and Essential oils responsibly and sensibly for your health. Nature has provided us with two very wonderful gifts provided we use them wisely.

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Aromatherapy Tip of the Week

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