

Smelling Essential oils – what do they smell like and how to do it correctly

Let's raise our hands – How many of you are new to essential oils? Okay, I see you know what they are but when asked what do they smell like do you have an answer? And next do you know how to 'smell' them correctly?

Many of you may have received new essential oils and synergy blends for gifts. AND we have seen it many times over – you open the cap and put your nose to the bottle and take a whiff. This is wrong. Don't do it again. That is if you really want to get a good handle on what that new essential oil or blend really smells like.

Don't feel bad, many folks new AND old that use essential oils are guilty of this procedure. Although you should have known better, it is commonly seen. But then again maybe you have never been taught the correct way to smell essential oils and their blends.

First thing – never ever smell a 'new to you' essential oil directly from a bottle. Why? Because you will usually only get the top note. These are the light and volatile constituents that are at the top of the bottle. The true essences will be in the rest of the bottle. Of course you missed that part when you sniffed a whiff from the newly opened bottle.

The proper way is to gently rotate the bottle then place a drop or two onto a [Scent Strip](#) made for smelling scents. Or at the very least use a clean paper towel (not the best but better than a tissue).

Now, don't stick your nose right into that drop. Gently wave the scent strip under your nose. Take a little whiff. What does it smell like? (For an in depth article on the "Correct way to smell Essential oils"

<http://birchhillhappenings.com/aromatip/1042011smellright.htm> [Click Here](#)).

Further below in this article will be some terms that those in the aromatherapy world sometimes use to describe essential oils and blends.

Now before I forget, don't spend all afternoon sniffing and whiffing your new oils. If you do pretty soon you won't be able to smell anything. Luckily this is a temporary situation. But sensory overload can occur after as few as 5-6 different oils or blends. So don't open up every bottle of oil in your new sampler kit or in your box of essential oils. Spend only about 10-15 minutes on your new oils and study only a few. Quit and do a few more the next day or at the very least after several hours where your mind has time to reset your sense of smell.

Describing what an essential oil smells like can be quite tricky.

If you try to explain the smell of a particular essential oil to someone that has never smelled that odor before, your description can be very difficult to relate. Although most oils can be described by some common terms. Most everyone has smelled these common scents before.

The common terms are: floral; woody; citrus; herbal; spicy; minty; camphor; pine; vanilla-like

Then there are sub categories of each: soft; strong; mellow; sharp; smooth; harsh; bitter; sweet; sour; full; flat; and obviously all the ones in between.

Each essential oil can be described with one of the common terms, but some may need to be described using two or three of the common and one or two of the sub categories.

An example is [Ylang ylang](#), it is very floral, and can be very soft or very strong, depending on the 'sniffers' nose and the fractionation of the oil.

Rosemary smells herbal and it's camphor undertones are more mellow than say [Eucalyptus Globulus](#) that smells strong camphor but not herbal.

So, when learning about essential oils, again, keep a little journal. Write your descriptions down. Smell it after a drop that was placed on a cotton ball – immediately after applying it, then in 5 minutes, 15 minutes and 1 hour. The smells will change as the oils volatile constituents evaporate into the air. The original oil smell may or may not be present after the hour.

Have fun and buy a few sample sizes of several essential oils. Then put them in the categories listed above – or add your own descriptions. Use the terms that will **help you to remember the scent**. This will come in handy as you begin to blend and develop your own recipes.

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