Aromatherapy Tip of the Week - #09

March 18, 2008

Storing Essential oils

You have just spent a lot of hard earned money on several precious essential oils. But how do you keep them from being destroyed.

The biggest factors to harming your essential oils are heat and oxygen.

Protecting them from heat is simple. If you have space in your refrigerator, keep them in there. If not, then keep them in a dark, cool cupboard away from any source of heat, is a must.

Oxygen causes essential oils to - oxidize and change the constituents within the oils. Breaking them down and making them 'weak'. Oxygen freely mixes with the constituents to form other compounds.

The best way to help protect them from deterioration due to oxygen is to keep your bottles tightly closed even when you are busy blending. Take the cap off, pour or measure out what you need from that essential oil bottle then cap the bottle again.

The other thing is to eliminate 'head space' in the bottle. As you use your essential oils, transfer them into smaller containers as soon as possible. So when the bottle is capped there is little free air space available in the bottle.

To be sure your oils are at their peak, try to buy oils that you can use within a few short months. It may appear to be more expensive but buying smaller amounts that are used up rather than a larger container sitting in your essential oil box spoiling is really a better alternative than risk using bad or deteriorated oils.

What about protecting them from light? Well, the main reason to protect from light is the heat factor. Many aromatherapists will tell you to store your oils in amber, blue, green or violet glass. Well, sorry to tell you but clear glass is able to protect your oils just as well as the colored glass. The UV light is absorbed in the clear glass (or any colored) before it reaches the essential oils.

This was researched at the University of Tennessee¹ while they were trying to cause photo-chemical reactions using clear glass. UV light was absorbed. They had to obtain specialized glass made only from quartz in order for the UV light to be able to pass through the glass and cause the reactions.

There is one exception to this rule and that is any of the oils that have chamazulene (this is the constituent that gives them their blue color) in them such as Roman and German Chamomile, Yarrow, Blue Tansy and other blue oils - any visible light (not necessarily UV) - even what might sneak through a colored bottle will cause the blue color to fade. The color is only affected. By far and large the biggest detriment to the "blue oils" is still oxygen and heat. Keep them in a cool, dark (preferably a refrigerator) place to help preserve them and their color.

So rest assured any color or colorless glass will protect your oils as long as you keep the cap tightly closed and the oils away from any kind of heat source.

Keeping your essential oils in a cardboard box is fine. You can find a few storage and carrying cases around the internet. Finding small enough box that can easily be keep in a corner of your refrigerator. There are convenient wooden storage boxes available from Birch Hill Happenings Aromatherapy too.

Just remember to keep you oils away from heat and tightly capped. Buy only what you can use up within 6 months to a year.

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¹ Dr Robert S Pappas PHD, http://essentialoils.org/knowledge-center/colorless-bottles/

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