

# “Notes” of Essential oils, Blends and Perfumes

by Penny Keay

How sweet this sounds! When we talk about essential oils, especially when related to blending and perfumery we need to know a little bit about notes. This is not a music lesson!

Notes? What are they in aromatherapy? You will often hear the term “notes” in aromatherapy when describing the scent throw of an essential oil.

What are they talking about? Simply it is the volatility of the molecules of the essential oils basic chemicals.

Perfumers and aroma therapists came up with a type of ‘scale’ similar to that used in music to help describe the intensity and strength of oils and their scents.

Essential oils are assigned ‘notes’ – High, Middle and Base. When you get the right blend of essential oils in your blend or perfume, you will have a harmonious bouquet, so to speak, that will usually include a blend of oils that includes a high, middle or base note.

The notes of essential oils are a simple way of speaking about the volatility or evaporation rate of a particular essential oil.

The top or high note essential oils are usually light and airy. They dissipate quickly into the air and will not linger, typically lasting only 1-2 hours at the most. Examples of these are your citrus oils such as lemon, orange, lime and grapefruit.

A middle note will be in the middle ground between the high and low (base notes). These oils will be a bit stronger and will last longer, anywhere from 2-5 hours is the average for middle notes scent. Examples here include Lavender, Juniper berry and Rosemary

A base or low note essential oil are heavy and will last for a long time – usually 24-48 hours but sometimes a week or longer. Oils in this category include Sandalwood, Vetiver, Patchouli and Cedarwood.

The hard part about classifying essential oils by notes is that some oils will fall into more than one category or they will favor one more than another.

The “notes” of essential oils is very helpful when making perfume or scenting for your home or office.

Always having a base note mixed in will help your blend to last more than an hour or two.

Another way to look at notes is the differences in smell as it evaporates:

- A Top note is the first impression of the smell of the oil. Top notes are difficult to reproduce, the scent usually fades quickly.
- Middle note - is the main scent of the oil. It last longer than the top. It's easier to reproduce.
- Base notes - also called the dry out note - as it is the last "part" of the oil to linger for aroma.

As you “get to know” your essential oils remember to write down what you feel is the “note” or “notes” of each oil. This will come in very helpful and handy as you continue your journey.

Remember to use a [Scent strip](#) when smelling oils. And keep a journal or notes as you get to know each oil.

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When you smell any blend using essential oils you will first smell the top notes at the first whiff. A few minutes later you may smell the blend of top and middle notes, and occasionally the base note will be evident. Within an hour or two you will most likely not smell much of the top note of the blend and the middle note will be most prominent along with the base notes.

Again as time continues the top and middle note scents will fade but the base note will linger. Eventually you will only smell the base note and a slight hint of the top and middle notes.

When you get the blend percentages right your blend (or perfume) should hold onto most of the high and middle notes along with the base for about 2-3 hours before the scent will slowly just become the base note as the predominant scent.

When making any blend, but especially if making perfume, it is best to begin with a base note and then add one or more high notes and one or more middle notes. There are a few essential oils that actually fall into more than one category. When you blend all three volatility levels and you let the blend 'age' you will have a blend that will actually last longer and hold its scent longer than any of the components would by themselves.

As you read through the list you may see an essential oil listed in one, two or all three note categories. Although it is rare for an oil to fall in all three, it is more likely that it will fall into two.

The difference being some of the chemical constituents that make up the essential oils will cause the single essential oils to have a different smell the first time you smell it and a few minutes later it will have a different smell, although still distinguished as the original it will have a slightly different smell.

Try this with any of the oils you see in a couple different categories and see for yourself. Put one drop of an oil on a piece of unscented tissue or cotton ball.

Take a smell. Note the scent – it may be very intense or strong. Then walk away and come back 5 minutes later, it will still smell like the essential oil but it will have changes slightly, not as intense but you will smell some of the subtle differences. Come back 2-4 hours later and you may smell something entirely different yet reminiscent of the original drop of oil.

#### **Here is a list of essential oils known as Top or fast notes:**

[Angelica, Anise, Basil, Bergamot, Cardamom, German Chamomile, Roman Chamomile, Coriander, Eucalyptus globulus, Juniper, Lavender, Lemon, Lime, Mandarin, Marjoram, Neroli, Pennyroyal, Petitgrain, Rosemary, Rosewood, Spearmint](#)

#### **Here are the Middle notes:**

[Anise, Angelica, Basil, Black Pepper, Cardamom, Carrotseed, Cassia, Clary Sage, Clove bud, Coriander, Cypress, Fennel, Geranium, Ginger, Grapefruit, Hyssop, Jasmine, Lavender, Lemongrass, Mandarin, Marjoram, Neroli, Niaouli, Nutmeg, Orange, Oregano, Palmarosa, Peppermint, Petitgrain, Pine needle, Rose, Rosemary, Rosewood, Sage, Tangerine, Tarragon, Thyme, Ylang Ylang](#)

These are sometimes used as Middle or top notes: [Angelica, Basil, Bay laurel, Black Pepper, Clary Sage, Coriander, Lavender, Marjoram, Neroli, Nutmeg, Oregano, Palmarosa, Rosemary, Rosewood, Tarragon, Thyme.](#)

#### **Here are the Base Notes:**

[Bay laurel, Cedarwood, Cinnamon, Clary Sage, Frankincense, Geranium, Ginger, Jasmine, Myrrh, Neroli, Patchouli, Rose, Sandalwood, Vanilla, Vetiver Ylang Ylang.](#)

These are sometimes used as Base or Middle notes: [Bay laurel, Cedarwood, Cinnamon, Frankincense, Myrrh, Patchouli, Sandalwood, Vetiver.](#)

This is just a quick overview of "notes". When you actually begin studying and creating your own blends you will discover that blending different essential oils can create a scent or perfume that is completely different than any of the components in that blend. The essential oils will blend together so well they create a wonderful NEW scent.

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