

Essential Oils

Then & Now Newsletter

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BEFORE MEDICINES BECAME CHEMICAL

The oldest form of medicine in the world, Ayurveda (science of life), dates back 5000 years in India. Vedic literature dating around 2,000BC lists vetiver among other substances for perfumes, and for liturgical and therapeutic purposes. These ancient healers of India and Egypt learned to distill the life-blood of the plants and, over time, discovered the healing properties of the oils. The priests and priestesses were the physicians of the time, dispensing oils for healing all kinds of diseases, for restoring youthfulness, and for embalming. Their temples became laboratories where they would experiment with various concoctions to achieve their goals. They were the first dispensers of aromatics, the first perfumers, and the first aromatherapists.

In its wild native state, the perennial tall grasses of vetiver flourish on the slopes of the Himalayan Mountains and in India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. Vetiver is cultivated and largely produced in Java, Haiti, and Reunion. It's called the "Oil of Tranquility." The name vetiver means "Hatched up" which describes the way the roots are dug up. The root system is very dense, fibrous, spongy and complex. For centuries in Java these roots were weaved into mats to sleep on, rugs, and for thatching roofs. In India it's been used to make thick heavy blinds to keep out the intense summer heat. The blinds constantly doused with water, produce sweet earthy scented vapors to turn the scorching dehydrating winds into moist balmy breezes and insect repellent. The Russians used vetiver in sachets attached to the lining of their coats to help retain warmth. Sanskrit texts refer to its use for anointing brides to bless them in marriage. In the Middle Ages it was mixed with rosewood to make perfume. The grass was used to make woven baskets, rugs, and parts of the houses in Africa.

The quality of the oils is directly related to the age of the root and the length of distillation. The roots must be a minimum of 2 years old. The "hatcheting" up, washing, drying and slicing of the roots before distilling is a long, slow labor-intensive process. The yield is small but the oil is very thick and a little goes a long way. It has been used as a base for 36% of the world's perfumes.

An ancient remedy within the traditional Indian Ayurveda medicine, the root and its essential oil are used to alleviate dehydration, heat stroke, fevers, headache and to relieve inflammatory disorders of the joints and skin, rheumatoid arthritis, arthritis, muscular aches and pains, sprains, cuts, dry skin, acne, and eczema. It also aids the reproductive system to promote fertilization of the female egg.

Psychologically, it is incredibly helpful for ADHD, extreme anxiety, depression (including postpartum), mood swings, stress, recovering from emotional traumas and shock, flashbacks, hysteria, premenstrual and menopausal tensions, mental exhaustion, extreme nervousness, and insomnia. It's nourishing, refreshing, restoring, calming, stabilizing and grounding. A wonderful oil.

Viva la Vetiver!

Joanna