



**GUIDELINES FOR THE
PURCHASE OF
ESSENTIAL/FIXED OILS
FOR THERAPEUTIC
USES**

There are two main rules to follow when purchasing quality essential or fixed oils.

Firstly, always buy from a reputable supplier and, secondly, always check that the bottle label has sufficient information on it – see below.

ALWAYS BUY FROM A REPUTABLE SOURCE

The only way to obtain good quality essential oils, that are suitable for aromatherapy, is to purchase them from reputable suppliers. Purchasing organic or naturally farmed essential oils is recommended. Good suppliers sometimes have direct contact with the producer of the oils, i.e. the farmers themselves, or they trade with a dealer who has enough contacts with producers to offer a full range of the best quality oils available. One of the most important things is that the supply chain from field to therapist should, ideally, be as short as possible. A good supplier is also likely to be more aware of any current problems within the market regarding the availability of specific oils (e.g., may be the lavender harvest has been poor this year and so the price is likely to rise). Reputable suppliers are often able to give good advice about what to buy and when.

Additionally, there are some things that the aromatherapist can also do when purchasing new oils:

- Check that the aroma of the oil is as expected;
- Make a record of how long the oil 'keeps' for – does it go off sooner than expected?
- Have any of the 'non-resinous' essential oils purchased felt greasy and/or left greasy type stains on fabrics?
- If at all sceptical of the oil's origin or purity ask the dealer for the Gas Chromatograph certificate showing the oils' components, or similar evidence to support quality.
- The majority of fixed vegetable oils can be taste tested to check for freshness (there are a few exceptions, so please do your research first).
- A good indication of a reputable supplier is if they are registered with a professional body for example an [ATC Member](#), certified by the [Soil Association](#) and/or registered as an [IFA Corporate Member](#). (See below for more details)

CORRECT LABELLING

Due to the small size of essential oil bottles, the amount of information that can be fitted onto the label is understandably limited. However, there are a number of recommendations and guidelines for labelling, from various regulatory and professional bodies, which suppliers need to adhere to. These include guidance from the IFRA ([International Fragrance Association](#)) and the ISO ([International Organisation for Standardisation](#)).

The following information should be provided on labels:

- Common and Botanical names of the oil, including any chemotypes, e.g. Rosemary – *Rosmarinus officinalis* ct cineole
- The part of the plant that the oil has been extracted from, e.g. juniperBERRY, or juniperTWIG
- The quantity of oil in the bottle, usually in millilitres

- Country of Origin
- Method of Extraction, e.g. distillation
- Batch number
- 'Sell' and/or 'Use By' Dates
- Dilution level where appropriate (usually 100%) - Check the label to ensure that the essential oil being purchased is 100%, i.e. undiluted. Some of the more expensive oils (e.g., rose, jasmine, neroli) can be sold pre-diluted in a fixed oil, making them more affordable. The correct way to represent the dilution level on a label is by specifying the mL/mL. So, a 100% essential oil can be represented by 1mL/1mL, whilst a 3% dilution would be shown as 0.03mL/1mL. The carrier oil in which the essential oil is diluted also needs to be named, e.g. sweet almond oil.
- Storage precautions and temperature implications – usually stated as, 'keep cool, tightly sealed, not in direct sunlight and out of reach of children'.
- Cautions – 'do not use neat, keep away from eyes, for external use only – do not ingest'.
- Name of the supplier, with contact information, e.g. a website address.

Ensure that the oil being purchased is in appropriate packaging, i.e. dark glass, and being sold at an appropriate price. There is a saying, "If a deal seems too good to be true ... it usually is!" So, if a 10ml bottle of rose oil is being offered for sale at £4.99, when most other suppliers are pricing it at above £80 – the aromatherapist would do well to be suspicious. Does the sale price match the expected value of the oil?

When selecting essential oils, try to adhere to the following criteria, where appropriate:

- The oil is sourced from a single, botanically specific plant
- Ideally, that plant is cultivated without the use of chemicals
- Oils are distilled or extracted specifically for therapeutic use
- Oils are stored and transported in a way that maintains their therapeutic integrity.

THINGS TO WATCH OUT FOR

More and more chemical synthetics, which masquerade as essential oils, are coming on the market. They may have the smell but they do not contain the properties of pure plant extracts. The life force, which makes the essential oils so effective, is completely non-existent in their synthetic substitutes, which is why it is important to buy essential oils from a reputable firm.

There is no such thing as a regulated 'Therapeutic Grade' standard, which some companies use as a marketing ploy to imply their oils are better than others.

Avoid companies who recommend the oral intake of essential oils (with water or otherwise) or neat application of essential oils - these methods are unsafe. For more information see the IFA's ['Safety and Toxicology'](#) page.

PROFESSIONAL BODIES:

AROMATHERAPY TRADE COUNCIL (ATC)

The Aromatherapy Trade Council (ATC) is the principle UK trade association, MHRA appointed advertising code administrators, and independent self-regulatory lead body for the specialist aromatherapy essential oil trade. The ATC's aims and objectives are explained at <https://www.a-t-c.org.uk/what-we-do/>.

ATC members, as a condition of membership, are required to uphold a strict Code of Practice that includes responsible marketing, a minimum standard of packaging and labelling, and compliance with the laws, regulations and industry guidance that relates to the supply of essential oils and aromatherapy products in the countries in which these products are sold. Details can be found on the ATC website at <https://www.a-t-c.org.uk/code-of-practice/>.

Members' products, labelling and marketing material is scrutinised and approved by an independent code administrator, both before becoming members and throughout their membership, to ensure compliance with current legislation, industry best practice and ATC codes of practice. In addition, the ATC has adopted a policy of random testing of members' essential oils in order to ensure quality, consistency and reliability.

SOIL ASSOCIATION

The Soil Association is a charity that campaigns for healthy, humane and sustainable food, farming and land use, supporting soil and crop management. The natural cosmetics industry is booming, but in this unregulated sector, consumers have no way of knowing whether a natural product actually contains ingredients which fit with the natural ethos. This is especially important as an increasing amount of essential oil plants are appearing on the endangered species list due to over farming. Those oils that have been certified by the Soil Association mean that they use organically farmed ingredients that have been grown without being genetically modified (non-GM) and with no herbicides or synthetic fertilisers. When you see their logo on a product you know it's sourced and manufactured using sustainable ingredients, not tested on animals, free from harsh chemicals, nano particles, parabens, synthetic dyes and artificial fragrances.

IFA CORPORATE MEMBERSHIP

IFA Corporate membership is extended to companies who serve the aromatherapy profession that advocate the safe use of aromatherapy and support the ethos of the IFA. It is a condition of membership that the company provide sufficient information on their website and promotional literature about their products to allow customers to make informed decisions and also provide instruction on how to apply the product safely. As essential oils vary from crop to crop they cannot be licensed; therefore the company's website must not make any medicinal claims regarding an aromatherapy product and provide guidelines regarding dilution, where necessary. The information printed on product labels must meet the IFA 'correct labelling' requirements as above. Essential oil bottles must have a single oil dropper safety dispenser integrated into the bottle to prevent spillage/swallowing (for the safety of the public). The IFA sample five products from across a company's range in order to check product labelling, viscosity where necessary, freshness and quality.

Members are required at all times to comply with relevant laws and regulations of the country in which they operate and in relation to the specific product(s) they provide. For example, the [Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency Guidelines](#), [Cosmetic Toiletry and Perfumery Association Guidelines](#), [Product Safety for Manufacturers](#). As a general principle, all companies must uphold standards of good business practice to remain in good standing as a member. Failure to do so may result in expulsion from membership.

It is appropriate to finish with a final word on quality by Kurt Schnaubelt PhD, who writes, “It is consistent with holistic thinking to treat essential oils not just as standardised mixtures of substances (as the pharmacy manuals do), but as complex products of the cooperation between man and nature. Why should a fine bergamot oil from Sicily not be treated like a good bottle of wine, with information on the vintage and its producer provided on the label?”