

Holistic Horticultural Practices with the Power of Essential Oils

by Angela Banks

As the pace and need for consumption in our society and culture continues to accelerate, there is a growing trend and desire to live a more slow, sustainable life. Technology and innovation hurl us forward as the world becomes more synthetic, more chemical, and less natural. Many individuals, however, are breaking away from these trends and are stepping on a more holistic path. Alternative healthcare and therapies are becoming more popular as individuals look for more natural ways to manage their health and lifestyles. Buying locally made goods and products is also becoming a popular trend as people look for more environmentally and economically conscious options. Many people are even beginning to start their own gardens to grow food for their family and loved ones.

Growing a vegetable garden can be one of the most fulfilling and rewarding hobbies a person can do. The process of growing and nurturing plants from seed to maturity can be incredibly grounding and therapeutic, and it requires a slowing of pace and a reconnection with the earth. Not only does the garden nourish the body, it refreshes mind and spirit. The best way to reap these nutritional benefits is to grow an organic, sustainable home garden.

For a new grower, however, the challenges that come with starting a garden can seem daunting. From pest management and weed control, to bug bites and sunburns, one may be tempted give up the shovel and head to the grocery store before even turning the first square foot of soil. Add in the desire to grow organically, without the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers, and the whole task can seem near impossible. Thankfully, nature knows how to take

care of herself and has given gardeners useful and effective tools to grow a bountiful harvest with the help of aromatherapy and essential oils.

Essential Oils for Pest Control

One of the biggest challenges for gardeners is pest control. Nothing is more disheartening than going out to the garden and seeing the hours of hard work eaten through by a myriad of insects. The battle of the bugs in the garden can be an exhausting one when gardening organically, and it can be tempting to give up and grab a bottle of insecticide to attack the problem. Rather than spraying the vegetables and fruits with dangerous chemicals, there are some effective natural repellants using essential oils that can help save the garden. The following is a recipe for an all purpose insecticide for garden use¹:

All Purpose Insecticide

1 Teaspoon vodka, ever clear, or high proof alcohol

Also substitute with liquid soap

1 drop garlic essential oil - *Allium sativum*

1 drop onion essential oil - *Allium cepa*

1 oz water

1 oz mister

Combine the first three ingredients. Shake well. Add water. Shake. Spray towards evening. Reported to be very good for roses especially if they have mildew or black spots.

Essential Oils for Mold and Fungi Control

Insects and pests are not the only things that can damage a crop. Diseases, bacteria, and fungi are other challenges to overcome. Conventional methods of controlling these types of infections and infestations are the use of synthetic chemicals, fungicides, and even antibiotics on

¹ http://www.gritman.com/EO_Papers/GardeningandEOs.html

plants. Valerie Ann Worwood recommends using antimold and antifungi essential oils such as patchouli *Pogostemon patchouli*, tea tree *Melaleuca alternifolia*, cinnamon *Cinnamomum zeylanicum*, and niaouli *Melaleuca viridiflora* on trees, flowers and plants blighted with molds and fungi. Using any type of spraying equipment for the garden, simply add ten drops of essential oil to every gallon of water.

Essential Oils for the Gardener

Essential oils are not only helpful in the garden; they are also helpful on the gardener. Working outside in the garden can make one a tasty buffet table for mosquitos and ticks. Some essential oils that have insect repelling qualities are lemongrass *Cymbopogon citratus*, lavender *Lavandula angustifolia*, peppermint *Mentha piperita*, and thyme *Thymus vulgaris*, just to name a few. It should be noted that these essential oils should not be used during pregnancy, and peppermint should be avoided with children less than 5 years of age².

The safest of these oils to use with carrier oil, such as sweet almond or jojoba oil, directly on the skin is lavender *Lavandula angustifolia*. As recommended by Worwood, two tablespoons of carrier oil to thirty drops of lavender prior to going outdoors can help deter bug bites. She also recommends adding five drops of insect deterrent blend (four drops thyme, eight drops lemongrass, four drops lavender, four drops peppermint) to one tablespoon of witch hazel, adding this mixture to four tablespoons of water. This mixture can be applied directly on the skin³.

² Dechen, S. (2014). Therapeutic Blending. In Clinical Aromatherapy Level 1 (p. 103). Aroma Apothecary.

³ Worwood, V. (1991). Your Basic Travel Kit. In The Complete Book of Essential Oils & Aromatherapy (p. 53). New World Library.

Companion Gardening and Essential Oils

Another helpful practice in the garden is the use of companion gardening. This is when one type of plant is planted in the same bed or container as a different type of plant to either enhance their growth or to help a plant that is ailing. For example, beets companion well with lettuce, onions and cabbage, while tomatoes companion well with carrots, celery, chives, garlic and parsley⁴

A convenient way to get the benefit of companion gardening is to add the companion plant's essential oil to the watering can. According to Worwood, to achieve the appropriate dilution, first mix six drops of essential oil with one gallon of warm water and allow mixture to cool. Then add half the mixture to a gallon watering can, filling with cold water and mixing well⁵. The following list contains Worwood's essential oil companions for popular home garden plants.

<u>Plant</u>	<u>Essential Oil Watering Companion</u>
Broccoli	Basil <i>Ocimum basilicum</i> , Thyme <i>Thymus vulgaris</i>
Carrots	Sage <i>Salvia officinalis</i>
Cucumbers	Sage <i>Salvia officinalis</i> , Yarrow <i>Achillea millefolium</i>
Lettuce	Carrot <i>Daucus carota</i> , Tagetes <i>Tagetes patula</i>
Potatoes	Basil <i>Ocimum basilicum</i> , Sage <i>Salvia officinalis</i>
Tomatoes	Tagetes <i>Tagetes patula</i> , Basil <i>Ocimum basilicum</i>

Living in a world less synthetic and with fewer chemicals is a goal that many people are striving towards. Growing a garden is just one way of taking control of exposure to agricultural chemicals and rebuilding a connection with nature. There is no doubt that we live in a chemical

⁴ Riotte, L. (1998). Garden Plans. In Carrots Love Tomatoes (pp. 186-187). Storey Publishing.

⁵ Worwood, V. (1991). Gardens For The Future. In The Complete Book of Essential Oils & Aromatherapy (p. 373-376). New World Library.

world. Aromatherapy and essential oils provide a holistic and safer alternative to the harmful chemical solutions so often relied on in horticulture. This not only creates a safer environment today, but a healthier environment for the future.