

Household Cleaning with Essential Oils

by Diane Campbell

Today there are numerous chemicals in the average household and many of them have harmful effects on the human body; using essential oils offers a beneficial way to eliminate many chemicals and toxins from your household. We live in a fast paced world and many people want instant gratification – with that comes the desire of products that can make life simpler. However, that does not mean these products are better.

Looking around an average household where can chemicals be found? Cleaning products (laundry detergent, dish soap, hand soap, dust spray, multipurpose cleaners, bathroom cleans, toilet cleaners, rug shampoo, and any specialty cleaning products), health and beauty aids (cosmetics, skin care, toothpaste, lotions, deodorants, and specialty items), first aids products and medicines, air fresheners, pet products, and processed foods and drinks. Many of these products contain chemicals that are harmful to us, if not immediately, than over time. Side effects to natural and plant-based products are far less common compared to the synthetic counterparts (Schnaubelt page 114).

“Aromatic plants and essential oils have been used for thousands of years – as incense, in perfumes, for cosmetics, and culinary applications” (Lawless page 4). Many natural cleaning products on the market contain plant-based agents and aromatic oils for their fragrance. The essential oils in commercial products are only fragrance and have no therapeutic benefit. Switching to more natural or plant-based products can be a good starting point to helping removing chemicals from your household. However, some products can be eliminated altogether through the use of essential oils and common household items such as baking soda and vinegar.

“Aromatherapy” is a term that was first used in 1928 by Gattefosse, a French chemist working in family’s perfume business that became fascinated with the therapeutic qualities of oils (Lawless page 9). Aromatherapy utilizes essential oils, which are substances that have been extracted from various parts of plants and can have a powerful effect on the body, mind and emotions (Dechen pages 6, 9). Some caution must be taken when using essential oils, especially when there are pre-existing health conditions, during pregnancy or with young children in the family. When oils are used in a practical manner and precautions are followed, their use should be free from complications (Schnaubelt page 43).

Where to start when replacing chemicals with essential oils can seem like a daunting task. Like anything it is easiest to start with one step at a time and keep the process simple. Even if your intent is to not replace all of your home’s ready made products; anything

homemade will reduce your consumption of toxic chemicals (Berthold-Bond page 38). Valerie Ann Worwood in her book suggests essential oils for everyday use and even breaks them down into categories such as “basic care kit”, “travel kit” or “sweet-scented celebrations”, which can be extremely helpful for someone new to essential oil use (Worwood).

In this case, we are going to look at getting started with using five oils. Is it essential to buy therapeutic grade oils that you know are manufactured by a reputable company.

One of the best oils to start with for many people is Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*), because it is extremely versatile (Worwood 2 intro). Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) can be used in your dryer in place of fabric softener by adding 3-5 drops to a soft cloth or to wool dryer balls. It can be diffused, placed in a bowl, added to dried flowers, made into a spray, or added to a cotton ball/tissue placed somewhere in your home to be a natural room freshener. It can be used to relax and distress. It can be used on burns, minor cuts, bug bites, and irritated skin. It is generally safe with children and also pets.

What essential oils you add next, depends on your specific needs. However, as far as versatility, starting with a few oils, and not spending a great deal of money – good recommendations are Lemon (*Citrus limon*), Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*), Sweet orange (*Citrus sinensis*), and Tea tree (*Melaleuca alternifolia*) essential oil. With these oils, you can clean your home, but help allergies, freshen your house, and use them for minor first aid. With the exception of sweet orange, (*Citrus sinensis*) these oils are recommended by Valerie Ann Worwood as four of the ten oils for the average home in a basic care kit (Worwood page 19-22).

Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*)

Regarded as one of the most versatile oils and was well established as a folk remedy (Lawless page 122). It is associated with relaxation. The ancient Greeks and Romans used it as a medicine and perfume (Walji page 105).

Precautions:

- Not with low blood pressure
- During pregnancy from third trimester on – in moderation and 1% or less dilution
- Safe with children – in moderation and 1% or less dilution

Health benefits: Analgesic, antibacterial, antibiotic, anticonvulsive, antidepressant, antifungal, antiseptic, antispasmodic, antiviral, decongestant, emmenagogue, fungicide, stimulates immune system, and sedative (Dechen page 91).

Lemon (*Citrus limon*)

In European countries lemon is regarded as a 'cure-all' for infectious illnesses (Lawless page 123). This property along with its flesh uplifting scent makes it a good choice to use in cleaning around the house.

Precautions:

- May cause dermal irritation or sensitization reaction
- Phototoxic (including sunlamps and tanning beds)
- Not for use in bath
- Safe during entire pregnancy – in moderation and low dilution

Health benefits: Antibacterial, antifungal, antimicrobial, anti-rheumatic, antiseptic, antispasmodic, antiviral, astringent, carminative, cicatrisant, diuretic, febrifuge, hypotensive, insecticidal, rubefacient, tonic, and vermifuge (Dechen page 92).

Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*)

Mints have been used since ancient times, in Asia and Egypt (Lawless page 140). Simply smelling/inhaling the essential oil can help sinuses to clear or help nausea. This is a great oil to have on hand for simply first aid, though it should be used in moderation. It is also good for bruises and mouth infections (Walji page 121).

Precautions:

- Avoid during pregnancy
- Not for children under 5 years old
- Not for use in bath
- Possible skin sensitivity
- Use in moderation and with a carrier oil or lotion for sensitive skin areas or face
- Not compatible with homeopathic remedies
- Cooling and stimulating – not good right before bed

Health benefits: Analgesic, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, antiseptic, antispasmodic, astringent, bactericidal, emmenagogue, expectorant, digestive, hepatic, nervine, stimulant, vasoconstrictor, and vermifuge (Dechen page 95).

Sweet orange (*Citrus sinensis*)

Can add a pleasant fragrance around the home. Good to dull oily skin, when applied to the skin; but is phototoxic and care must be used when outside or in the sun (Lawless page 153).

Precautions:

- May cause dermal irritation or sensitization reaction
- Phototoxic (including sunlamps and tanning beds)
- Not for use in bath
- Safe during entire pregnancy – in moderation and low dilution
- Safe with newborns – not in bath and always diluted

Health benefits: Analgesic, antibacterial, antidepressant, antifungal, antiseptic, antispasmodic, antiviral, digestive, diuretic, sedative, stimulant, and tonic (Dechen page 94).

Tea tree (*Melaleuca alternifolia*)

The early settlers in Australia used this as a common remedy (Walji page 131). This oil is extremely versatile though not as well-known to as many people as Lavender. “This oil is unusual in that it is active against bacteria, fungi, and viruses (Lawless page 190)”. These properties make it an excellent choice to use in place of chemicals around your home.

Precautions:

- Generally non-toxic, non-irritating, and non-sensitizing
- Safe during entire pregnancy – in moderation and low dilution
- Safe with children – in moderation and low dilution

Health benefits: Antibacterial, antifungal, anti-infectious, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, antiseptic, antiviral, bactericidal, cicatrisant, expectorant, immune stimulant, insecticidal, parasiticide, and vulnerary (Dechen page 98).

Toilet Cleaner - A chemical product to get out of your home is toilet cleaner. A half cup of vinegar and/or quarter cup of baking soda with two drops of essential oils will do wonders and be more cost effective and healthier than any store bought cleaner.

Floor Cleaner - Mopping your floor can be accomplished with a gallon and a half of hot water, a half cup of vinegar, and two to four drops of Lemon (*Citrus limon*), Tea tree (*Melaleuca alternifolia*), or Sweet orange (*Citrus sinensis*) essential oil. This can also be used as a general purpose cleaner. Tea tree (*Melaleuca alternifolia*) adds the added benefit of being an antibacterial and antifungal oil.

Toothpaste - A better alternative to commercial toothpaste is a teaspoon of baking soda, mixed with a quarter to a half teaspoon of water (adding more water for a thinner consistency or less for a more thicker paste), and one drop of Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*) essential oil.

Room spritzer – Clears the air of odors, also adding the anti-bacterial and anti-viral qualities of the essential oils. This is as easy as adding eight drops of essential oil (of your choice) to two and a half cups of water; then spraying in a mister around your house (Worwood page 302). Other recipes recommend replacing half of the water with vodka (Berthold-Bond page 45).

Facial toner - If you use a facial toner before applying moisturizer to our face, a half of a cup of witch hazel and/or hydrosols can be used with two drops of Lemon (*Citrus limon*) or Sweet orange (*Citrus sinensis*). If you have sensitive skin you can dilute the blend with water, until you find what works best for your skin or use Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) as your essential oil.

Most all-commercial lotions have chemical preservatives, parabens and absorbers, better to make your own.

Key points to incorporating essential oils into your everyday life are:

- Be creative
- Use common sense
- Always look for the least toxic approach to accomplish your task
- Determine how you and your family respond and if your approach is working (example: is this product cleaning effectively?)
- Do your research (especially if you have health concerns, take medication, are pregnant, nursing, or using around children)
- Introduce new options slowly and do not try to accomplish removing chemicals all at one time

There are countless ways to remove chemicals from your home and incorporate essential oils. Today there are numerous chemicals in the average household and many of them have harmful effects on the human body; essential oils offer one way to eliminate many chemicals and toxins from your household.

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