

Therapy That Smells Great

Aromatherapy and topical essential oils that can make your arthritic dog feel better.

BY CJ PUOTINEN

In addition to their use in teas, capsules, and other applications as discussed in last month's article, "Herbal Remedies for Arthritis Pain," medicinal plants provide pain relief and other benefits through their essential oils and hydrosols.

Essential oils – the volatile substances of aromatic plants – are collected, usually by steam distillation, from leaves, blossoms, fruit, stems, roots, bark, or seeds. The water that accompanies an essential oil during distillation is called a **hydrosol** or **flower water**. Hydrosols contain trace amounts of essential oil and are themselves therapeutic.

AROMATHERAPY

It isn't fragrance that imparts the medicinal properties of aromatic essential oils but rather their constituent chemicals.

Essential oils may contain anti-bacterial monoterpene alcohols or phenylpropanes, stimulating monoterpene hydrocarbons, calming esters or aldehydes, irritating phenols, stimulating ketones, anti-inflammatory sesquiterpene alcohols, antiallergenic sesquiterpene hydrocarbons, and expectorant oxides.

In addition, each chemical category may have several different effects. Aromatherapy is a modern healing art, and the therapeutic quality of essential oils is still being discovered. In other words, aromatherapy is a complex subject that deserves careful study and expert guidance.

There are many ways to deliver essential oils into your dog's environment. You can:

- Send them into the air with an electric nebulizing diffuser (available from aromatherapy supply companies).
- Add a few drops to a small spray bottle of water and spritz it around the room, being careful to avoid wood or plastic surfaces and your dog's face.
- Place a drop on your dog's collar, scarf, or bedding.
- Place two drops on your hand; then rub your palms together and gently run your hands through your dog's coat.
- Add 15 to 20 drops of essential oil to eight ounces (1 cup) of unscented natural shampoo, or add one drop to shampoo as you bathe your dog.
- Add two to five drops essential oil to a gallon of rinse water, shaking well before applying (avoid your dog's eyes).

Quality is critical when it comes to essential oils, and there is much debate over which oils, sources, production methods, and testing procedures are best. For therapeutic-quality essential



These are some of our favorite commercial essential oil products that help sore, achy, arthritic dogs. In addition, you can make your own aromatherapy blends.

oils and blends that can help your dog lead a comfortable, active life, see the suppliers mentioned in "Reliable Sources of Quality Oils," next page.

ESSENTIAL OIL BLENDS

At FrogWorks, Colorado aromatherapist Frances Fitzgerald Cleveland does more than consider which essential oils will work; she lets canine patients make the selection. "For any condition, there are several essential oils that could help," says Cleveland, "and I let the dog smell each of them, usually by offering the cap. If she runs to the other side of the room or turns her head away, that's not the right oil to use. Don't ever force an essential oil on your dog. Wait for her to find an oil she's interested in, one that she wants to smell more of. She may even try to lick the cap."

This approach is called zoopharmacognosy, a term coined by Cornell University biochemistry professor Elroy Rodriguez, Ph.D., to describe how animals self-medicate with plants, soils, and insects to treat and prevent disease.

Sometimes dogs are cautious because a fragrance is unfamiliar. If your dog

turns away from an essential oil, offer it again tomorrow or the next day. Once you've found an essential oil that will treat the problem and that agrees with your dog, Cleveland suggests blending it with an easily digested vegetable oil, such as cold-pressed safflower oil.

"Diluting essential oils for use with dogs is an important first step," she explains. "I strongly believe that full-strength, undiluted essential oils are too strong for animals, who are very sensitive to essential oils and plant medicine. Some essential oils, due to their chemical constituents, can cause skin irritation if not diluted and, because their olfactory systems are much stronger than ours, dogs can be overwhelmed by undiluted essential oils."

Cleveland created the massage oil she calls "Path to Comfort" for her dog Oscar. "He was so active in his youth," she says. "His favorite activity was chasing rabbits and he was good at it. Then one day when he was 11, a rabbit came into the yard and Oscar got into his chase mode. The rabbit took off, but Oscar stopped, sighed, and laid back down. He looked so sad that I made a blend to help him cope with his senior years."

To a safflower oil base she added sweet marjoram essential oil for its analgesic, nervine, and vasodilator (blood vessel dilating) properties; ginger for its antispasmodic benefits; helichrysum for its analgesic, anti-inflammatory, and nervine properties; carrot seed, which is a vasodilator and smooth muscle relaxant; grapefruit for its detoxifying and emotionally uplifting benefits; vetiver, which is a deeply relaxing antispasmodic; and rose otto, distilled from rose petals, which has antidepressant and antispasmodic properties.

You can use this blend by placing a small amount of the oil in your hands and applying gently to areas on the dog's

body that seem stiff, sore, or restricted, or massage a few drops into painful joints.

You can learn more about Path to Comfort, individual essential oils, other canine massage blends, and Cleveland's home study course, "Working with Essential Oils for You and Your Animals," at the FrogWorks website (see sidebar above).

Pet Alchemist aromatherapist Joan Clark makes a massage blend for acute pain relief that she calls "Arf-itis," containing angelica, arnica, wintergreen, marjoram, peppermint, and tansy essential oils, in a base of arnica-infused oil, St. John's wort, jojoba, fractionated coconut oil, flower essences, and lavender hydrosol. The blend is also available as a hydrosol mist, which can be sprayed on painful areas and gently massaged in.

"Both blends contain flower essences and the best in essential oils and carrier bases," Clark says. "Regular application is needed to get the full benefits of natural treatments. Our two Chihuahuas, Spirit and Sabrina, loved this blend. Every evening before bed we massaged them and we applied it again in the morning and before any physical activity. As they got older we had Sunday Spa nights starting with a massage using the blend and ending with a warm towel over the area."

RELIABLE SOURCES OF QUALITY OILS

- ✓ **FROGWORKS** – Littleton, CO. (877) 973-8848; frogworks.us
- ✓ **NATURE'S Gift** – Madison, TN. (615) 612-4270; naturesgift.com
- ✓ **THE PET ALCHEMIST** – Lawrence, KS. (785) 887-1030; joanclark.com
- ✓ **ROCKY MOUNTAIN OILS** – Orem, UT. (866) 493-8159; rockymountainoils.com
- ✓ **SILK ROAD OILS** – Leicester, MA. (508) 892-9330; silkroadoils.com

Arf-itis Pain Relief massage oil from Silk Road Oils was developed by canine aromatherapist Faith Thanas, who blends AromaDog Products. "This is a serious treatment for stiffness and arthritis pain in dogs," she explains. "Rosemary and ginger increase circulation to the area, while juniper acts as a detoxifier, and lavender and birch calm and help relieve pain. The oils are blended with arnica and jojoba.

"This is one product that takes a little time, but you will soon see improvement. Place a drop on the affected area and gently massage it into skin."

If you search online for "aromatherapy canine arthritis remedies" you'll find many other recommendations. One popular blend combines 60 ml or ¼ cup carrier (vegetable) oil with four drops of helichrysum, two drops peppermint, three drops ginger, and three drops valerian essential oil. Another combines 120 ml or ½ cup carrier oil with eight drops lemon, six drops lavender, and eight drops ginger essential oil.

EASY AND INEXPENSIVE

It's sad when our aging dogs slow down because of arthritis – and a joy when natural remedies that are affordable and easy to use provide relief from pain and discomfort. Incorporating medicinal herbs and essential oils into your dog's daily schedule may help him act like a puppy again. 🐾

Next month, we'll discuss assistive devices that can help support a dog with limited mobility due to arthritis or other issues.

A long-time contributor to WDJ, CJ Puotinen is the author of The Encyclopedia of Natural Pet Care and other books; see page 24 for purchasing information. CJ and her husband live in Montana.

PAST ARTICLES ON USING ESSENTIAL OILS FOR DOGS

For more about canine aromatherapy, essential oils, and hydrosols, see:

- ✓ "Smell This, You'll Feel Better," WDJ December 2004
- ✓ "Essential Information," WDJ January 2005
- ✓ "Canines in a Mist," WDJ April 2005