

Sourcing Organic Ingredients for Apitherapy Products

Part 1: Organic Essential Oils

by Priscilla Coe

To achieve the highest healing potential possible with apitherapy products, every ingredient must be scrutinized to see if a purer counterpart with greater vitality exists. Fortunately, the marketplace for organic products continues to widen and now includes readily available organic essential oils.

Why use organic ingredients when making apitherapy products? For some people the choice of organic ingredients for apitherapy products is a natural extension of an existing commitment to organic foods and sustainably produced, “green” lifestyle products. For others, the reasons for making the extra effort to source organic ingredients and spend the extra money to buy them are not yet evident or compelling.

In a presentation at an international scientific aromatherapy conference in San Francisco in 2000,¹ the world-renowned Bucharest-based aromatherapy researcher and author Pierre Franchomme submitted benchmark findings on the effect of citrus oils on tumors. A specific conclusion was that organic lemon essential oil had cytotoxic properties on tumoral cells, while conventional lemon essential oil was the polar opposite, a carcinogen. I had the opportunity to interview Franchomme recently and inquire about his current research. Today he is researching *only organic* essential oils, since his findings have shown that pesticides affect the metabolism of plants.

Dr. Daniel Penoel, the eminent French medical doctor who has advanced the aromatic healing movement, is another advocate of organic essential oils, recognizing their ability to support life. Dr. Penoel has, moreover, written that Demeter Certified Biodynamic essential oils “represent the height of organic production.”³ Biodynamic agriculture was introduced by Rudolf Steiner in 1924. The biodynamic method is certified by Demeter, an international certification agency.

When single crops are distilled into very refined substances such as essential oils, the effect of growing methods becomes transparent. Recent research on many organic crops now echoes that of Franchomme’s early work, pointing a clear beacon to organic — and biodynamic — growing methods. A presentation by Dr. Dietrich Wabner at the Sixth Scientific Wholistic Aromatherapy Conference in San Francisco in April 2005 reaffirmed the importance of certified biological cultivation.² For confidence in the marketplace, look for the name of the organic certification agency on the label.

Essential oils for api-honey and propolis creams

Nearly all essential oils are produced by the steam distillation of plant material; exceptions are citrus oils, which are typically pressed oils. It is imperative that plants be correctly chemotyped and that the practitioner be knowledgeable. It is ideal to know a good deal about the practices and standards of all involved — the growers, distillers, and purveyors. Top companies can provide traceability and testing reports on their essential oils.

Aro-honey, as described by Dr. Theo Cherbuliez at the February 2005 CMAC Level I training, is honey to which up to 7% essential oils have been added. One tablespoon, 15 grams, is made with 14 grams of honey and one gram of essential oils. Propolis creams were also discussed during the course. Glenn Perry (www.wholepropolis.com) provided a formula for an excellent propolis ointment: up to 5%

whole propolis is incorporated into a penetrating cream such as Skin Food from Weleda. I have experimented with adding essential oils to this most receptive and healing medium, with results that amplify the baseline healing properties. The following are a few top companies in America from which organic and biodynamic essential oils are available:

Oshadhi. This is a highly reputable line from a parent company in Germany. For those who are new to essential oils or who want to experiment with a wider range of oils, it is now extremely convenient to buy small, personal size bottles (five or ten ml) at retail. Oshadhi is sold nationwide at stores such as Whole Foods, Wild Oats, and Pharmaca Integrative Pharmacies, as well as online. Phone: (888) 674-2344. Website: www.oshadhiousa.com.

Original Swiss Aromatics. OSA is a favorite with many professionals, has an extensive list, and is known for hard-to-find and newly emerging therapeutic oils. The owner, Dr. Kurt Schnaubelt, has written numerous books on medical aromatherapy.⁴ He also hosts a biannual scientific aromatherapy conference through his Pacific Institute of Aromatherapy. A product list is available at (415) 479-9120. Website: pacificinstituteofaromatherapy.com

White Lotus Aromatics. Christopher McMahon is a horticulturalist who travels the world to source essential oils, which he sells in bulk sizes. Oils often come from unique, small-scale producers like an organic cooperative in Bosnia or a preservation project in India seeking to preserve traditional distillation methods. There is a wide selection of certified organic essential oils from trees. Fax: (360) 457-9235. Website: www.whitelotusaromatics.com.

Domestic distillation

One paradigm of healing is to look to one's own bioregion for medicine, largely for the harmonious subtle energetics that local and indigenous plants offer us, as well as for pragmatic reasons such as reduced fuel consumption in transport. Something to follow in coming years is the distillation of essential oils in the United States. This is now happening primarily in the western U.S., notably California. To date the most high-profile and easily available crop is lavender. However, there is a rapidly increasing selection of oils distilled from a wide range of herbaceous plants and indigenous therapeutic trees, along with an increasing availability of pressed organic citrus oils. The easiest way to learn about domestic essential oils is to contact local herb associations, aromatherapists, and farmers' markets. Some of the organic certification associations are now listing essential oils as a separate category — see, for example, California Certified Organic Farmers (www.ccof.org).

Conclusion

We have only to keep the hive in mind for a standard of tenacious exactitude and impeccable quality to aspire to in our medicine making, and ultimately as a social model for all of life. Rudolf Steiner has observed about the venerable honeybees: "That which we experience within ourselves only at a time when our hearts develop love is actually the very same thing that is present as a substance in the entire beehive. The whole beehive is permeated with life based on love."⁵ In thinking about our standards for ingredients for apitherapy products, we might hold in our imagination a primordial image of the honeybees not only as perfectionists, but as the original aromatherapists, whose perpetual work is indeed a labor of love.

References

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