

# HEALING ESSENTIALS AROMATHERAPY NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2014



## Issue #15 Vanilla Absolute

**Healing Essentials News:** We recently had a wonderful gathering here at my home for an essential oil introductory presentation. The second presentation in the series will take place at the Ojai Retreat Center on Sunday, December 7<sup>th</sup> from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. This will be a workshop about blending, making a room mister, massage oil, and bath salts.

### Vanilla!

With the Holidays just around the corner, we are thinking about gifts and recipes. Vanilla essential oil and Vanilla extract combined with spices is popular at this time of year. The intoxicating fragrance and flavor of Vanilla inspires our creative forces to experiment. In Aromatherapy, Vanilla can be added to soaps, lotions, diffuser blends, and perfumes. Were you aware that this wonderful oil comes from a beautiful orchid!?



A vanilla plantation in a forest of Réunion Island

### Plant Description:

The vanilla orchids form a flowering plant genus of about 110 species in the orchid family (Orchidaceae). The Flat-leaved orchid *V. planifolia* is the one from which Vanilla is extracted. *Vanilla planifolia* grows as a vine, climbing up an existing tree (also called a tutor), pole, or other support. It can be grown in a woods (on trees), in a plantation (on trees or poles), or in a shaded nursery, in increasing orders of productivity. Its growth environment is referred to as its *terroir*, which includes not only the adjacent plants, but also the climate, geography, and local geology. Left alone, it will grow as high as possible on the support, with few flowers. Every year, growers fold the higher parts of the plant downward so the plant stays at heights accessible by a standing human. This also greatly stimulates flowering.



*Vanilla planifolia* produces a beautiful yellow orchid flower.

## History:

Prior to the Aztecs, the Totonac people, who inhabit the East Coast of Mexico in the present-day state of Veracruz, were the first to cultivate Vanilla. In the 15th century, Aztecs invading from the central highlands of Mexico conquered the Totonacs, and soon developed a taste for the vanilla pods. They named the fruit *tlixochitl*, or "black flower", after the matured fruit, which shrivels and turns black shortly after it is picked. Vanilla was completely unknown in the Old World before Cortés. Spanish explorers arriving on the Gulf Coast of Mexico in the early 16th century gave Vanilla its current name. Spanish and Portuguese explorers brought vanilla into Africa and Asia later that century. They called it *vainilla*, or "little pod".



palhoacan, molapalloavana,  
molapalloava.  
Tlixochitl, mecatl, memecatl,  
pipitzoac: iniquauhio iuhquin  
tekitzilin, moricomarj, nojaca  
tlacanj, exoio, injexoio xaxotlic:  
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Drawing of Vanilla from the Florentine Codex (circa 1580) and description of its use and properties written in the Nahuatl (Aztec) language.

Until the mid-19th century, Mexico was the chief producer of Vanilla. In 1819, however, French entrepreneurs shipped Vanilla fruits to the islands of Réunion and Mauritius in hopes of producing Vanilla there. After Edmond Albius discovered how to pollinate the flowers quickly by hand, the pods began to thrive. Soon, the tropical orchids were sent from Réunion Island to the Comoros Islands Seychelles and Madagascar, along with instructions for pollinating them. By 1898, Madagascar, Réunion, and the Comoros Islands produced 200 metric tons of Vanilla beans, about 80% of world production. The market price of Vanilla has fluctuated dramatically from \$20 to \$200 per kilogram due to crop failures and successes as a result of weather. Currently due to the increased production of imitation Vanilla, prices remain low at \$20 per kilo.

## Method of Vanilla Extraction



After flowering, long pods emerge that are also referred to as beans due to their long bean-like shape. Until the beans are dried and cured there is no fragrance. Only the curing process allows the fragrance to develop. A pure essential oil is achieved by steam distillation, expeller or cold pressing of a plant part. Vanilla is not steam distilled, expeller pressed, or cold pressed; therefore there is no such thing as Vanilla pure essential oil. Instead Vanilla is extracted by Co2. It can also be extracted as an Absolute.

**What is a Co2 Extract?** Carbon Dioxide under pressure is piped into a container of the dried vanilla beans. The Co2 acts as a solvent drawing out the Vanilla Extract. This method allows for a pure extraction of the aromatic compounds without adding heat. It is 200 times stronger than common Vanilla extract used for culinary purposes. 'Vanillin' is the chemical constituent that gives Vanilla its unique aroma and taste. Vanilla extract used for flavoring contains approximately 2% *vanillin* whereas Vanilla Co2 Extract used in aromatherapy has 26% *vanillin* content. Vanilla Co2 Total Extract is often referred to as Vanilla Bourbon.

**What is an Absolute:** There are two ways to make an absolute.

1. Plant material is placed upon fat and the fragrance oils are drawn out of the plant into the fat. This is called *Enfleurage*, the most gentle and pure way of extracting plant oils. An example is Jasmine Absolute. A layer of Jasmine flowers is placed on the fat on trays under glass. Fresh batches of flowers have to be changed every few days as many as seven times. Thousands of pounds of blossoms are used. The resulting Jasmine Concrete is then washed in alcohol. When alcohol has evaporated the result is the purest essence unchanged by heat and the closest to the living flower. *Enfleurage* is the oldest method of extraction and is still used in France today.
2. An absolute can also be created by infusing the plant material with a highly volatile chemical such as hexane, a by-product of petroleum. Though a highly complex process and dangerous due to its flammable nature, hexane is the most widely used method to create an absolute. Many aroma-therapists prefer "hexane free" absolutes. Extremely costly in the hundreds of dollars, there are companies that offer *enfleurage* absolutes. An example is Rose Damask Absolute.

Those engaged in selling "Pure Vanilla Essential Oil" are likely doing so either dishonestly or perhaps are simply unfamiliar with the origin of their own products and fail to realize that Vanilla does not exist as a pure essential oil.

The scent of Vanilla is easily created in the form of a synthetic, lab created fragrance oil but is certainly not natural or pure. The best advice is to READ the description for the Vanilla being sold and find out if it is a Co2 Extract, Solvent Absolute, tincture, or dilution. Because of the cost of the Extract or Absolute, to make it more affordable, it may be diluted in oil. This is an acceptable practice *provided it is labeled accordingly*, e.g. Vanilla Absolute 20% in Jojoba, Vanilla Co2 Total - 30% in Fractionated Coconut, and so forth.

To summarize there are 5 types of Vanilla none of which are an essential oil:

1. Vanilla Co2 Extract (Select or Total)
2. Vanilla Absolute
3. Vanilla Oleoresin
4. Vanilla Dilution (Co2 or Absolute) blended in a fixed oil
5. Vanilla Tincture (beans macerated in an alcohol base)

**Uses of Vanilla Co2 Extract in Aromatherapy:**

As Vanilla Co2 Extract is viscous it needs to be diluted. It can be used in soap, lotion, massage oils, and perfume. The main property is calming, uplifting, and aphrodisiac.

**Description of Vanilla:** Vanilla is considered a premiere sensual aphrodisiac and one of the most popular flavors/aromas. It is comforting and relaxing and is also an ingredient in many well-known perfumes. **Color:** Dark brown. **Consistency:** Viscous. **Note:** Base. **Aroma:** Rich, sweet, warm, honey-like. **Blends well with:** Bergamot, Frankincense, Grapefruit, Jasmine, Lemon, Mandarin, Myrrh, Orange, Patchouli, Rose, Sandalwood, Vetiver, and Ylang Ylang. **Chemical constituents:** Vanillin.

**The Use of Vanilla Co2 in Perfume:** "It can take years to perfect a perfume....but some scents have come about by a happy accident. 'Shalimar' was born when Jacques Guerlain accidentally tipped some Vanilla into an existing cologne called "Jicky." Celia Lyttelton. **Recipe:** Try combining 2 drops Vanilla with 4 drops Lavender and Orange and 1 drop of Cinnamon in ½ oz. of oil for a lovely blends.

**Taking Orders for Christmas specials:**

**Christmas Gift Bag:** Small Organza Bag containing a Lavender Sachet, Lavender Lotion 0.5 oz., Lavender Mist, and a Lip Balm. \$6.00

**Fragrance Pillows:** 12 inch Cotton Flannel Pillow in 4 Designs includes a 1-2 oz. Fragrance Mister to spray on the pillow. The pillows are popular for children. The four fragrances are hint of Rose, Lavender, Cedar, and Citrus. \$15.00

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References:

1. The Complete Guide to Aromatherapy, by. Battaglia, S., P.32-33.
2. The Scent Trail by Celia Lyttelton, New American Publishing, 2007.