

## Animal Aromatherapy Essential Oil Safety

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As aromatherapy continues to gain acceptance within the Holistic and CAM (Complementary Alternative Medicine) field, there is also increasing interest in incorporating aromatherapy and other natural therapies for use with our animal friends.



It is important to note that animal lovers always want what is best for their pets, and often will seek out information and advice via the internet, blogs and social media groups: the information may not always include or contain safe use, or applies to humans and not for actual use with animals.

If you do choose to explore self-care with essential oils for your pets, it is best to seek out a professionally trained aromatherapist with additional training in animal aromatherapy, and to communicate with your veterinarian if your animal friend has any known allergies or serious health issues before using essential oils. Some essential oils are contraindicated for use with certain health care conditions.

Essential oils for canines (dogs) and equines (horses), and with some other farm animals (cattle, donkeys, goats, sheep, and alpacas), can be used topically for spot application, massage therapy and for skin and hoof/paw care. Inhalation therapy is also used with tools such as an atomizer- diffuser type unit, and with mist spray bottles to infuse the aromatic scent and healing properties into the environment.

Aromatherapy use for felines (cats)\* is very limited due to a cat's sensitive metabolic system and their internal organs: the liver and kidneys do not breakdown certain substances due to lack of enzymes.

Some hydrosols-hydrolats (the aromatic-water from the steam distillation process of plant material: flowers, leaves, twigs and bark for essential oil use) can be a gentle and safe alternative for animals, and for cats if used in minute amounts. Always use under the guidance of a professional aromatherapist with additional education in animal aromatherapy.

Education is key. Purchasing essential oils and botanicals before knowing more about their individual properties/uses and safety cautions; is like putting the cart before the horse. EOs are can be expensive, and as an investment in natural health; best to also invest in education-the key to knowing how to use aromatherapy effectively and safely.

\*Note: (See the Aromatherapy & Cats PDF for additional information).

The information below contains basic and common-sense guidelines for essential oil safety with our animal friends.

Please note, that there are **no definitive lists** of essential oils for use or non-use with animals as it depends on the individual and their health history/allergies/contraindications/age/breed/size, etc., as not all animals can tolerate the use or exposure to essential oils.

#### **Essential Oil Cautions & Contraindications:**

- Avoid use with and around cats (due to their highly sensitive metabolic systems, cats and essential oils do not mix). (See the Aromatherapy & Cats PDF.)
- Do not place essential oils in cat litter boxes/pans.
- Avoid use with and around birds (due to their respiratory and metabolic systems). (Some diluted hydrosols may be used with fowl: chickens, guinea fowl, etc.).
- Avoid use with pregnant/nursing and newborn animals.
- Avoid use with and around fish/reptiles/amphibians (due to their pH levels and aquatic environments).
- Use caution with pet rodents and small mammals (gerbils, ferrets, hamsters, rabbits, rats, etc. \*
- Use caution with smaller dogs, young (avoid use until at least 6 months old) and elder animals, as well as those that are frail and or have health issues, etc. \*

\*Diluted hydrosols are a better option.

#### **Methods of Application:**

Inhalation

Diffusion\*

Topical (localized spot application, massage and energy therapies, bathing and compress)

Essential oils must always be diluted in a carrier base for topical application.

#### **\*Diffusing Safety Cautions (please see Animal Aromatherapy Safety & Cats PDF):**

- When diffusing essential oils be sure to do so in a well-ventilated area (avoid use in small confined spaces or where excess heat or moisture may affect the diffuser unit), and use a small fan to circulate fresh air.
- In a household with animals, be sure that animals have access to leave the room/area where the essential oils are being diffused.
- Diffusion time: avoid use of constant diffusion and of the same essential oils or too many EOs with and around animals. It is best to diffuse one or two EOs at a time and for short timeframe; such as 5-10 minutes every 4 hours or less.
- Do not place diffusers directly on, or in any animal crate/cage.
- Do not use diffusers near cats, bird cages, fish tanks, reptile/amphibian aquariums, and do not place too closely near any small mammal habitat (ferret, gerbil, guinea pig, hamster, mouse, rabbit, rat, etc.)
- If you notice any negative reaction or issues, discontinue use, and if necessary seek veterinarian care.

Avoid use of these types of essential oils listed below in a diffuser with regards to birds and cats in the household/area (also see page 4 for more details).

**Please note: This list is not exhaustive and does not mean that other essential oils that are not on the list are automatically safe to diffuse around animals, especially cats and birds.** What this list is meant to convey is that these particular types of essential oils and their chemical components are best to avoid use of around these specific animals (birds and cats). This also does not mean that these (and those not listed) essential oils/components are then therefore automatically safe for use with other animals (dogs, horses, farm animals, etc.) either. If you are not sure if an essential oil is safe for use, please ask.

- Citrus oils
- Cinnamon (bark, leaf)
- Clove (bud, leaf)
- Conifers (fir, pine, spruce)
- Elemi, Myrtle and Eucalyptus species
- Frankincense species
- Juniper berry
- Lavandin and lavender spike
- Peppermint, spearmint
- Rosemary (all chemotypes)
- Basil, Black Pepper, Carrot Seed, Celery Seed, Hyssop, Nutmeg, Sage
- Cajeput, Niaouli, Tea tree and melaleuca species (avoid with dogs and small mammals).
- Thyme species
- Citronella and Camphor-based essential oils
- Essential oils high in methyl salicylate: birch/wintergreen (avoid with all animals)
- Essential oils high in ketone and phenol constituents
- Essential oils high in monoterpene hydrocarbons: (limonene and pinene).

#### **Dogs/Horses/Donkey/Goats/Cows/Sheep/Alpacas and Essential Oils**

Essential oils that are usually safe to diffuse around adult dogs and the other animals listed on the header for this section (and based on their individual health history/allergies/contraindications, etc.) are from the following groups:

1. **Citrus:** grapefruit, lemon, lime, sweet orange, tangerine.
2. **Floral:** chamomile (German/Roman), clary sage, geranium, jasmine, lavender (*L. angustifolia*), neroli, patchouli, rose, ylang-ylang.
3. **Others:** Cypress, Frankincense\*, Palmarosa and Petitgrain are also considered safe to diffuse when safety precautions are followed.

\*There have been some individual personal reports of frankincense EO possibly contributing to lowering blood sugar levels. Please use caution with individuals that have diabetes or blood sugar or metabolic imbalances.

**Note:** See information below for more details that expand upon the above list of essential oils and chemical components.

## Basic Essential Oil Chemistry-*it's more than just a pretty smell!*

Below is a list of some essential oils and their components to be aware of, and is shared to give more detail on the above list of essential oils and the importance of knowing not only the complete oil, but also its individual components. Please note, that this list is not exhaustive and for educational awareness purposes only.



- **Essential oils high in phenols:**  
Clove (bud, leaf), oregano, savory, melaleucas' (tea tree chemotypes) and the thyme oils (all chemotypes), wintergreen.
- **Essential oils high in ketones:**  
Peppermint (menthone up to 31%), rosemary (Up to 25+% depending on chemotype) sage, spearmint (carvone up to 62+ %).
- **Essential oils high in the monoterpene (limonene):**  
All citrus oils (bergamot, clementine, grapefruit, lemon, lime, mandarin, orange, tangelo and tangerine). Also, note that immortelle (*helichrysum italicum*) may contain up to 10% limonene) and fir, pine and spruce oils can contain anywhere from 6%-54% limonene), elemi (up to 65%), palo santo (up to 63%), and the boswellia species also contain limonene and pinene.
- **Essential oils high in the monoterpene (pinene):**  
Fir, pine and spruce oils, juniper, frankincense (Boswellia species contain anywhere from 4.6%-80% depending on which sub species i.e. Boswellia frereana contains between 41.7-80.0%), etc.
- **Essential oils moderate to high in camphor component:**  
Camphor, lavandin (4.5-12% depending on chemotype), spike lavender, rosemary ct. camphor-borneol, rosemary ct. 1,8-cineole, yarrow, etc.
- **Essential oils high in 1,8-cineole:**  
Eucalyptus oils, rosemary (all chemotypes: camphor-borneol (up to 25%), 1,8-cineole (up to 45+ %) and verbenone (up to 48%), etc.
- **Essential oils high in methyl salicylate:** birch (up to 90%) and wintergreen (up to 98%).



### **Avoid These 'Not-so-Common' Essential Oils with All Animals:\***

Ajowan, Bitter Almond, Boldo, Buchu, Calmaus, Camphor, Cassia, Cinnamon Bark, Citronella, Celery Seed, Clove, Costus, Elecampane, Garlic, Horseradish, Mustard, Oregano, Parsley seed, Pennyroyal, Rue, Sassafras, Savin, Savory (summer and winter), Tansy, Thuja, Wintergreen, Wormseed and Wormwood. (This list is not exhaustive).

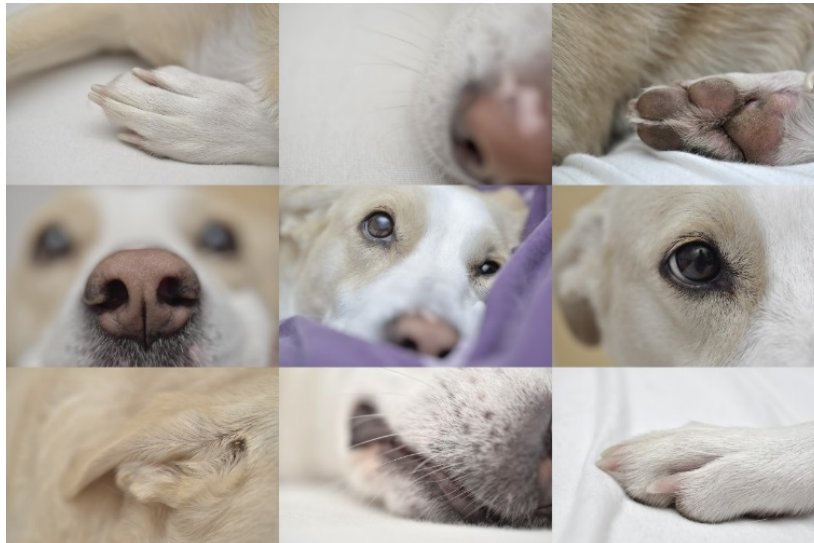
**\*Note:**

Though the 'avoid list of the 'not-so-common' EOs' listed above contains essential oils that are not often used in aromatherapy (and some aromatherapist avoid them all together), however please note that this is not an exhausted list of the essential oils to avoid use with animals (as it also depends on the individual and their health history/allergies/contraindications/age/breed/size, etc., as not all animals may be able to tolerate the use or exposure to essential oils at all.), and that these particular essential oils\*are flagged (to avoid use with both humans and animals) in most aromatherapy books and educational materials.

Some of the EOs listed in this extra 'avoid list' that have been used with caution (cinnamon bark, clove and wintergreen, etc.) and via the guidance of a trained aromatherapist for use with humans (but not for use with animals, so always use caution if you do use these oils for yourself and have animals in the household).

**Reminder: Do Not Apply Essential Oils in the Following Manner:**

- Directly to nose, mouth/whiskers, eyes or ears or to sensitive genital areas.
- Always dilute EOs if applying to the skin and especially paw areas\*.
- Do not apply undiluted EOs or excessive drops to the skin.
- Diffusion of EOs should be of short bursts vs constant exposure.



***\*Important Note: Aromatherapy (if any) should only be used on the paw pads if there is a specific issue such as abscess or minor wound, chapped or bruised paw pad. Dog's paw pads are part of their process of 'smelling' and we do not want to block or irritate that process.***

## Diffusion of Essential Oils Additional Notes:

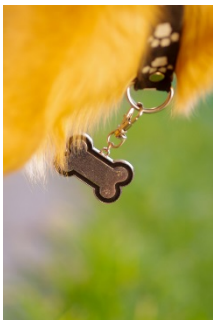
Now, if you still choose to diffuse essential oils in your environment and have a cat/s, and other animals (**do not diffuse essential oils around birds**), please do so with safe use guidelines and note; that this is your choice (vs your cat's choice) and as a precaution, I would recommend that during your cat's yearly visit to the vet, that you have blood test to keep tract of his/her liver health. This data can also be a way to compile and share this information in regards to safety and if there is possible residual or long-term negative effects experienced by cats exposed to essential oils.

**Note:** There is an aroma-stone unit (see image/resources section) that functions on very low heat which is used to disperse the scent of the essential oils within a very small area. The use of only a few drops of an essential oil is all that is needed for this type of unit and if used properly and fresh air is circulated.



I think that this may be a safer alternative to other types of diffuser units such as an atomizer diffuser which uses water to disperse the essential oil/components within a larger environment/space (usually up to 1,200-1,500 square feet.) With that said, if you choose to try an aroma-stone type unit and you have cats (and smaller mammals) in your home, be sure to follow safe use guidelines which include circulating fresh air during and after diffusing, keep the cat away from the unit during diffusing and avoid use of certain EOs (see list) in the diffuser.

## I've seen diffuser pendant charms for use on animal collars, are these safe to use?



I personally do not recommend the use of this type of a device with animals as it will hang too close to the facial area, and if left on (or forgotten) for too long-leaving the animal being exposed to the essential oil/s on a regular basis, which can contribute to sensitization issues or skin or respiratory irritation, as well as other negative reactions, such as panting, or trying to bite the charm and then possibly getting their mouth/teeth caught in the collar/charm, etc.

I would say the same for collars/halters; in that it is best to not apply EOs directly to a dog's collar or horse's halter, as it is again too close to the face and sensitive nostril/muzzle area, hence causes the animal discomfort (imagine wearing aroma jewelry and not being able to remove it if it contained a scent you did not like or caused irritation). **Please note:** animals that like to chew and ingest items that they shouldn't, this is another reason why I do not recommend the use of this type of device.



## **Animal Aromatherapy Safety Precautions:**

- Keep all essential oils and aromatherapy products out of reach of children and pets.
- Do not give essential oils internally to your pets/animal clients. While internal use of essential oils may be useful for specific issues such as digestive support and via short-term use with humans, we do not recommend this type of use with animals unless under the supervision of a qualified animal aromatherapist and in conjunct with the veterinarian being aware of this type of use, having a blood test, etc.
- Animals will often lick the area where essential oil blends/botanicals have been applied. This normally does not cause a problem – but watch to make sure that the animal does not have an allergic reaction, or negative response. If they do, wipe the area with a cool wet cloth and diluted mild soap, rinse and repeat. If necessary seek immediate veterinarian assistance.
- Other and more serious clinical signs to watch for with your pet that can result from ingestion of essential oils are: vomiting, diarrhea, depression, lethargy, weakness, excessive drooling/salivation, mouth sores, seizures, tremors, increase in liver enzymes and temporary paralysis. [1]
- Do not get essential oils near or in the eyes. If essential oils accidentally get into the eyes or sensitive areas, flush the area with water or sterile saline solution until the area is clear. If water is not helping, try a bit of milk which will aid to absorb the essential oil residue. Do not place essential oils in the eyes (this is extremely unsafe and reckless, and can cause damage to the eye).
- Never apply essential oils directly to an animal's muzzle area, inside nostrils, ears, mouth or onto whiskers. Avoid use on or near sensitive areas including: eyes and genital areas.
- Aromatherapy (if any) should only be used on the paw pads if there is a specific issue such as abscess or minor wound, chapped or bruised paw pad. Dog's paw pads are part of their process of 'smelling' and we do not want to block or irritate that process.
- Do not force essential oils onto animals by way of a head or muzzle mask breather-type device/gear or cross ties.
- If irritation occurs (this can happen via topical, diffusion and inhalation) discontinue use of essential oils and re-evaluate. If animal has a coughing or breathing issue due to the aromas, remove the animal from the area and, if symptoms persist or get worse, contact your veterinarian.

## **Animal Aromatherapy Safety Precautions:**

- Do not apply essential oils neat (undiluted) to animals. Essential oils should always be diluted when applied topically to animals. Over-use of essential oils and neat applications can cause sensitization issues.
- Do not use essential oils as negative deterrents with animals. The use of scent should not be used as a tool to keep a dog off a sofa, or cat to not scratch furniture, or stop an animal from biting/licking an area on their body, etc. Scent can be used as a positive tool as a training aid, not as a punishment.
- There are certain essential oils that should not be used with animals: one in particular is tea tree (*Melaleuca alternifolia*), which for some pets can cause poisoning and other serious health concerns [2, 3, 4].
- Do not apply use the method called Raindrop Therapy (RDT) to your animals. This and other 'neat and excessive drops of essential oil type-applications' can cause sensitization, severe allergic reactions, skin sensitivity, respiratory difficulties, dermal burns, toxic overload and other serious health concerns, and are not appropriate for use with animals.
- Diffusion time: avoid use of constant diffusion and of the same essential oils or too many EOs with and around animals. It is best to diffuse one or two EOs at a time and for short timeframe; such as 5-10 minutes every 4 hours or less.
- Remember: Less is best with essential oil use, do not be tempted to think that if it's good, then more is better. This is especially true with sensitive animals: they are entrusting us to use essential oils safely and wisely. **Always use the rule 'when in doubt...don't.'**
- When using essential oils within a barn or kennel type facility it is best to store aromatherapy products in aroma-safe containers and in a locked cabinet. Keep away from animals and children.
- Be mindful of your fellow barn/stable/kennel mates and their animal friends. Remember that not everyone can tolerate the same aromas that you and your animals enjoy. Smell is unique to each individual and lavender is not loved by all!
- If you clean your home/office with essential oils, be sure to air out the area for at least one or more hours prior to animal entering the area. Do not use EOs to clean bird cages or cat litter boxes/room. (See additional information below page 9).



## Cleaning with Essential Oils



Cleaning with natural ingredients such as baking soda and white vinegar are usually safe around animals. If you want to add in a couple of drops of essential oil such as lemon (*Citrus limonum*) to use when cleaning sinks/tubs and toilets then be sure to dilute the EO with the base (hydrosol/baking soda/vinegar, etc.) and rinse well. Air out the space for at least an hour or more before animals enter.

If cleaning with EOs be sure to not use any of the EOs listed on the avoid list (in particular tea tree and thieves type blends) in SAFETY PDF, as the animals are still exposed to the EO components via the environment, carpet, flooring, etc.

Be sure when using baking soda to remove all residue so that pets do not lick it. I also do not recommend its use as a powder to clean/deodorize carpets as it can be toxic to pets if they ingest it; and since dogs and cats lie/roll/sleep on the floor/carpeting, and then clean themselves, etc. best to use an alternative such as arrowroot powder, or just a carpet/rug steamer (without chemical-based shampoo/cleaner).

**Note:** Be sure to dilute the essential oils in a carrier base to avoid possible damage to certain materials such as wood, plastic, and certain marble type surfaces, etc. Always dilute the EOs and rinse thoroughly after cleaning.

**Reminder:** Do not use EOs to clean litter pans or cat room/area, small mammal habitats, fish, reptile and amphibian aquarium/habitats.

## **References:**

- (1) ASPCA Animal Poison Control: <http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/poison-control/>
- (2) Pet Poison Helpline: <http://www.petpoisonhelpline.com/poison/tea-tree-oil/>
- (3) National Capital Poison Center:  
<http://www.poison.org/poisonpost/winter2010/teatreeoil.htm>
- (4) Tea Tree Essential Oil-Toxic to Cats: S. Hartwell, 2008, available at:  
<http://www.messybeast.com/teatree.htm>, last accessed November 2016.

## **Resources:**

**Aroma Stone Diffusers:** Available online via Nature's Gift Aromatherapy:  
<https://www.naturesgift.com/product/aromastone-eggshell/>

Animal Poison Control Center: 1-888-426-4435

The Lavender Cat, S. Martin, 2007, available at: [www.thelavendercat.com](http://www.thelavendercat.com) (click link to 'old website version via PDF' to view different topics on the issue of essential oils and cats). Last accessed November 2016 (PDF website version).

The Natural Cat Blog, L. Eastwood, May 2015, available at:  
<http://www.naturalcatcareblog.com/2012/05/cats-and-essential-oils-perfectly-safe-now-exploring-the-controversy/>, last accessed November 2016.

NAHA (National Association for Holistic Aromatherapy) [www.naha.org](http://www.naha.org)

The Holistic Animal Association: [www.holisticanimalassociation.com](http://www.holisticanimalassociation.com)

***Education is key!*** If you'd like to learn more about the different essential oils and using them safely with your pets, please consider taking our [Animal Aromatherapy Level I course](#) which is open to beginners and those that want to learn about self-care with aromatics for their animal friends.

For those that are interested in using essential oils and botanicals with their own and other animal friends, there is the [Animal Aromatherapy Practitioner Certification Course](#). This course offers over 300+hours via home-study mentorship based program. The course is approved by both NAHA (National Association for Holistic Aromatherapy) and the Holistic Animal Association. Course study is suitable for: groomers, trainers, behaviorists, veterinarians-nurses-techs, acupuncturists, massage and energy therapists, animal rescues and animal hospice, and those seeking a new career with animals.

## Animal Aromatherapist & Aromatherapy Educator:

Kelly Holland Azzaro, RA, CCAP, CBFP, LMT, is a Registered Aromatherapist, Certified Clinical Aromatherapy Practitioner, Certified Bach Flower Practitioner, Licensed Massage Therapist, Reiki Practitioner, Past Vice President (NAHA), Past President of NAHA and current Public Relations, Journal Manger and Co-Editor of NAHA (National Association for Holistic Aromatherapy).



Kelly has over twenty years' professional experience and educational training in Aromatherapy and Massage Therapy. She also has specialized training in Canine and Equine Acupressure- Massage Therapies, Cupping Therapy, Intuitive Animal Communication, Crystal-Gemstone Therapy, Reiki and Qigong, and Aromatherapy and Flower Essence Therapy for people and their animal friends.

Kelly is approved by the National Certification Board of Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB) as a Continuing Education Approved Provider, and her (300+hr) [Animal Aromatherapy Practitioner Certification Course\(sm\)](#) meets the NAHA Standards of Education requirements. Kelly is the Founder and Director of [The Holistic Animal Association Network](#).

Kelly, and her husband Marco a Licensed Acupuncturist and Qigong Practitioner/Instructor have a [Holistic Healing Center](#) in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina where they work together as a team to educate and empower others through holistic services, education and support.

**Disclaimer:** The information contained in this handout is for educational personal awareness only; it is not meant to diagnose or treat any serious health problems or conditions, or take the place of professional health or veterinarian care. Essential oils are not a replacement for veterinarian health care. Always contact your veterinarian in regards to any serious health concerns and issues.

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