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## Essential Oils for the Home

*By Marisa Gray*

Today was a big cleaning day for me. As the seasons change, it's time to shake off the dust and let in some fresh air. I avoid chemical cleaners both for my health and the health of my pets. I don't have children, but I'm sure that those of you that do have the same concerns as I do.

I have spent some time researching alternatives to chemicals while still getting rid of the dirt and germs in my home. I'm not fanatic about it, I think a certain level of germs are necessary to help the immune system and in the interests of staying healthy I go outside and work in the garden and get a little dirty. I avoid antibacterial hand cleaners and soaps like the plague.

Speaking of the plague, many of you will be interested to know that during the Bubonic Plague of the 1300's, people who worked in the tanning and perfumers trades were largely unaffected by the disease. Both of these groups used essential oils in the course of their jobs. This was in part because of the antibiotic/antibacterial/antiviral properties of the essential oils and partly because of the odors associated with the oils. The smell helped to repel the fleas carrying the disease. Thieves were said to have used essential oils of clove, rosemary, lemon and eucalyptus on themselves to prevent plague while robbing the bodies of the dead.

The Romans, the Greeks, the Egyptians and many other ancient civilizations used essential oils to purify and heal. Hippocrates used aromatic fumigations to cleanse Athens of the plague, as well as using oils in baths and massage. In the 1920's, a

French chemist, Rene-Maurice Gattefosse began experimenting with essential oils and was the first to coin the term 'aromatherapy' after burning himself severely and using cold water with lavender oil in it to stop the tissue damage and ease his pain.

Therefore, I feel very confident in using essential oils for my house cleaning needs. These days I use soap, hot water and a little elbow grease for cleaning my kitchen and bathroom. I follow up with a few drops of lavender or lemon or pine essential oil mixed with water in a spray bottle to kill off any dangerous germs or bacteria that might be lurking around. With five furry critters running around, I can never be sure what is in the air. When I do laundry, I dash a few drops of lavender on a washcloth and throw it in when I use the dryer. If you are line drying, you can also put a few drops in with the wash. This leaves my house and my laundry smelling beautifully, as well as protecting me from illness.

Did you know that Tea Tree essential oil has been shown in studies conducted by the Mayo Clinic to effectively fight all strains of MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*)? Essential oils can help protect us in many ways and they do so without killing off beneficial bacteria. So go ahead and have a fragrantly clean home!

You may also want to incorporate some of the plants from which these oils are derived into your landscape. Many of them grow well in our desert climate and are drought tolerant once established.

Put in some lavender plants! Spanish lavender (*Lavandula stoechas*) does extremely well, as does Sweet lavender (*Lavandula heterophylla*). Spanish lavender doesn't have the same properties as Sweet lavender, but it smells good and makes a wonderful landscape plant.

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) also grows well here and is a low water use plant. I have a very old weeping rosemary plant in my yard that has grown tall and now looks like a gnarled old bonsai tree, with quiet beauty it graces my landscape and brings bees to my vegetable garden. The added benefit is that I can cook with it.

Need some shade? Plant that orange or lemon tree...when life hands you lemons, clean your house! There is no end to the uses and benefits we receive from plants. From food to medicine to cleaning solutions, the garden has it all!