

ESSENTIAL OIL CERTIFICATION: History of Essential Oils

History of Essential Oils

Essential Oils in Ancient History

- Egypt
- Indus Civilizations
- China
- Greece

Developments in Essential Oil Science

HISTORY OF ESSENTIAL OILS

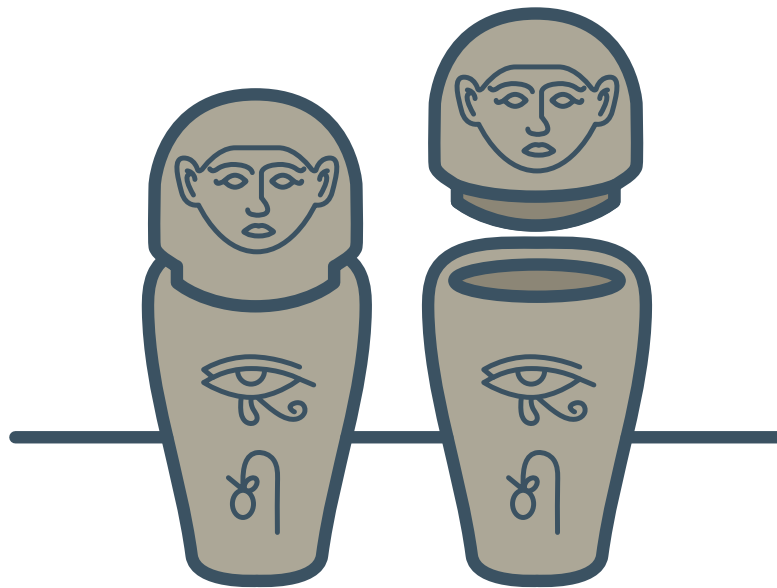
Did you know that crude forms of essential oils have been used for thousands of years? Archaeologists have found evidence of the use of these essential oil forerunners in many ancient societies. We don't know exactly which culture was the first to use them, but records indicate it could've been the Egyptians, Chinese, or Indus civilizations. Throughout history, people all over the world have used the power of plant extracts for things like health practices, religious ceremonies, cultural rituals, and food. Essential oil plant material, like frankincense resin, was even used as a form of currency at certain times. One of their most famous uses was as perfume. If you ever want to smell like Cleopatra, a safe bet would be rose, myrrh, cardamom, or cinnamon, as these scents were popular in ancient Egypt. Egyptian, Indus, Chinese, and Greek civilizations all contributed to what we now know about the powerful uses of essential oils.

ESSENTIAL OILS IN ANCIENT HISTORY

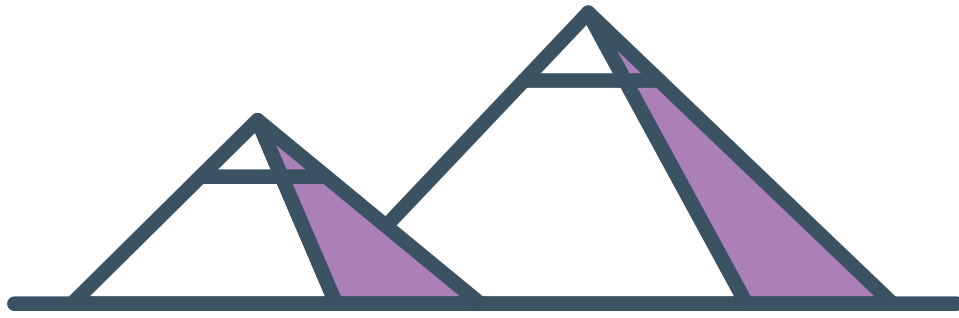


The first use of aromatics likely occurred in ancient Egypt, China, or Indus

EGYPT



When you think of Egypt, tombs and mummies tend to be some of the first things that come to mind. Burial traditions in Egyptian culture were of the utmost importance. The Egyptians observed specific rituals and sought to give as many luxuries to the deceased as they could afford. Researchers have found that one such luxury was precious plant extracts. Aromatic residues have been found in unearthed jars in Egyptian tombs, as well as on actual mummies. The walls of Egyptian temples are decorated with images depicting the use of potent plant extracts. Historical records suggest that Egyptian healers also recommended them for health purposes.



INDUS CIVILIZATIONS

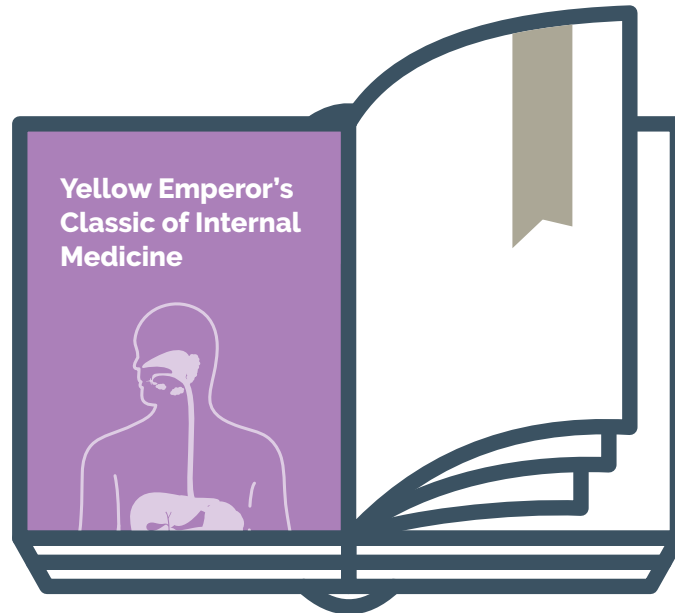
Indus civilizations—in the area where India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan are today—left behind clues of plant use. The people of this era were some of the first to attempt their own method of extracting essential oils from plants. Archaeologists have found a rudimentary invention made of terracotta pottery that they believe was used to create early plant extracts around 3000 BC. Keep in mind that this would have been roughly the time when humans first developed writing, before the Old Kingdom of Egypt was founded and around when Stonehenge was being built! More than a thousand years later, Indus civilizations still used plant extracts for various purposes. Cinnamon, ginger, myrrh, sandalwood, and coriander extracts are listed in an ancient Indian book of plant uses called the Vedas. From the Vedas, the ancient tradition of Ayurvedic medicine was born. This practice continues to this day.



CHINA

Between 500 and 1300 AD, China was a leading world power, with advances in science and technology far ahead of any other civilization of the time. They conducted extensive research, leading to many advances in the usage of plants. For example, references to aromatic plants are in the widely read and highly influential book *Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*. Some believe this guide was originally written about 2600 BC.

Protocols based on experiences and research done in ancient China have been passed down through generations and still influence modern healthcare to this day.

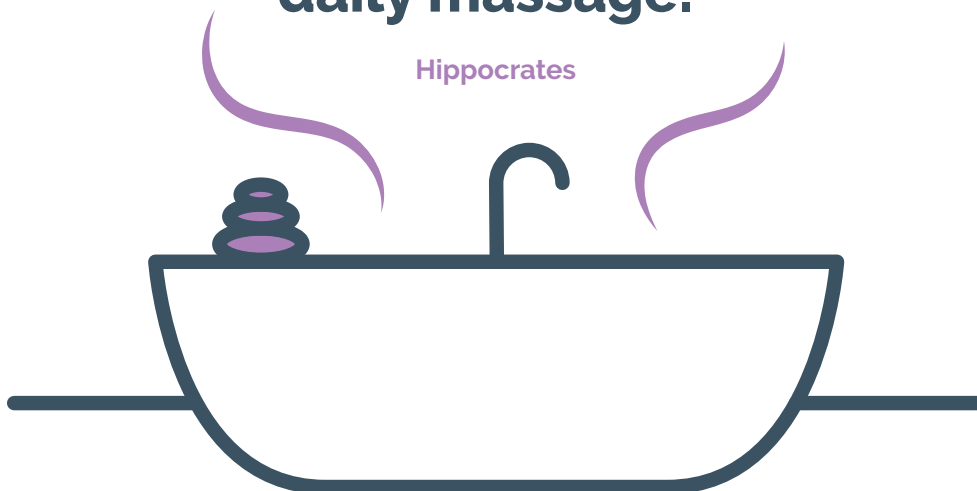


GREECE

Historical accounts suggest ancient Greek physicians Hippocrates, Theophrastus, Dioscórides, and Galen each used the aromatic power of plants for health solutions. The Romans famously employed Greek physicians at the Colosseum, where they used plant extracts when performing surgeries on injured gladiators. The research of these physicians influenced many health practices throughout Greek culture.

**“Healing begins with
an aromatic bath and
daily massage.”**

Hippocrates



DEVELOPMENTS IN ESSENTIAL OIL SCIENCE

Though basic forms of essential oils and aromatics have been used for thousands of years, it was quite some time before modern essential oils emerged. We had to wait until the late tenth to early eleventh century before true essential oil distillation was developed by a Persian physician and alchemist named Avicenna. His compiled writings, *The Canon of Medicine*, list the use of hundreds of plants, including plant distillations for wellness. His book was so renowned that people were still reading it 900 years later. In 1913, one physician called it "the most famous medical textbook ever written." We owe a lot to Avicenna for giving us what we now know as essential oils.

More developments in essential oil science followed Avicenna. During the thirteenth century, the Spanish physician Arnaldus de Villanova distilled rosemary, spike lavender, juniper, clove, cinnamon, nutmeg, and anise for various purposes. From the fifteenth to the twentieth century, European scientists distilled, analyzed, and recorded the properties of essential oils. This systematic analysis of essential oils was critical in paving the way for them to become valuable therapeutic solutions.

René-Maurice Gattefossé, a French chemist, is credited as the first to coin the term aromatherapy. He studied and researched essential oils in the 1800s. If you've ever read about the history of essential oils, you've probably heard the story of Gattefossé realizing the usefulness of lavender essence after an incident in his lab one day.

ESSENTIAL OIL SCIENCE TODAY

Ancient civilizations first made the case for essential oils and plant-based therapeutic practices. From China to Egypt, the people of these early cultures helped create a foundation that scientists and physicians later built upon.



Our scientific understanding of essential oils has come a long way since then. There are now thousands of peer-reviewed studies that contribute to our understanding and use of essential oils. The twenty-first century has brought essential oils out of fringe groups and into popular society, perpetuating their study. With advancements in technology and years of research, we can finally tap into the full power of essential oils.

