

PSYCHIC NEWS

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TOUR GUIDE SEES APPARITION AT BUS STOP

URI SEEKS SHELTER FROM ROCKETS

SCIENTISTS DISCOVER DEATH LEADS TO LIFE

DIANA COOPER ON THE LOST LAND OF ATLANTIS

'DON'T GHOST HUNT IN GRAVEYARDS' SAYS RESEARCHER

COLLEGE LAUNCHES MAJOR EXHIBITION OF ART, ARTEFACTS AND BOOKS

TAKING A LOOK AT LIFE, LOCKDOWNS AND LOVE

SUPERMODEL IS CRYSTAL CLEAR ON BENEFITS OF CRYSTALS

FORMER ROMAN CATHOLIC SPREADS SPIRIT TRUTHS

DOCTORS SAY 'SPIRITUAL FITNESS' MAY REDUCE RISK OF ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

EXPERTS GIVE PURRFECT ADVICE ON AROMATHERAPY FOR CATS



Experts give purrfect advice on aromatherapy for cats

BY NAYANA MORAG AND JULIE-ANNE THORNE

It is estimated that in the UK alone there are almost eleven million cats. Just like humans, they suffer from a variety of illnesses and conditions. One way to treat a feline is by aromatherapy and herbs.

Need some advice? Look no further than "The Aromatic Cat." Written by Nayana Morag and Julie-Anne Thorne, it takes an holistic approach.

Nayana earned her Certificate in Animal Aromatherapy and Touch for Health for Animals in 1999. She is also certified in herbalism, aromatherapy, kinesiology, aromatic energetics and equine acupuncture.

Nayana's system of animal wellness incorporates aromatics, traditional Chinese medicine, and reducing stress through management and diet.

Julie-Anne Thorne holds a psychology degree, alongside diplomas in feline zoopharmacognosy, animal healing and cat care, welfare and behaviour.

In their book, the authors give step-by-step advice on treating cats using complementary methods and include an extensive A-Y list of aromatherapy oils and how they can benefit felines. It starts with Angelica root through to ylang-ylang.

Caution first! Please note that you should not treat your cat without reading the book and consulting your vet first.

Below, Nayana and Julie-Anne give an overview of how aromatherapy and herbs can benefit our feline friends.

IN nature, essential oils can be found in the seeds, roots, leaves, resin, bark or flowers of aromatic plants.

They are secondary metabolites (not essential for the plants' survival) and in different plants have different functions. For example, to protect from microbes, attract insects for pollination or to repel herbivores.

Essential oils are the fragrant molecules that are released when you break a lavender plant, or open an orange, designed to be inhaled. The oils are highly volatile, lightweight and penetrative.

When inhaled – the way cats normally choose to use them – the molecules enter directly into the regions of the brain concerned with emotions and memory, and the endocrine system.

The nervous system transforms the messages from these aromatic chemicals into physical responses in the body, such as the anti-inflammatory, relaxation, or anti-allergenic responses.

Essential oils are most commonly extracted from the plant by steam distillation. Plant material is put in a

large vat. Steam is then forced through it under pressure, condensed and collected as water.

The essential oil collects on top of the water and is separated out. The remaining water is the hydrosol.

Essential oils are also produced using solvent extraction, in which case they are known as absolutes. The vast majority of essential oils are produced for the fragrance and flavouring industries, which demand high yield and low cost.

Essential oils suitable for therapeutic use are distilled with care, slowly and at a lower temperature, so more of the healing molecules remain intact.

Unfortunately, many essential oils are adulterated,

usually by adding synthetic fragrances or a cheaper essential oil with a similar fragrance. This is especially true of the more expensive oils, such as rose, or those in high demand like French lavender.

The best way to guarantee you are using good quality oils is to purchase from a reputable supplier who is also a trained aromatherapist, can tell you where the plant was grown and how it was distilled, and guarantee botanical purity.

Cats love aromatics – we all know about the catnip effect, right? But that's not the only herb cats enjoy, and there are many benefits to using herbs and aromatic extracts for cats.

Properly used, they can help your beloved feline be happy and healthy in body, mind and soul.





NAYANA MORAG and Julie-Anne Thorne are seen with their feline friends.
(Photo: Nayana Morag of Essential Animals)

You may have heard that essential oils should never be used with cats? Well, this is not necessarily so, as used correctly they can be a useful tool in your cat's wellness regime.

Our recommended protocol is based on animal self-selection, a safe, effective and non-invasive system. Offering aromatic extracts like this provides environmental enrichment, as well as helping with a variety of conditions, whether physical, mental or emotional.

This simple, practical guide to aromatic botanicals for cats will give you confidence to use herbs, hydrosols and essential oils:

- To support physical and mental wellbeing
- As natural remedies for daily care
- To increase immune function
- To enrich your cat's environment and reduce stress
- To give your cat a voice, by using self-selection

One of the things we love about aromatics and self-selection is that it gives your cat a voice and builds trustful communication.

In reading your cat's responses, you connect on a deeper level and your cat can communicate with you what she wants and needs in order to thrive.

Are essential oils safe for cats?

The quick answer is it depends how you use them. Cats are more vulnerable to the misuse of essential oils than some animals, so we advise you to research and learn how to use them safely with your cat.

Also, we must remember that essential oils have been extracted from their natural environment and are much more potent than when found in nature. The key to safety is to differentiate between correct use and overuse of essential oils.

Natural cats

In a natural environment, cats are exposed to essential oils daily because they are everywhere that plants grow. As cats walk through the undergrowth, rubbing against flowers, twigs and leaves, essential oils are released, albeit in minute amounts.

When your cat rolls in a bed of catnip, she releases essential oils from the plant. *Felis Catus* is one of the most successful species on the planet, so must be an adaptable survivor, and unlikely to keel over at the first exposure to aromatic compounds.

Cats and glucuronidation

It is well known in veterinary medicine that cats metabolise drugs and other toxins differently than other animals.

This mechanism is not properly understood, despite being investigated since the 1950s, but we do know that the metabolic process of glucuronidation, present in most mammals, is missing in cats.

Glucuronidation is a detoxification process whereby drugs and other substances are combined with glucuronic acid to form water-soluble compounds that are easier for the kidneys and bile to excrete.

Cats lack an enzyme called glucuronyl transferase, which means they are less able to excrete certain chemical compounds, making them more sensitive to their use.

In particular, cats take longer than dogs or humans to rid their bodies of some chemicals, such as phenols.

Therefore, they are more likely to experience toxic overload if frequently exposed to these substances. Many essential oils contain phenolic compounds; therefore caution is required.

Overuse

It's true there are reported cases of liver failure in cats after exposure to essential oils, but this has always been when undiluted essential oil has been applied topically or a cat was forced to interact with the essential oil.

A well-known case tells of someone who shaved her cats and applied undiluted tea tree oil to their skin to kill fleas – an obvious case of overuse.

There are also reports of cats who suffered liver congestion, digestive upset, lethargy and symptoms of neurological disease after being exposed to daily diffusion of essential oils in the home. Again, this is prolonged exposure to essential oils.

The cats had no option to leave the room and get away from the molecules being released into the air. Remember that cats take longer to excrete toxins than other animals. Daily exposure to essential oils can overload a cat's liver.

To avoid a buildup of toxic metabolites in the body, or fatal toxic shock (at worst), you must be very cautious when using essential oil with cats.

Especially avoid the more pungent, camphoraceous oils, such as eucalyptus, pine or tea tree (although tea tree is safe to use as a hydrosol) or anything high in phenols.

Always make sure a cat can leave the room to a source of fresh air if you are diffusing essential oils. Never apply topically unless under professional supervision.

Safe use

Every medicine can be toxic if misused. The safe way to use essential oils with cats is to dilute highly and allow your cats to choose how, when and with what to interact.

Trust their innate sense of what is good. When you do this, you will find that inhalation is the preferred method of interaction and a tiny amount is enough to trigger healing. Hundreds of cats feeling happier and healthier are testimony to this system.

Having said that, if you prefer to leave essential oils to the professionals, hydrosols and herbs are safer for the layman to use with their cats. We encourage you to explore all the aromatic extracts.

If we use nature's guidance and allow cats the choice to interact with aromatics when and how they like, they will cause no harm and have many benefits. This is especially important for indoor only cats.

Zoopharmacognosy

Zoopharmacognosy (Zoo=animal, pharma=medicine, cognosy=knowledge) is a very long word for animal self-medication.

This scientific discipline studies an animal's instinctive drive to seek out the healing herbs and minerals he or she needs.

Animals are said to be self-medicating when they eat something that is not a normal part of their diet. This can be a plant, fungi, soil or clay.

The most common domestic example is a cat eating grass to cleanse their digestive tract. Observe carefully when your cat eats grass and you will see that she is selecting her grasses very carefully.

More exotic examples are monkeys eating bitter herbs to cleanse parasites; macaques rubbing aromatic plants into their fur to prevent fleas and heal skin sores; birds using insect repellent plants to line their nests; elephants using clay as plasters for wounds.

There are many more examples being observed as scientists study the phenomenon. Scientists assume that animal self-medication is based on the hedonic response and is driven by "that which feels good."

Differences in body chemistry cause animals to find substances tasty if their bodies need a healing compound. When the body is healed, the plant no longer tastes good.

Self-selection

Domestic cats retain the innate ability to select plant medicines. Such a useful biological survival mechanism is not easily lost.

When working with aromatics, we respect this instinctive ability and let cats select between aromatics we offer them.

The aromatics your cat chooses can help you understand the root of what might be bothering her or if she needs more support with something.

For instance, if you think your cat "isn't quite right," you could offer a few dried herbs. If she selects valerian root, which helps with pain and stress/anxiety, you could then offer comfrey leaf, a pain remedy, and chamomile for stress.

If she selects comfrey, it points towards pain; if she selects chamomile, she is pointing you towards anxiety related aromatics.

When you give your cat the opportunity to tell you what she needs, you can offer aromatics that support her emotional and physical needs.

During our combined 35 years of



HERE a cat self-selects a hydrosol, which is produced during the extraction of essential oils. (Photo: Nayana Morag of Essential Animals)

experience, self-selection has proved itself to be a safe, effective and powerful healing method that has many advantages, not the least of which is that cats love it!

The holistic view

Healing works best when you look at the whole picture and consider all factors in the cat's life and history. This holistic view is fundamental to the way we work.

You may have had the frustrating experience of multiple vet visits for the same problem. Each visit the prescription is changed.

For a while, there might even be some improvement in the condition, but soon you are back to square one: itchy skin, fungal ears or whatever problem brought you to the vet in the first place.

Maybe you got rid of the itching, but you are soon back at the vets trying to get on top of irritable bowel syndrome. This familiar scenario is a result of the way modern medicine focuses on disease symptoms without addressing their causes.

Allopathic medicine absolutely has its place in animal care, but for the best results we need to find the root of the problem, which may not be immediately obvious.

The holistic view sees body, mind, emotions, and environment as one interactive system. With this view in mind, we can see that both of the problems just mentioned arise from the same underlying imbalance, which is probably the diet.

If you adjust your cat's diet, you are likely to see both problems resolve. Using an holistic approach, symptoms become clues to detect where the system has broken down and needs support.

Our aim is to help your cats rebalance their whole system, so they can heal themselves.

Stress and wellness

We strongly believe that for your cat to be truly healthy, you must reduce stresses wherever possible. This is usually easy to do with small changes in management and diet.

Stress is the prime cause of disease for animals. Every domestic animal is subject to small stresses on a daily basis simply because they are not free to choose.

Not all stress is bad, as it's a natural part of any animal's life. Even hunting or chasing toys provokes stress on a physiological level.

As the chase/hunt switches are turned on adrenalin levels are raised and joints and muscles are stressed by running, turning and stopping.

This sort of stress is natural, short term and not problematic. Too many stresses, or chronic stress such as our domestic cats are often exposed to, leads to distress, opening the door for disease.

Aromatics can help cats cope with the everyday stresses of normal life, such as family changes, moving home or exposure to viruses. However, for best results, be

aware of what stresses cats, and your cat in particular, and keep it to a minimum.

One of the major causes of stress for any animal is lack of self-determination. We love our cats, but our concern for their well-being often means we restrict their freedom and limit their choices.

You may not be able to let your cat out of your home, but you can let her participate in her own health care.

Letting your cat self-select aromatic extracts reduces stress and improves health. Stress reduction plus aromatics is a powerful healing combination.

How to use herbs

The easiest way to give your cat access to herbs, no matter where you live, is to make a herb mat with dried herbs. To do this, lay a blanket or towel on the floor with dried herbs/flowers in each corner.

We call this a “herb garden.” Your cat is free to interact with the herbs as she chooses and may rub, roll or sniff on each aromatic or just choose to lie there enjoying the fragrance.

There is no right or wrong, as your cat is taking what she needs in the way she needs it. You can also use fresh herbs in the same way: parsley, basil, lemongrass and marjoram are popular choices.

Dried herb gardens can be left down as part of the cat’s day-to-day environment, just like a scratching post. Check the herbs regularly in case they need to be topped up or removed.

When you are laying the herb garden down, make sure it is in a quiet area away from household activity. It’s important the cat has the opportunity to take herself



INHALATION “is the preferred method of interaction and a tiny amount is enough to trigger healing.”
(Photo: Nayana Morag of Essential Animals)

away from the family to a place where she feels safe because she can feel vulnerable as she starts to process and heal.

When offering a herb garden in multi-cat households, keep other cats away. Preferably put down multiple gardens so all the cats can enjoy their own herb time and won’t have an excuse to fight over resources.

Know when to call in the professionals

If your cat has disease symptoms, it is crucial to consult with a veterinarian as soon as possible. While natural medicine is great for your home pharmacy, sometimes you need stronger allopathic medicine.

This article is intended as a guide for cat lovers and guardians who would like

to use aromatic extracts in the routine management of health and well-being for their cat.

It is not intended to replace regular veterinary care or to offer diagnosis, advice or treatment. Please consult with your veterinarian for diagnosis and possible treatment if you are concerned about your cat’s health.

Building a good relationship with your vet ensures that your cat has the best possible care. Together you can work out a treatment plan that includes aromatics and gives your cat an holistic approach to its care.

■ Published by OtE Press, “The Aromatic Cat” costs £14.99 and is available direct from <https://shop.naturallycats.co.uk/collections/educational-resources/products/the-aromatic-cat-book> or Amazon.co.uk



AROMATHERAPY oils are made from many plants such as lavender.

