

# What Are Essential Oils

“Essential Oils are subtle, aromatic and volatile liquids extracted from the flowers, seeds, leaves, stems, bark and roots of herbs, bushes, shrubs and trees.” and a closing paragraph something like “Today essential oils are mainly produced using steam distillation.”

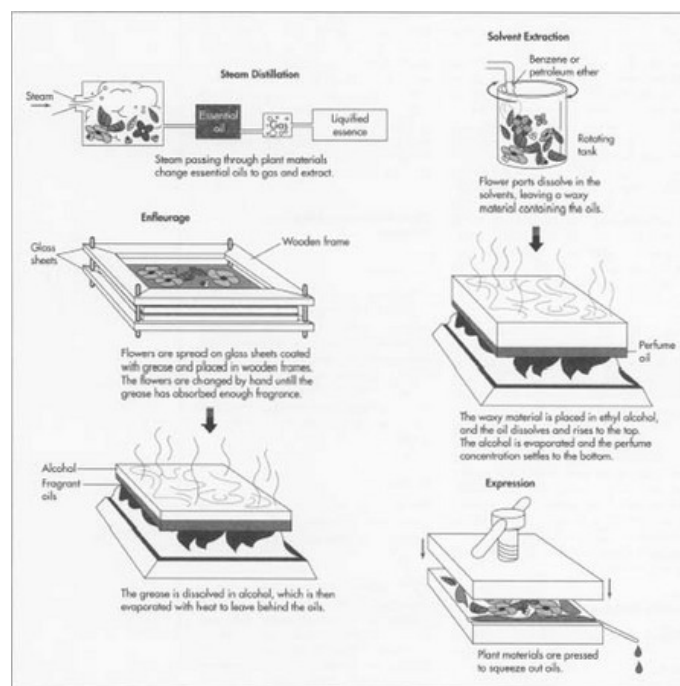
Ancient cultures found that aromatic essences or oils could be extracted from the plant by a variety of methods. One of the oldest and crudest forms of extraction was known as enfleurage. Raw plant material (usually stems, foliage, bark, or roots) was crushed and mixed with olive oil or animal fat.

Other vegetable oils were also used. In the case of cedar, for example, the bark was stripped from the trunk and branches, ground into a powder, soaked with olive oil, and placed in a wool cloth. The cloth was then heated. The heat pulled the essential oil out of the bark particles into the olive oil, and the wool was pressed to extract the essential oil. Sandalwood oil was also extracted in this fashion.



Sandalwood Bark

Enfleurage was also used to extract essential oils from flower petals. In fact, the French word enfleurage means literally “to saturate with the perfume of flowers.” For example, petals from roses or jasmine were placed in goose or goat fat. The essential oil molecules were pulled from the petals into the fat, which was then processed to separate the essential oils from the fat. This ancient technique was among the



Enfleurage Techniques

most primitive forms of essential oil extraction.

Other extraction techniques were also used. Some of these included:

- Soaking plant parts in boiling water
- Cold-pressing
- Soaking in alcohol
- Steam distillation by passing steam through the plant material and condensing the steam to separate the oil from the plant.

Many ancient cosmetic formulas were created from a base of goat fat. Ancient Egyptians formulated eyeliners, eyeshadows, and other cosmetics this way. They also stained their hair and nails with a variety of ointments and perfumes. They probably used the same aromatic oils that were used in the temples. Such temple oils were commonly poured into evaporation dishes for fragranting the chambers associated with sacred rituals and religious rites.

Fragrance “cones” made of wax and fragrant essential oils were worn by aristocratic Egyptian women who enjoyed the oils’ rich scents as the cones melted with the heat of the day.