

Essential oil of the Month: Ylang ylang

By Kathy Padecky, Aromatherapist, HHP, CBS

Ylang Ylang

Botanical Name: Cananga odorata

Why I love ylang ylang: The scent is breathtaking and sensuous. My shoulders relax and I have a peaceful smile on my face after inhaling this intoxicating scent. The scent continues to linger after the bottle is closed.

Aroma and scent: The aroma is intriguing, floral-balsamic, sweet, and soft with a slight spicy scent.

Native to and history: In Malayan, the words ylang ylang mean the flower of flowers. It is also known as the poor man's jasmine. The words ylang ylang come from alang-ilang which means hanging or fluttering. The ylang ylang plant grows in Comoros, Java, Madagascar, the Philippines, Reunion Islands and Sumatra. The French introduced ylang ylang to the Reunion Islands in 1770. Ylang ylang became popular in the 1900's. Manila holds the monopoly with limited production of ylang ylang. Combat during World War II destroyed many plants. The Javanese plant is a poorer quality of ylang ylang. The United States imports 81,367 kilograms of ylang ylang essential oil valued at \$51 million dollars.

Indonesian women perfume their hair with ylang ylang. Indonesian newlyweds find ylang ylang flowers strewn on the bed on their wedding night. During the rainy season people used ylang ylang to nourish and rejuvenate the skin. In the Victorian era, "Macassar" hair oil was a mixture of ylang ylang and coconut oil.

In Hawaii the mixture of ylang ylang and coconut oil is borriborri. Locals protect and nourish the skin as well as to protect the hair from sea salt.

In the 1900's, French chemists, Garnier and Rechler conducted research on the Reunion islands. It was discovered the essential oil to be effective against malaria, typhus, intestinal tract infections and calms the heart.

Chemistry: There are four grades of ylang ylang; extra, first (also called complete), second and third. The length of time the flowers are steam distilled determines the grade. Extra is distilling the flowers for only 1 1/2 hours; 3 to 5 hours is called first or complete, 5 to 8 hours is

called second, and 8 to 15 hours is called third. The extra grade, the most aromatic, contains chemical compounds of esters and ethers. It is primarily used in perfumes. The first to third grades contain sesquiterpenes, aldehydes, ketones and phenols, alcohols and esters. The cosmetic industry prefers to use the second and third grades. The esters and phenols give ylang ylang its intoxicating fragrance. The terpenes, aldehydes and esters are anti-inflammatory, antiseptic, antiviral, antifungal and antimicrobial.

Part of the plant: Ylang ylang is a tropical evergreen reaching a height of 60 feet. Only the yellow flowers are steam distilled to obtain the essential oil. The leaves have a peppery scent if crushed. The color of the essential oil is amber to yellow brown.

If the oil is exposed to light it turns brown and loses its aroma. The ylang ylang tree thrives in a moist tropical climate. This plant is immune from pests. Spring yields the highest quality oil. The flowers harvested before daybreak yield the most oil. Wild ylang ylang plants have no fragrance.



Ylang ylang may help the body recover from the following: acne, allergies, anger, anxiety, asthma, Candida, colds, colitis, cough, depression, diabetes, eczema, hair loss, headache, hypertension, hyperventilation, hysteria, insomnia, low libido, muscular pains, pre-menstrual syndrome, scars, skin (dry or oily), sores (infected), stimulates hair growth, reduces stress, tachycardia, tension, tinea and wounds. Ylang ylang is considered an aphrodisiac.

Ylang ylang blends with: anise, basil, bergamot, cardamom, cedar wood, chamomile (Roman), citronella, clary sage, cumin, cypress, elemi, fennel, frankincense, gardenia, geranium, ginger, grapefruit, jasmine, lavender, lemon, marjoram, melissa, neroli, orange, patchouli, rose, rosewood, sandalwood, vanilla, and vetiver.

Body, Mind and Spirit

Connections: Valerie Ann Worwood (1999) in *Fragrant Heavens* states "ylang ylang is the tenderhearted one who's hanging petals dance in the wind, as if, through flexibility, it protects a tender heart from destruction. It shields and guides the passion of love and true emotion, while allowing a tender awakening of that sensual part of our being and spirit that can embrace all things."

Ylang ylang balances sebum production in the skin. It is good for all skin types. The aroma can be overpowering so I suggest using small quantities.

Ylang ylang pacifies the mind, releasing anger and stubbornness. It eases frustrations and promotes confidence. It is effective against introversion and emotional coldness.

According to I. Leigh (2001) *Aromatic Alchemy*, ylang ylang dispels anger, and negative emotional states. It can assist in overcoming sexual dysfunctions and sexual issues.

Dr. Tim Betts of Birmingham University's Neuropsychiatry Clinic in the United Kingdom, in the *Aromatherapy Quarterly* 1994, Issue 33, states ylang ylang oil can be effective for controlling epilepsy, especially when smelled before the onset of a seizure. The majority of patients with epilepsy, given a choice of four or five oils, almost invariably choose ylang ylang."

Jane Buckle, (2003) who wrote *Clinical Aromatherapy* states midwives used ylang ylang to reduce hypertension during pregnancy.

Contraindications and Precautions: Ylang ylang must be diluted. It may irritate sensitive skin because of its phenol content.

Essential Oil Recipes:

Anti-anxiety formula

2 drops bergamot

5 drops lavender

3 drops ylang ylang

Blend the above oils and add 3 drops to bath water. This may be added to liquid soap for washing hands or dishes.



Dew Drop

14 grams rose hydrosol

8 grams sweet almond oil

6 grams of jojoba oil

4 drops geranium

2 drops lavender

1 drop ylang ylang

Put the ingredients in a clean 1 ounce glass bottle. Cap and shake gently to ensure an even mixture. Massage into your skin.

Helpful Hint: This essential oil improves with age because of its ester content. Some of the masterpieces of French perfumery rely on the skillful blending of ylang ylang, rose, bergamot and vanilla.

Disclaimer: These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. Products and/or techniques mentioned are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease. The information provided is for educational purposes only and is not intended as diagnosis, treatment, or prescription for any disease. The decision to use, or not use, any of this information is the sole responsibility of the reader.

Resources:

Aromatherapy for Massage Practitioner by Ingrid Martin

The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Essential Oils by Julia Lawless

The Fragrant Heavens by Valerie Ann Worwood

Aromatherapy blends & Remedies by Franzesca Watson

Aromatherapy Scent and Psyche by Peter & Kate Damian

Aromatherapy for healing the spirit by Gabriel Mojay

The Encyclopedia of Aromatherapy by Chrissie Wildwood

Aromatherapy for Bodyworkers by Jade Shutes and Christina Weaver

Australasian Course Study

Aromatherapy for Massage Practitioners by Ingrid Martin

About the Author: Kathy Padecky is an Aromatherapist and a Holistic Health Practitioner (HHP). She began working in the holistic health field in 1981 and teaches various massage modalities, aromatherapy, and hydrotherapy at the International Professional School of Bodywork (IPSB). Ms. Padecky is also publisher of the "Sacred Scents" Newsletter.

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