

# Essential Oil of the Month: Vetiver

-By. Kathy Padecky, Aromatherapist, HHP

## Vetiver

**Botanical Name:** Vetiveria zizanioides is known as the "oil of tranquility". It is known by other names such as Vetivert, Khus-Khus and moth root.

**Why I love vetiver:** I love the smell of vetiver for reasons



I have challenges articulating. Words fail to express the depth and essence of my feelings. There is something mysterious and exotic about this fragrant essential oil. It is one of the few oils whose earthy smell I find reassuring and comforting. I put

vetiver on my face before going to sleep every night. I suspect the smell of vetiver helps make me feel youthful.

**Aroma and scent:** Vetiver's consistency is viscous. It has a warm, amber-brown color. The scent is smoky, heavy with an earthy undertone. Its aroma is long lasting. The earthy fragrance has spicy overtones that provide warmth and comfort such as found on a sun-drenched day. Tenacious, with a sense of belonging and grounding, its personality is one of renewal, ripeness, and maturity. Vetiver is excellent for those who have 'lost touch' with something. Botanically, it is in the same family as citronella, lemongrass and the evergreen trees or shrubs litsea cubeba.

**Native to and history:** Vetiver is a tall, tufted perennial grass with fibrous aromatic roots. It grows in Indonesia, Malaysia, Ceylon, the Philippines, Haiti, India, Jamaica, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, and Martinique. People weave the roots into baskets and mats. Curtains or mats made from the grass are practically waterproof when tightly woven. Many

cultures use these curtains and mats. In Haiti, the dried grass is used to thatch roofs.

**Chemistry:** Vetiver is a complex essential oil with over 50 chemical constituents. It consists of primarily of sesquiterpenols (30-42%), an alcohol. They calm, sedate, and reduce spasms and inflammation. Sesquiterpenones (14-22%), a ketone are calming, mildly anti-septic and a sedative. They are helpful as decongestant, aid in digestion and encourage wound healing. Sesquiterpenes (2-4%), a terpene are anti-inflammatory and calming, they also remove faulty information stored in cellular memory. Most essential oils contain some sesquiterpenes. Vetiver has the largest amount of terpenes found in any essential oil. Lastly, it contains sesquiterpene esters (1-2%) which are calming, adaptogenic (bring the body back into balance) and sedative with a pleasant fragrance. There may be a trace of carboxylic acids (0-2%) are in the production of esters which help one relax.

**Part of the plant:** Vetiver is steam distilled from the roots and rootlets (small roots). Small pieces of the roots and rootlets are initially dried and just before distillation they rehydrate the roots with water. In perfumery, a solvent quickly and cheaply extracts the oil from the roots.

**Vetiver may help the body recover from the following:** acne, addictions, anxiety, aphrodisiac, arthritis, Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), bruises, cut, dermatitis, eczema, feet (cracked soles), headache, insect bites, libido (low), muscles (stiff and achy), nail infections, nervous exhaustion, neuralgia, obsession, overworked, psoriasis, rheumatism, scars, sinus issues, skin (infections, inflamed, dry or cracked), sores, spasms, stiffness, stress, tension, thrush (oral), wounds and wrinkles.

**Vetiver blends with:** bergamot, black pepper, cedarwood, clary sage, coriander, frankincense, geranium, ginger, grapefruit, jasmine, lavender, lemon, lemongrass, neroli,

orange, patchouli, rose, rosewood, sandalwood, violet and ylang ylang

**Body, Mind and Spirit Connections:** Well known aromatherapist, Jan Kasmirek, medical herbalist and lecturer states Vetiver is a hidden oil to do with the dark recesses and the potential for life and energy. Vetiver balances and calms the nervous system. It gives a person a sense of grounding and connectedness. It will assist a person to reduce the use of and ease one off the use of tranquilizers. It is a sedative for times of mental and physical exhaustion. "It is called a calming oil and it is a reputed panacea for stress and tension."

Vetiver is reputed to regulate hormonal secretions of progesterone. Using vetiver during menopause helps with cope with hot flashes.

Shirley Price in her book, "Aromatherapy for Health Professionals" states vetiver, rosemary and *Thymus vulgaris* (thyme) help promote blood circulation, and improve limb mobility after a stroke."

Dr. Terry Friedmann published an article on vetiver in the June 2002 *Zia's Essential Connection* issue "The Effects of Essential Oils on Children with ADHD (Attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder)." His findings showed children

diagnosed with ADHD are usually between the ages of six and twelve years of age. The common treatment in our society for ADHD is a



prescription for Ritalin. An electroencephalograph (EEG) tested the brain waves of eighteen children. The brain waves of normal children were high in beta waves and low in theta waves during the waking hours. It was reverse for the children diagnosed with ADHD. Six children inhaled vetiver, six inhaled lavender and six inhaled cedarwood three times a day for 30 days. At the end of 30 day period, they returned for retesting with the EEG. The analyses revealed a significant improvement in the pre- and post treatment in the group using vetiver essential oil. The improvement was a significant 32%. The treatment results showed vetiver improved the brain activity and reduced ADHD symptoms in the children. "Similar results were found with essential oil of cedarwood, although not as statistically significant. This lack of significance could be the results of the relatively small number of subjects in this study. The lavender group showed no apparent

improvement after the treatment program. Dr. Friedmann received letters from parents of the ADHD children stating that the children's behavior improved. Teachers observed improved behavior and with improved grades.

If you are interested in learning more about ADHD see "Treatment of Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder," [New England Journal of Medicine](#), Pages 780-788 J. Elia, et al, 1999, or [www.ahcpr.gov/clinic/adhdsutr.htm](http://www.ahcpr.gov/clinic/adhdsutr.htm) (August 26, 2000).

**Contraindications and Precautions:** When creating a lotion or blend the scent of vetiver is quite aromatic. If used in a massage blend, limit the amount of vetiver to 5% of the blend. Vetiver may be applied "neat" or undiluted to the skin. There are no known contraindications for vetiver.

#### Essential Oil Recipes:

##### A Good Rose deodorant

Mix together equal quantities of baking soda (aluminum free) and Orris root powder. Scent 1 cup of the mixture with 10 drops of rose essential oil, 10 drops of sandalwood essential oil and 5 drops of vetiver. Shake together, sift, and let age for at least a few weeks so the fragrance and powders meld together. Use as an underarm or foot deodorant. Apply with a powder puff. This wonderful mixture will help prevent the bacterial degradation of perspiration.

##### Nourishing vetiver

1 drop of vetiver (undiluted "neat")

Apply to the face for wrinkles or apply to the stomach to reduce stretch marks from pregnancy or anywhere to improve the elasticity of sagging skin.

##### Repel moths

3-4 drops of vetiver on a cotton ball

Place the cotton ball on a closet floor to repel moths and protect clothes and linens.

**Disclaimer:** This information is for educational purposes only. It is not provided to diagnose, prescribe or treat any condition of the body. This information is no substitute for medical counseling with a qualified health care professional.

**About the Author:** Kathy Padecky is an Aromatherapist and a Holistic Health Practitioners (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.