Citronella

**Botanical Name:** Cymbopogon nardus or Cymbopogon winteratus

**Common Name:** Citronella. It goes by other names, andropogon nardus, nardus, nard and nard grass. It is known in Chinese medicine as Zhao wa xiang mao.

NOTE: The summer season is around the corner. There are healthy and safe recipes to repel insects and pests with essential oils and herbal plants at the end of this newsletter.

**Why I love this essential oil:** I love citronella because it is a beautiful essential oil and it has a wonderful aroma. It is the perfect mosquito and insect repellent. Many believe its only use is to repel mosquitoes, ticks, flies, etc. This is true, yet it is perfect for sore muscles, joints and as an astringent. I use it after days of teaching when my feet are sore. It warms the body and reduces my fatigue. I love this essential oil and when I use it, it puts me into a relaxed spiritual state.

**Aroma and scent:** The aroma of citronella ranges from strong to subtle. The scent of citronella is fresh, sweet, lemony, camphor like and sometimes fruity. The color ranges from colorless to a light or deep yellow.

**Native to and history:** Citronella is a member of the gramineae plant family of grasses. It is a hardy grass grown primarily in Africa, Sri Lanka, Java, Burma, Madagascar, Guatemala and South America. Sri Lanka was the first exporter of citronella until 1890. There were reports that Sri Lankan citronella was adulterated with kerosene. This may be true yet citronella is flammable and this may be the reason some believed it was adulterated. The island of Java (Cymbopogon winterianus Jowitt) produces twice as much citronella than Sri Lanka (Cymbopogon nardus Rendle). The Java citronella is considered superior and it has the highest content of the chemical compound of geraniol. The Java citronella is considered to be one of the highest quality and widely used ingredients for perfumery. Alexander the Great is reported to become intoxicated while riding an elephant when he smelled the nard as the elephant crushed the leaves under foot. Historically, citronella was a safe, natural, non-toxic insect repellent.

**Chemistry:** Citronella is a relatively simple essential oil containing at least eight known chemical compounds. Citronella contains three known types (33-57%) of alcohols. Alcohols are anti-inflammatory, anti-microbial, antispasmodic, support the immune system and are sedative. They are calming to the body. Citronella contains three known types (19-27%) of phenols. Phenols are antiseptic, anti-fungal and anti-inflammatory. They can be skin irritating and this is why you must dilute them. Citronella contains one known type (5-10%) of monoterpenes. Monoterpenes are volatile, and they absorb quickly into the bloodstream. They have the quickest physiological response on the body. They are immune stimulating, antiseptic, and a tonic. They are beneficial due to their mildness and safety. They may irritate some skin. Citronella contains one known type of (5-6%) aldehydes. Aldehydes are sedative and antimicrobial. They may be irritating in large amounts.

**Part of the plant:** This three-foot high plant has long slender leaves. The essential oil is steam distilled from the greenish blue, lemon scented leaves and stems. It is in same family as the aromatic grasses of palmarosa and lemongrass.

**Citronella may help with the following conditions:** colds, digestive issues, fatigue, fever, flea repellent, flu, headaches, minor infections, migraine, mosquito repellent, neuralgia, excessive perspiration, oily skin, parasites, sanitize and deodorize surfaces for food preparation. If you combine cedarwood and citronella essential oils together, this makes an excellent insect repellent.

**Citronella blends with:** Bergamot, cajuput, cedarwood, eucalyptus, geranium, lavender, lemon, neroli, orange, peppermint, petitgrain, pine, rose, sage, ylang ylang

**Body, Mind and Spirit Connections:** This essential oil is an excellent choice for anyone experiencing depression, anxiety or panic attacks. Its fresh lemon scent is uplifting to the body.
It may act as a tonic to the whole body as it clears the mind. It helps relieve insomnia. It is frequently adulterated with chemicals or synthesized. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, it is used for rheumatic pain.

Citronella is an ingredient in soaps, detergents, household goods and perfumes. Sri Lanka uses citronella as an ingredient in food categories such as soft drinks and alcohol.

**Contraindications and Precautions:** Avoid with children under the age of six. It may possibly irritate skin. Citronella must be diluted for topical use. Inhalng citronella candles may increase heart rate. Repeated use can result in extreme contact dermatitis. Avoid use with pregnancy.

**Essential Oil Recipes:**

**Deter moths and insects**
Place one drop on a cotton ball and place it in drawers to repel moths and insects.

**Fleas be-gone shampoo**
Your pet will be happy after this citronella shampoo.
20 drops citronella
2 tablespoons of shampoo
Wet your pet down. Massage with the shampoo mixture. Let stand for five minutes and rinse. Your pet will smell great.
Avoid citronella shampoo with cats. Cats are unable to process essential oils. It stresses their liver.

**Fido's flea collar**
4 drops citronella
4 drops eucalyptus oil
1 small cotton heavily absorbent woven string, enough to encircle your pet's neck.
Drop the essentials oil along the string and allow it to dry for 30 minutes.
Tie the string comfortably around your pet's neck. Make the string loose enough to avoid choking your pet if it gets caught on something. The scent will disappear after one week.

**Flea away house salt**
1 tablespoon of citronella
1 cup sea salt
This is a great way to keep fleas outside of your home. The ingredients are harmless.

**NOTE:** Even though it contains only two ingredients, this a well-tested recipe with a great track record because it has been sold for years as a fundraiser by the Northern California organization GASP (Group Against Spraying Poisons). The group reports lots of success. The salt absorbs the essential oil and retains the flea-discouraging scents longer.

**Did you know?** Citronella is added to wax candles to deter mosquitoes.

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**Resources:**
- *Ayurveda and Aromatherapy* by Dr. Light Miller, ND and Dr. Bryan Miller, DC
- *Aromatherapy for the Massage Practitioner* by Ingrid Martin
- *Aromatherapy with Chinese Medicine* by Dennis Willmont
- *The Chemistry of Essential Oils Made Simple* by David Stewart, PhD.
- *The Directory of Essential Oils* by Wanda Sellar
- *Aromatherapy for Dummies* by Kathi Kelville
- [http://citronella-oil.blogspot.com](http://citronella-oil.blogspot.com)
- *doTerra Living*, Spring 2012

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