

THE TRADITIONAL INCENSE CRAFTING COURSE

from The Northwest School of Aromatic Medicine

A Guide to Formulation - Therapeutics

The first step in the incense formulation process is deciding your intention for your creation. Will you be making heavenly divine smelling incense, or incense that's healing to the respiratory system, emotions or mind, or will you be making a blend to accompany a particular ritual like meditation or yoga? Once you decide on the intention behind your new formula, then you can look to the proper formulation methods and techniques to help you achieve your desired result.

Formulating incense for therapeutic purposes can be quite different than crafting for aesthetics and aroma. The system of fragrance notes is utilized when creating a blend solely based off of the aromas of different materials. When crafting for therapeutics however, you'll be paying much closer attention to the medicinal qualities of the materials you use, with much less focus on how they actually smell.

There are many therapeutic incense blends that certainly smell 'medicinal,' and are not as pleasing as most aesthetically formulated incenses. Now, that's not to say you can't design a blend with both medicinal *and* aromatic qualities in mind, especially since most medicinal aromatics come with a beautiful scent. For many incense crafters, the boundaries of different formulation methods are known to blur from time to time.

There are times, however, where the healing virtues of a plant are much more important than how pleasant it smells. A therapeutic incense that also smells amazing is certainly very achievable, but it's not a necessity in the eyes of the healer. Many aromatherapists for example, will create essential oil blends using plants that are not as pleasing to the senses as others, but are very potent and effective as a treatment. The same goes for formulating and prescribing incense.

If you're a practicing aromatherapist, herbalist, or healer, the importance of creating an effective therapeutic treatment for a patient should be your first priority. If an incense ends up smelling great, that's an added bonus. On the other hand, if you're a hobbyist, or wish to sell incense for aesthetic purposes, or just want to make incense for yourself or others, and therapeutics aren't your top priority, using the formulation method of fragrance notes will definitely suit you best. But, feel free to incorporate the healing knowledge of certain aromatic plants into your aesthetic blends for added benefit to the mind, emotions, and spirit. Just be sure you study and know the plants you use deeply and thoroughly first.

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Therapeutic Formulation

Generally speaking, when crafting incense for therapeutic purposes, the majority of the blend should address the most problematic symptom of the patient. The other ingredients should be those that aid the first ingredient, whether helping to enhance or strengthen its medicinal actions, or address other symptoms a patient is having. For example, if the main ingredients in a blend address a viral infection a patient is experiencing, the other herbs in the blend might be added to reduce accompanying excess phlegm and mucous, ease a related cough, or for their antiviral properties to help the main herbs kill off the infection.

There are different levels to healing, and the art of crafting incense for therapeutic purposes allows for the addressing of multiple levels at the same time. A well-formed blend is one that synergistically touches on not just the physical level, but other areas a patient may need support in as well; such as the mental, emotional, and spiritual levels. One, a few, or all of these aspects can be addressed with a single blend depending on a patient's unique requirements and needs at any given time.

Whether you are formulating therapeutic incense as preventative medicine, or attempting to cure a more serious ailment, the first thing you must do is decide what your formula will address. Is it for general health, strengthening cognitive functioning, fatigue and low energy, respiratory complaints, nervous system

disorders, emotional wellbeing, and is the issue chronic or acute? Once you decide the intention behind your blend, you'll then take different botanical candidates into consideration.

Unless you have professional training in the areas of aromatherapy or other forms of medicine, I highly recommend that you or others see a licensed physician or health practitioner in the case of any serious or chronic health issues. It's very important that you do not attempt to heal someone without having the proper knowledge or experience.

That being said, incense is considered a generally safe healing modality for acute issues and at-home grass roots health care. It can be used for mood balance, emotional support, preventative medicine, strengthening the mental faculties and memory, general respiratory health, and spiritual healing; whether you have proper training or not; as long as you're not attempting to treat any serious disorders or imbalances.

Leads, Synergists, and Supportive Herbs

Similar to the system of fragrance notes, when formulating for therapeutic purposes, there are three classifications of medicinal herbs: lead (or primary) herbs, synergists (or drivers), and supportive herbs.

Lead Herbs:

The lead herbs hold the main medicinal properties of your blend and address the main symptoms or complaints of the patient. In incense, the lead herb content can make up anywhere from 30-80% of a formula.

Supportive Herbs:

The supportive herbs give their support to the lead, or primary herbs by either strengthening or enhancing their properties, or addressing accompanying symptoms as mentioned above. They can also act as a buffer for stronger ingredients. Supportive herbal ingredients usually take up around 30-40% of a formula.

Synergist Herbs:

These are the herbal ingredients that help synergize, or harmonize, the effects and overall potency of a formula. Many plants used as synergists have strong energetics: like Clove, Rosemary, or Galangal. They oftentimes have a strong effect on the circulatory system, lymphs, and are usually more stimulating than other herbs. These tend to make up around 5-20% of a formula.

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When formulating a therapeutic blend, you always want to decide on what lead herbal ingredients you'll be using first, based on the main ailment or symptom of your patient. Then, decide which supportive herbs you'll be using for additional symptoms and support, or for strengthening your leads. Once you have the bulk of your formula thought out, you can then decide which synergist herbs would harmonize best in the blend.

If a therapeutic blend is too sharp, intense, earthy, or spicy to your patient's nose, you can always add a little something to round it out, smooth its edges, or sweeten it up a bit. You just want to be sure it isn't enough to throw off the balance of your well-rounded blend.

At the same time, our bodies are very intelligent and tend to let us know if we should avoid something or not. Therefore, you always want to test out an incense with a patient prior to prescribing a full treatment plan with. One of the most important skills of the practitioner is the art of listening. If a patient really doesn't agree with a plant or a blend you create, it's important to take that into consideration.

Some folks find the smoke or essential oils of certain plants to be irritating to the sinuses or respiratory tract, especially if they have an allergy to a plant. Allergies should never be taken lightly. If a patient has a strong disagreeance with anything you prescribe or suggest, it's best to take note and find a new botanical candidate that may be better suited. Always ask your patients beforehand if there are any herbs or spices they don't care for or are allergic to, and be sure to omit these from any formulas you create for them.

Holistic Healing

As an aromatherapist, herbalist, or health practitioner, it's very beneficial to develop your skills around *holistic* perspectives of healing. Plants and people are very similar in that they have many facets. They both have a physical nature, an intelligence, and a spiritual nature. When healing a patient, it's very important that you carefully look into *all* aspects of a person's life and health, and not just the physical (emotional, lifestyle, diet, relationships, thought patterns, energy/vitality, spirituality, stress/anxiety levels, past traumas, etc.).

The dominant paradigm of Western medicine has given too much focus to treating *symptoms* over treating individual people. Most modern pharmaceutical medicines out there today are designed to treat symptoms, no matter who you are or what your unique constitution or health factors may be. The fact is, we're all very different and all require unique treatments and care. One remedy for one person may not be the answer for the next.

Most symptoms that we experience within our bodies, minds, or emotions are mechanisms our body uses to alert us to a deeper imbalance within. They are warning signs telling us that our body/mind/emotions need attention and are out of balance. A health practitioner's job is to learn to read the language of symptoms to understand the *root causes* they point to so they can treat them appropriately.

A good practitioner will learn their patient's emotional state, physiological issues, mental state, and even spiritual needs. They'll learn to understand and address the *root cause* of the present symptoms instead of prescribing medicines that *cover up* the symptoms, which could potentially suppress and drive the real cause of illness deeper into the body; sometimes causing more harm than good.

If someone was trying to alert you to danger, would you try to hush them, sooth and relax them, or calm them down with drowsy tea? Or would you really listen to every word they were saying and do your best to interpret the danger so you could decide the best course of action? I would guess you would do your best to listen intently and act accordingly. This should be the same with 'listening' to the symptoms of a person, instead of treating or covering up the symptom. Learning to really 'listen' to symptoms will ultimately lead you to the root cause of illness with proper training and experience.

That being said, once the root causes of illness are uncovered and addressed, it's also beneficial to treat the accompanying symptoms as well to bring relief. The most effective way to go about treating a patient or creating a formula for healing is to know your patient on many levels, and create a unique formula that caters to their specific needs at the time and addresses the root causes of their illness or imbalance, as well as their symptoms.

Fully knowing your plants and their medicinal qualities when formulating for therapeutic purposes goes hand in hand with the importance of proper patient intake, diagnosis, and treatment. Always study a plant *thoroughly* and experience its medicine first-hand before using it for medicinal purposes for others.

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As this is more of an instructional and practical crafting program, I won't be going into the practice of therapeutics or healing more than this, but it's important that when learning to craft incense for therapeutic purposes, the factors mentioned above are taken into account. If healing with incense or essential oils interests you, I invite you to look into the other programs offered by the Northwest School of Aromatic Medicine.

Now you have the basic foundations for crafting incense for therapeutics and for using fragrance notes for crafting for aesthetics. It's up to you how you want to incorporate these two methods into your own practice. When starting out crafting incense, I suggest learning both separately to better understand each method. Make a few incense blends using the method of fragrance notes, and make a few therapeutic blends based off of the therapeutic formulation method above before combining or integrating these two systems together.

And above all else, have fun crafting!