



THE HAND-CRAFTED INCENSE WORKSHOP SERIES

Lesson 2: The Building Blocks of Incense

The Essential Elements that give form, strength, and ignition power to your incense creations.

Anyone can learn to make their own incense at home. And it can be as simple or complex as you want to make it. *But there are key teachings and a certain level of understanding* that needs to be in place before you begin if you want your incense to turn out to be a success.

One of the biggest problems most incense making beginners face is they put a ton of *energy, time* and *resources* into making a blend, but it just doesn't turn out the way they want it to.. They get frustrated, and sometimes feel like they want to give up.

Their incense falls apart, doesn't hold its shape, ends up not smelling as good as they'd hoped, ends up not burning properly, or worst case scenario, won't even stay lit for a few seconds!

These are super common problems and there's very little resources that offer any real guidance on the basic Building Blocks of Incense.

Until now..

In this guide I'll be sharing with you the **4 Elements of Incense** — the different kinds of materials required in order to create a *strong, combustable, and fully burning* incense— so you can create amazing and effective blends for health, ritual, or enjoyment.

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#1 - Base Materials

When making incense cones, sticks, or other types of shaped incense, the first component you need to know about are base materials. Bases are botanical powders that make up a majority of an incense blend—the foundation of a blend. These are most

often fragrant hardwoods or other types of wood, roots, or barks, that *play more than one role* in an incense blend.

#1- Base materials allow combustible incense like sticks and cones to burn all the way through. If you don't use any base material, your incense simply won't burn properly. If you do use them but don't have the *proper ratio* of base materials to other ingredients, your incense cones will likely burn a fraction of the way through before going out. If you have *just the right amount* of base material, your cone will burn all the way through and turn to ash. This ratio often changes from blend to blend, and can be fairly particular depending on various factors.

#2- Most base materials also give off a subtle, pleasant aroma that contributes to the overall fragrance of a blend. These types of materials usually give off a heavier, sweeter, 'base note' aroma when burned that is often a perfect medium for the other aromatics in a recipe to synthesize and mingle in.

Some of the most common base materials used in incense crafting are wood powders from aromatic trees like various species of Sandalwood, lighter varieties of Agarwood, and different evergreen tree species like Cedar and Juniper, or from tree barks like Makko powder.

Summary: Base materials help *formed incense* burn on their own. They also create a heavier, sweeter, underlying aroma that acts to enhance and tie together the overall aroma of an incense.

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#2 - Aromatics

The next components added to an incense formula are the countless botanical aromatic materials found around the world. The massive variety of aromatics we have access to today allows for the incense crafter to formulate literally *countless combinations* of scents, whether for enjoyment, ritual enhancement, or medicine.

There are many different types of aromatic plant materials used in incense: woods, barks, roots, seeds, leaves, needles, flowers, certain fruits, resins & gums.

Each type of material has its own properties. A few have particular uses. Some even have specific ways they're incorporated into an incense blend. Within all of these *groups* are various materials that act quite differently from one another.

There are certain materials that can *hinder* the burning process of cones and sticks when used in excess, and there are those that support it..

..For example, using too much of a certain variety of plant material such as Frankincense resin, will cause a cone or stick incense to not burn properly or thoroughly.

Resins, gums, fruits, waxy foliage, certain oil-dense woods, and other materials simply aren't combustable on their own, so they need to be balanced with a material that ***is*** combustable to make sure an incense blend burns just right.

Understanding how to create a *well-balanced* blend consisting of the proper amounts and ratios of different aromatic materials is a very important skill to have as an incense crafter.

Summary: Aromatic materials found in the plant kingdom are used in incense for their fragrance and medicine to create a fine-tuned aromatic profile, particular therapeutic quality, or certain ritualistic atmosphere.

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#3 - Binders

Binders are what *hold everything together* in an incense blend.

When it comes to creating formed incense like cones and sticks, natural binders are *absolutely crucial*. These botanical materials are the natural 'glue' of the incense crafter..

Different liquid or powdered gums and resins, viscous plant extracts, and certain bark materials are used as binders in nearly all varieties of incense—even in many loose incense formulas. Even materials like honey will do the trick in certain types of incense like nerikoh and loose incense, while adding a sweetness to the overall aroma of a blend.

Binders are what make form possible. They are what hold together the solid shape of an incense cone or stick over time.

Getting the proper ratios and amounts of binders down to a science is *critical* in incense crafting.

Too much binder can hinder or prevent burning altogether, while too little could leave you with a weak structure and a crumbly incense that doesn't hold up properly.

The trick is to find a *perfect balance* with the unique blend of materials you're using. With a little practice, this can easily become second nature to you.

Some of the most common binders used are tragacanth powder, honey, guar gum, xanthan gum, melted tree resins and plant gums, and makko powder.

Summary: Binders are *extremely* sticky plant extracts or other materials that are used to solidify the shape of incense. They are either activated using heat or water (depending which binder is used), and when dried or cooled, they act like glue.

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#4 - Water/Liquid

Water helps mix all ingredients together, among a few of its other *key purposes*.

Whether making sticks, cones, or loose incense, water is also necessary to activate most gum binders. The water helps *create the form* of the incense, while the activated binder helps *solidify the form* as it dries.

In addition to its physical attributes, to many incense crafters and medicine makers water is often thought of in a spiritual or philosophical sense. It's what helps bring the synergy and magic to life within a blend.

Traditionally, once water is added to the mix incense crafters around the world will then say their prayers, sing sacred songs, or recite mantras over their blend. Water acts as a vessel for the

good energy, intentions, and prayers they use to increase the effectiveness and potencies of their incense and medicines.

When added to the dry ingredients of blend, water also awakens the aromatic medicine of the plants on many levels.

In addition to or in substitution of water, many cultures also use perfumes, attars, hydrosols, and essential oils in their incenses. In some traditions, wood chips or powders are soaked in perfumes or flower waters for some time before they are blended with other ingredients.

Summary: Water and other liquids are used in incense crafting to mix all other ingredients together into a consistent incense dough. They also help create the form of different incenses, while activating the sticky properties of gum binders. The stage where water is added to an incense blend is when prayers and intentions are most often infused into an incense to enhance its spiritual or medicinal effects.

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You now know the 4 Basic Building Blocks of Incense:

Bases, Aromatics, Binders, and Liquid, or Water.

As you can see, it's crucial to understand the unique natures and qualities of each of these elements, and learn how to find that harmonious balance between them all in your crafting.

So far you've learned the importance of having a **base material** to make up the *foundation* of your incense formula, you've learned a bit about the different **aromatic materials** that make up the *heart and soul* of a blend, you understand that using a **natural binder** is necessary for your incense to *hold it's shape*, and you've learned how **water and other liquids** bring a blend together to harmonize and activate its ingredients.

You now have an *awareness* of these building blocks, but without further understanding how they best fit and work together harmoniously, creating a successful incense that burns properly and holds its form will continue to be *just beyond your grasp*..

That's why in the ***final lesson*** of this series, I'll be teaching you step-by-step exactly what you need to be burning and sharing great smelling, well-formed incense *made with your own hands*.

You'll learn every step of the incense crafting process—from raw ingredients to finished product—through an actual guided incense crafting session.

Plus, I'll be giving you my simple and easy recipe and sourcing list so you can make my blend at home!

Soon you'll put everything into action putting together an incense that not only smells amazing, sticks together and burns properly, but also brings a sense of fulfillment and confidence to your work.

You'll soon have what you need in place to craft incense to share with your friends and family for *ritual* or *meditation* or for *enjoyment* and *pleasure*.

If you're an aromatherapist, herbalist, or another type of healer, you'll soon be adding an *ancient aromatic healing modality* to your current practice, and reach a whole new level of holistic depth with your patients while helping them heal many kinds of physiological, psychological, emotional, and spiritual issues.

I know you're gonna love the final lesson of this series!

See you soon!



- Evan Sylliaasen
founder
The Northwest School
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