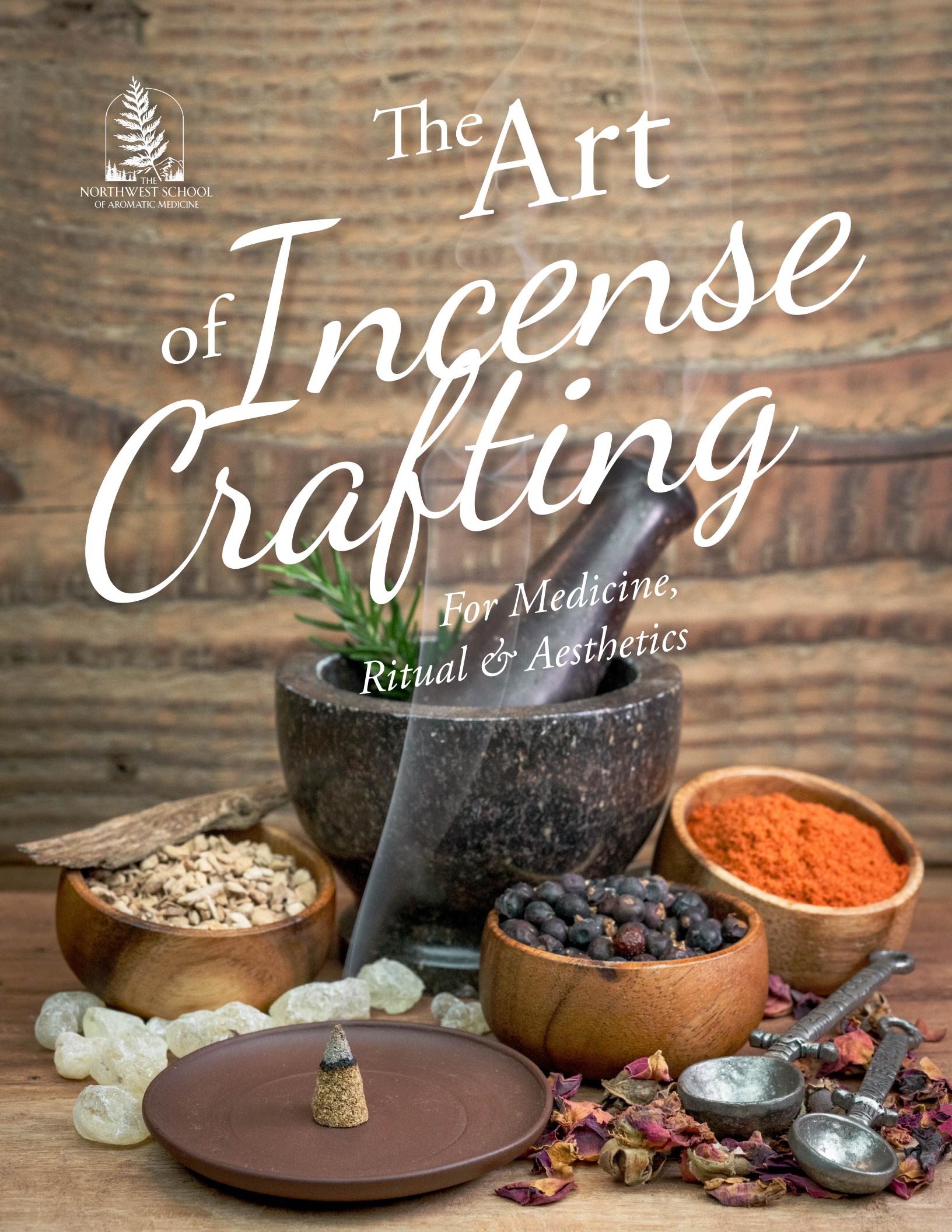




# The Art of Incense Crafting

For Medicine,  
Ritual & Aesthetics





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# The Art of Incense Crafting

*For Medicine,  
Ritual & Aesthetics*

Written by Evan Sylliaasen, Founder of the  
Northwest School of Aromatic Medicine



# INTRODUCTION



The act of burning aromatic plants for medicine, ritual, and enjoyment is a time-honored practice that originated in antiquity, and over time has touched every part of the world. With its most primitive origins dating back tens of thousands of years, this special, fragrant combination of the elements earth, fire, and air has evolved into the many incredibly diverse and sophisticated aromatic traditions that make up what we've come to know today as: the art of incense.

Incense is one of the most universal modalities that uses herbal and aromatic plants, gums and resins. Throughout many cultures it is highly revered, thoroughly enjoyed, deeply intertwined with spiritual belief systems, and rooted in ancient healing practices that in many cases, are still more effective and safer than modern medicine.

Many people are discovering that incense crafting can be a powerful tool for the at-home or professional herbalist or aromatherapist, incense lover, or spiritual practitioner. The path of incense is not exclusive, it is intrinsic, as anyone can learn to harness its power with just a bit of understanding. It can become one of your most powerful tools in your herbal, aromatic, or spiritual practice.



# 3 VIRTUES OF INCENSE

## *History*

On every continent you'll find various forms, styles, and traditions of making and using incense. Its use ranges from healing the mind, body, emotions, and the soul, to pleasing the sense of smell and enhancing spiritual rituals and ceremonies of all faiths. Let's take a look at the three core uses of incense to uncover its true versatility and value and discover new ways to benefit from this ancient art.





# INCENSE AS MEDICINE



You may or may not already have a fond relationship with incense, but have you ever thought of it being a part of your home apothecary? From calming a stressed mind, disinfecting the air, and promoting respiratory health, to deepening a meditation practice and creating emotional peace, incense is an incredibly valuable method of administering medicinal plants.

Nearly all aromatic plants used in incense carry medicinal qualities. Aromatic plants contain essential oils and other organic compounds that are beneficial to our health. Some plants are helpful as preventative medicine to keep us healthy, others carry more potent healing qualities. Whether incense is burned for therapeutic purposes or for simple enjoyment, whoever experiences its smoke will also benefit from its health promoting qualities, whether they are aware of it or not.

Many Native American and Indigenous peoples, and in folk medicine traditions around the world, incense plants have long been burned in a simple way on hot charcoals from fires or on hot stones to heal a patient. There are also branches within certain Oriental systems of medicine such as the Indian practice of Ayurveda, Tibetan medicine, and Traditional Chinese medicine, to name a few, who prescribe incense for countless ailments of the psyche, emotions, respiratory system, and other physiological imbalances.

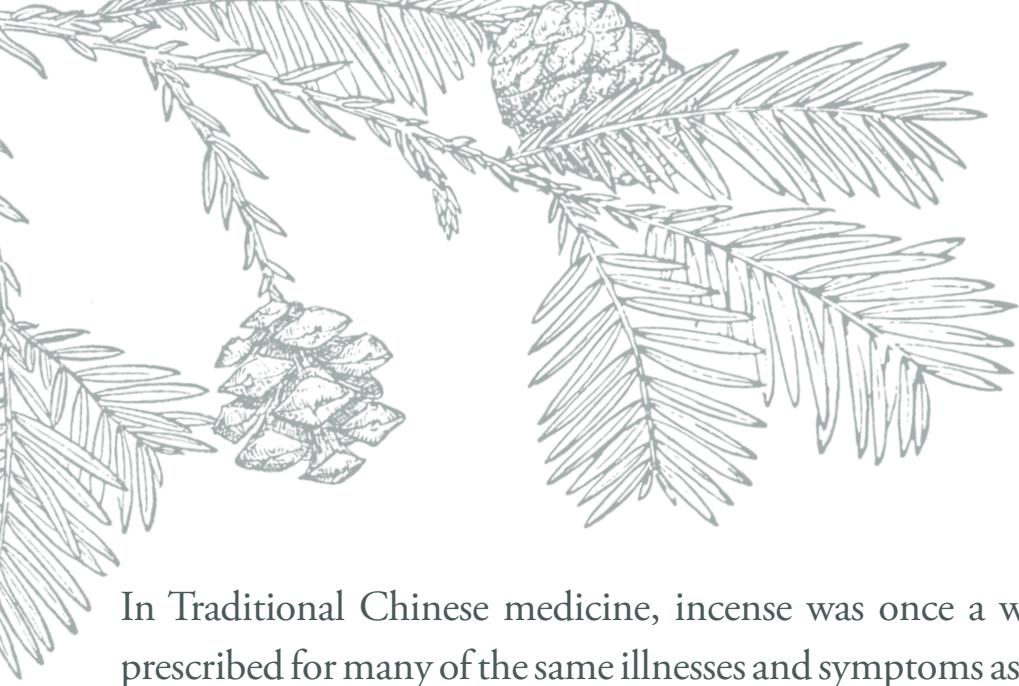
Oftentimes, in these more complex healing traditions, incense is used as a complimentary medicine to other herbal applications to ensure patients are receiving a more well-rounded, holistic treatment. This wider-spectrum treatment plan would cater to internal healing through ingesting herbs or using them topically, and through inhalation of plant smoke medicine. Incense is also used as a stand-alone treatment, depending on a patient's health concerns.

In the 5,000 year old healing system of Ayurveda, there are many traditional treatments that call for aromatic plants, from topical application, to herbal steam inhalation, to aromatherapy and essential oils, to hot herbal baths, and of course, the application of incense.

Ayurvedic physicians have used incense to treat everything from more serious conditions; from epilepsy, to schizophrenia, to depression and anxiety; to the more physical ailments of the lungs and respiratory system such as catarrh, bronchitis, coughs, colds, flu, viral infections and both internal and external bacterial and fungal infections.

Ayurveda also uses incense for less serious imbalances like strengthening mental cognition, focus, and memory, balancing and releasing emotions, relieving stress and depression, and strengthening the immune and nervous systems.

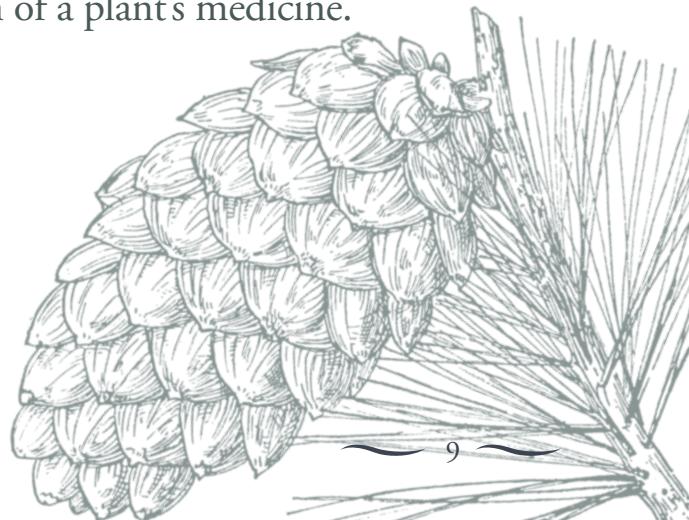




In Traditional Chinese medicine, incense was once a widespread healing application, prescribed for many of the same illnesses and symptoms as in Ayurveda and other systems. There are still many Chinese doctors who prescribe incense to their patients. Throughout ancient China, incense was used as preventative medicine to protect citizens from viruses and plagues that affected communities due to the antimicrobial and virucidal properties of the plants that were burned, which helped kill airborne pathogens.

Chinese doctors would also use incense for general health upkeep and longevity, often prescribing it at lower doses for longer periods of time. It was also used to keep the mind sharp in aging patients, for nearly every nervous system imbalance, for all types of respiratory complaints, to aid digestion, and for healing on the emotional and psycho-spiritual levels as well, helping people cope with the stresses and challenges of life.

Incense is a powerful healing tool that can easily be added to anyone's at-home herbal toolkit. It is considered one of the safest of all herbal medicines, as the level of plant constituents inhaled is much lower compared with ingesting herbs or using potent essential oils. Though, don't be mistaken, this herbal application can be very effective as it contains a wider spectrum of chemical compounds compared to extracts like tinctures or essential oils, which often only contain a fraction of a plant's medicine.





# INCENSE IN RITUAL

**F**or just as long, though likely longer than its use as medicine, incense has been at the heart of nearly every sacred ritual and ceremony of nearly every culture on Earth since early history. Even all major religions and spiritual practices still use incense in their rites and rituals.

Incense is the most universally widespread tool for all things spiritual. It is used to enhance prayer and meditation, evoke deeper spiritual introspection, as a sacred offering, for spiritual and energetic cleansing and consecration, for blessing, to accompany body/mind/spirit practices such as yoga and qi gong, for spiritual protection and so much more.

Thousands of years before its countless Biblical associations with the divine, incense use is seen across the histories of ancient civilizations such as the Maya, Aztec, and Egyptians, where daily rituals and offerings called for generous plumes of smoke from sacred blends of herbs and resins, used to appease gods, goddesses, and deities.

There are many reasons that incense is held in such high spiritual regard. To many cultures, the sense of smell is considered our sacred, or exalted sense, above all others. Therefore, aroma is the key that unlocks that sacredness. Many ancient cultures believe incense and plant smoke to also be the key to God's, or the Creator's, heart.

At the same time, aroma is the only one of our senses to have direct influence over the limbic system within our brains, which is said to govern our intuition, dreams, visionary experiences, higher thoughts, and feelings of sacred connection.

The many effects that certain ritual blends of incense herbs and resins can have on the way we feel and think, in combination with the personal ritual aspects of burning incense itself, whether accompanied by prayer, intention, mantras, sacred songs, or meditation, make it the most renowned tool for greatly enhancing any spiritual practice. Learning to craft incense infused with your own personal prayers and intentions towards your spiritual and ritual life can add a profound new layer to your practice.





# INCENSE FOR ENJOYMENT

We can't have a conversation about incense without addressing one of its most obvious and favorable traits. It simply smells amazing! The art of incense crafting has been an ever-evolving art of olfactory creativity for thousands of years.

Around the world, nearly every culture has perfected their own traditions and styles of incense: from the floral and exotic incenses of India, to the refined and delicate Japanese incenses and their renowned incense appreciation ceremony, the Koh-do, to the resinous bakhoor incenses of the Middle East, and beyond.

The ancient practice of crafting incense for the senses and aesthetics is what latter gave rise to the art of natural perfumery and the use of essential oils, and all other aromatic arts. Today, artisan incense crafters still pride themselves in making the most beautiful and perfected incense blends simply for the joy of creating a powerful and transformative aromatic experience for people.

Our Earth is adorned with gorgeous, alluring fragrances of all kinds, with the ability to instantly put a smile on our faces, elevate our moods, and uplift our hearts. Like choosing colors for a painting, the artists of incense crafting carefully balance the many aromatic plants at their fingertips in pursuit of creating a sensual masterpiece that offers people a chance to step out of time and experience a rush of positivity and pleasure.



Incense can be used in many ways aesthetically. It can be burned to welcome guests into your home, as it has for ages, or to accompany a bath or the reading of a good book, to uplift and freshen the atmosphere in your home, or to create a special ambiance.

As you can see, incense serves many purposes, and the choice is yours how you use it. You can stick to making medicinal incense, strictly make blends for spiritual use, or for simple enjoyment alone. At the same time, each of these three virtues often naturally weave together. So whatever your intention is, the plants in your incense will bring good health, enjoyment, and a sense of something deeper to those who burn it.



# THE **4** BUILDING BLOCKS OF INCENSE CRAFTING



Incense crafting can be a simple practice, or it can be a complex one. But either way you need to know the basics. There are a few core teachings that lie at the foundation of every formed incense blend. Let's get to know the 4 Building Blocks of Incense.



# BASE MATERIALS

*W*hen making formed incense like cones, sticks and coils, the first component you need to know about are base materials. These are the foundation of a blend, and make up the majority of a recipe. Base materials are most often fragrant hardwoods or other types of wood, roots, or barks, used in powder form. And they play more than one role in a recipe.

A base material, or a combination of them, is what allows combustable incense like sticks and cones to burn all the way through on their own. You ignite them once, and the base materials carry the ember from end to end.

If you don't use any base material, your incense simply wont burn properly, if at all. If you do use them but you don't have the proper ratio of base materials to other ingredients, your incense will likely only burn a fraction of the way through before going out. Whereas if you have just the right amount of base material, your incense will burn completely. This is often a fairly particular and unique ratio depending on many factors and will be different for each type of incense as well.

Most base materials also give off a subtle but pleasantly sweet, rich, woodsy aroma that contributes to a blend and creates a medium for the other more potent aromatics to synthesize and mingle in.

Some of the best base materials are Australian Sandalwood, Indian Sandalwood (Australian grown), Red Sandalwood, Makko, Joss, Cedar wood, and other evergreen wood powders. For some added combustibility, powdered charcoal from hardwoods is sometimes used if a blend isn't burning properly.

**Summary:** Base materials are necessary to keep formed, combustable incense like cones and sticks lit on their own and help them burn completely.



# AROMATICS:

There are thousands of aromatic plants around the world that are used in incense crafting, literally giving us unlimited possibilities for our blending pleasure. Aromatics are the stars of the show. Each with its own unique scent profile, healing benefits, and story.

All types of botanicals are used in incense: woods, barks, roots, leaves, needles, grasses, petals, flowers, fruits, seeds, resins and gums. Even certain pleasantly fragrant animal products like honey, propolis, and abergris are used. But within all of these groups are various materials that act quite differently from one another in an incense formula.

Some aromatic botanicals can hinder the burning process while others support it. Too much of certain kinds of plant materials, like resins, gums, or waxy foliage, will cause a cone or stick incense to not burn properly. These botanicals simply aren't combustable on their own so they must be balanced with a material that is combustable to ensure an incense blend has the right amount of combustibility.

Understanding how to create your own well-balanced recipe consisting of the proper amounts and ratios of different aromatic materials is a crucial skill to have as an incense



crafter, and one that anyone can learn with time and practice. In this guide you'll get an easy to make starter recipe. (just 1?)

In the modern world of aromatics, synthetic fragrances and chemical additives created to mimic natural plant aromas are often used. In the artisan incense world, however, these materials are avoided at all costs, as over the long term, they can potentially cause negative health issues and are damaging to the environment.

### **A Note on Sustainability:**

Sustainability is always something to keep in mind when sourcing your incense ingredients. Many aromatic plants today are struggling in the wild due to over harvesting and environmental changes. Threatened and endangered plants are harvested daily (often illegally) in massive amounts to be distilled into essential oil or kept whole and sold around the world, with most consumers kept unaware of these harmful practices.

As an incense crafter, it is a responsibility to research your sources and ensure plants you buy are wild-harvested sustainably, grown on a plantation (preferably organically grown), or grown or harvested from the wild yourself. And that you never buy threatened or endangered species that were harvested from the wild. Many plantations grow endangered plants to help keep the strain off of wild populations, while planting more plants and spreading awareness. These types of operations are important to support as an alternative to wild-harvested plants.





# BINDERS:

To achieve solidity in shaped incense like cones and sticks, and a certain type of consistency in some types of loose incense, botanical ingredients referred to as binders are necessary. These resin and gum derived ingredients act as a natural glue in incense crafting, helping to solidify form and keep formed incense from breaking. Sticky materials like honey can also work as binders in certain styles of incense like loose blends, pastilles, and nerikoh, while adding a sweetness to the overall aroma.

Getting the proper ratios and amounts of binders in your recipes down to a science is important. 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 well. The trick is to find a balance with the unique blend of materials you're using.

Some of the most common binders used in incense crafting are Gum Tragacanth, Guar Gum, Xanthan Gum, Makko, Gum Arabic, honey, and other melted resins and gums.



# LIQUID:



Water, and other liquids like fruit juices and herbal extracts are used to mix ingredients together and create form. Whether making sticks, cones, or loose incense, water is also necessary to activate most gum binders. Water helps create form, while the activated binder helps solidify the form and make it last.

Water is also what helps bring the synergy and magic to life within an incense blend. To many incense crafters, water is often thought of in a spiritual or philosophical sense as well. Traditionally, when it is added to the mix, this is often the stage where prayers, sacred songs, or mantras are spoken over a blend, with water acting as a vessel for good energy and intentions. Many cultures believe this increases the effectiveness and potencies of their incense and medicines.

Traditionally, many cultures also use perfumes, attars, or hydrosols in their incenses. In some cultures, wood chips or powders are soaked in perfumes or flower waters before adding them to an incense blend. This can create some amazing aromas. A more modern approach is the addition of essential oils for added aroma or medicinal properties.

It is important that all of your incense ingredients are completely dry before you incorporate them into an incense blend. This will ensure your end product won't mold overtime.



# MAKING YOUR FIRST INCENSE CONES

Now that you understand some of the basics, let's walk through all of the steps of making a batch of incense cones from start, to finished product. We'll be using a Sandalwood Spice recipe, which its ingredients can be found fairly easily, or even substituted for other aromatics of your choice.



# SANDALWOOD SPICE INCENSE CONES

## INGREDIENTS:

*5 teaspoons Sandalwood powder  
1/2 teaspoon Cinnamon powder  
1/2 teaspoon Clove powder  
1/16 teaspoon Gum Tragacanth powder (can sub. Guar Gum or Xanthan Gum)  
2 tablespoons and 1 teaspoon Water*

## TOOLS:

*Coffee grinder/mortar and pestle (optional)  
Mixing bowl  
Cutting board/plate*



## INGREDIENTS & CONSISTENCY

Once you have all of your botanical ingredients gathered and ready for your crafting session, the next thing you need to focus on is powdering your ingredients as finely as possible. For incense cones and sticks, finely powdered ingredients are necessary for incense to burn evenly and completely. It is possible to buy pre-powdered ingredients in many cases. If your ingredients are not pre-powdered, you can use a stone mortar and pestle, or a basic electric coffee grinder to get them down to the desired consistency. Flour consistency is what you should aim for.



## MIXING

Next, measure out each of your powdered (dry) ingredients into a mixing bowl—the Sandalwood, Clove, Cinnamon, and Gum Tragacanth—and mix thoroughly. Then, add half of your water and mix thoroughly, then the remaining water, and mix again. Once your ingredients are sticking together, form them into a ball of incense dough and use your fingers to knead the dough for 1-2 minutes, or until the mixture stops sticking to your fingers.



## FORMING

The next thing you will do is form your incense dough into small cone shapes. Pinch off a small chunk of incense dough, the size of a large blueberry, and start forming it into a cone shape with a flat bottom and a point on its opposite end.

You can roll the cone at an angle on a hard surface to create a smooth exterior, and press the bottom of the cone on your surface to create a flat base that will allow the cone to stand upright. Once formed, place your cones on a plate, cutting board, or metal baking sheet to dry. Avoid cardboard or butcher paper as dried cones will stick to these materials.

The best size for incense cones for beginners is to make the flat base the same diameter of a pen or pencil, and about 1 inch tall. Smaller sized incense cones like this tend to burn better than larger sizes.



## DRYING

Open air drying at room temperature for a few days is the most traditional method for drying incense cones. A dehydrator or oven on the lowest setting can allow for a much faster dry time, though you will risk cracks forming on the surface of your cones if your temperature is too high or they dry out too fast, which can be avoided if you are careful. All of these methods are commonly used.

Room temperature and humidity vary in different parts of the world. If you live in a cold, damp climate, it is best to let your cones dry near a heat source, or allow a fan to blow towards them from a distance for proper air flow.

Dry times can vary depending on these factors as well as which ingredients are used in a blend. Generally speaking, most incense cones will dry out completely between 24 and 48 hours in open air. In a dehydrator or oven on the lowest setting, cones can completely dry between 6 and 18 hours. After your cones are halfway dried, tip them over or roll them 180° to ensure an even dry.

To check if your cones are completely dry, crack one in half and look for a dark spot in its center. If the center of your cone is darker in color than the edges, there is still moisture at its core. Allow for more time to dry completely.

## CURING & STORING

Once completely dry, your incense cones are ready to burn. Many incense blends get better with age. Some are cured to bring out stronger and more well-rounded aromas. To do this, simply store your cones in an airtight container—preferably glass, for many months. Incense can retain its aroma for years.





## NEXT STEPS:

As we've discussed, the possibilities are endless for the types of incenses you can make and the intentions that you can have for them. With literally thousands of local and exotic botanicals to choose from, you can create endless aromatic combinations to please the senses, countless therapeutic and medicinal blends for health and wellness, and incense options to accompany any personal ritual or spiritual practice.

Keep this art to yourself, share your skill with friends and family, use it to help yourself or others on their healing journey, give as simple gifts of pleasure, or even sell with a new or existing business. There are so many opportunities for beauty, growth, and pleasure in the world of incense. And I'm honored you've joined me for your first steps on this path.

This art is a lifelong journey, full of wonder. Within these pages are just a tiny glimpse of what lies before you if you decide to walk the path of the artisan incense crafter.

If something inside of you has awakened while reading these pages, if you're ready to learn how to make your own incense for enjoyment, ritual, or healing, if you're feeling called to work with aromatic plants in the most traditional of ways...

...I want to extend an invitation for you to join me for The Traditional Incense Crafting Course.

This online program is the most extensive, comprehensive, and beautifully recorded video exploration of the vast art



of incense. You'll walk away knowing the ins and outs of incense crafting, with the ability to make all types of loose incense, incense cones, and incense sticks.

If you're interested in this special opportunity, visit the url below and join thousands of other beginners and advanced incense crafters, at-home and professional healers, herbalists, aromatherapists, and plant lovers of all kinds:

## *Become an Artisan Incense Crafter:*

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*Evan  
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*Founder*



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& Higher Mind Incense