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### BOOK REVIEW

by CJ Puotinen

*Essential Oils and Aromatics: A Step-by-Step guide for Use in Massage and Aromatherapy* by Marge Clark.  
Sandy, UT: Silverleaf Press, 2008. Hardcover, 95 pages, \$16.95.

The reason our favorite herbs emit their unique fragrances is because their leaves and blossoms contain essential oils. These volatile compounds concentrate not only odors but healing properties. Whatever your favorite herb, it's likely to produce an essential oil through steam distillation, pressing, solvent extraction, or carbon dioxide extraction. Once you find where to buy it, you can put it to work via topical application, inhalation, or diffusion.

For years, Nature's Gift founder Marge Clark has educated and entertained web browsers and customers at [naturesgift.com](http://naturesgift.com). Her practical knowledge, skill, concern about quality, and common sense make her descriptions, observations, and recommendations a self-contained aromatherapy crash course. Now she has condensed a wealth of information into an attractive hard-cover book illustrated with gorgeous color photos.

How can you judge the quality of an essential oil? This topic generates more confusion in aromatherapy circles than any other. Most essential oils are produced for the pharmaceutical and perfume industries from commercially grown plants that are distilled in large batches as quickly as possible under pressure and high heat, then standardized by removing certain chemicals or blending the output with oils from other batches. In contrast, therapeutic-quality essential oils are distilled in small batches at low pressure and temperature from organically grown or wildcrafted plants, and they are bottled unadulterated, rather like vintage wines, with characteristics that change from one growing season or region to another.

Only a tiny percentage of the world's production of essential oils is of therapeutic quality, and some companies claim to own them all. In truth, therapeutic-quality essential oils are produced around the world and are sold by many distributors – you just have to know what to look for and where to find them. As Clark explains, essential oils should be stored in colored glass bottles to protect against degradation caused by exposure to light and labeled with the plant's common name, utilized plant part, botanical species, country of origin, method of cultivation, and method of production. "This is the absolute minimum that should be on the label," she writes. Reputable suppliers know the provenance of their oils and are usually happy to share additional details.

Clark recommends diluting all essential oils in carrier oils (vegetable oils), which she selects as carefully as she does essential oils. Several pages of descriptions conclude with a convenient measurement chart showing how much essential oil to add to a fluid ounce (2 tablespoons) of carrier oil for blends of various strength.

After reviewing the many ways in which essential oils can be utilized, Clark lists several safety concerns and then delves into the art of aromatherapy, a lengthy section of recommended uses with specific instructions. Whether you want to use aromatherapy for the bath, skin care, the relief of aches and pains, or to repel insects, kill germs, heal wounds, blend a massage oil, blend a signature scent, or just make the room smell wonderful, she provides formulas and instructions. The book ends with descriptions of over 50 widely used essential oils, including warnings in red as appropriate.

Anyone who teaches aromatherapy workshops will find this an excellent guide for students, and it belongs on the bookshelf of any herbalist who enjoys experimenting with aromatherapy or who would like to learn about essential oils and their application.