



Aromatherapy in ancient Egypt has linked to today's booming alternative medicine practices

Laura DePrado, Final Touch Plantscaping, LLC Published 11:00 a.m. ET June 19, 2018



World renowned Therapist Mahmoud Saied of Essence of Life Al Fayed showing Horticultural Therapist Laura DePrado, President of Final Touch Plantscaping, LLC, some of many essential oils used for Aromatherapy. The great Manufacturer of perfumes, Oil of Flowers and Blends, exports 80 percent of its pure oil worldwide. (Photo: ~Courtesy of Laura DePrado)

In 2016, the global aromatherapy market size was valued at \$1.07 billion, according to an industry analysis report for 2014 to 2025 published by Grand View Research. And this lucrative growth shows no sign of stopping.

Rising awareness about the therapeutic uses of essential oils has led to the growth of using aromatherapy products as alternative medicines to treat many disorders, including pain management, skin-related problems, cardiovascular disorders, digestion problems, cold and cough, respiratory disorders, immune system functioning, anxiety, insomnia and wound healing.

Essential oils are extracted from plants and are processed naturally to form organic aromatherapy products. These products are nontoxic, and safe for inhalation. Aromatherapy is used as an alternative to pharmaceutical drugs due to these benefits, the report states.

READ: [Where a flower blooms, hope lives for senior](#)

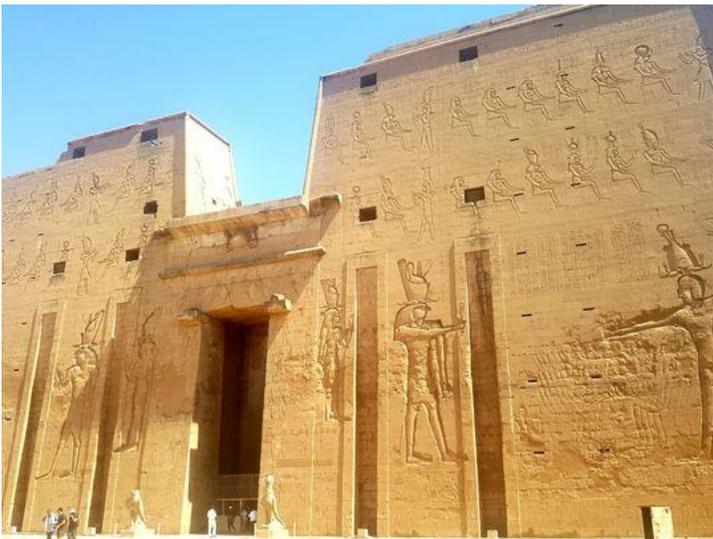
READ: [Catching colors, beauty, fragrance of spring](#)

And aromatherapy is not new, as I discovered for myself during a recent visit to Egypt.

Its origin can be traced to about 265 B.C. to ancient Egypt in the Temple of Edfu where incense and unguents (soothing or healing ointments), were blended according to recipes inscribed on the walls of the laboratory. On the west side of the main temple is an entry in a small hall, which is a laboratory in where aromatic creams and potions were brewed. More than 100 recipes are preserved to this day.

Edfu Temple is located on the west bank of the Nile, between ECHA and Aswan. This is the best preserved ancient temple in Egypt and is the second largest after that of Karnak.

In order to talk about aromatherapy, first we must talk about herbs. The Egyptians in the days of the pharaohs had developed great skill for using herbs. The earliest medical texts some 4000 years old rely mainly on the rich choice of plants produced by the land for medicinal application perfumes, cosmetics, household items, food, ornaments, and for funerals.



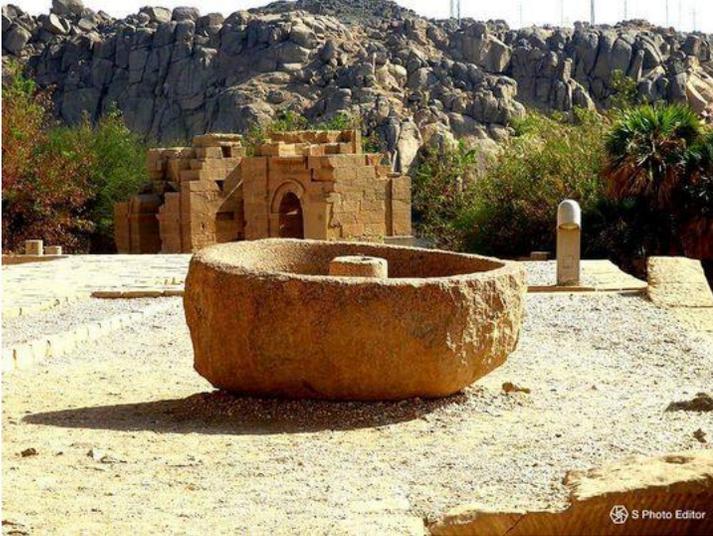
The origin of Aromatherapy can be traced to about 265 BC to ancient Egypt in the Temple of Edfu where incense and unguents (soothing or healing ointments), were blended according to recipes inscribed on the walls of the Laboratory. (Photo: ~Courtesy of Laura DePrado)

Flowers, seeds and fruits, leaves, roots, bark and chips of wood have been found in all of these items. All plant parts or vegetation are often loosely referred to as herbs. The ingredients of pharaonic medical prescriptions were derived mainly from plants, trees and their fruit. A surprisingly large amount of those used have medicinal properties recognized in modern herbal medicine.

In ancient Egypt, aromatherapy was first used in a form known as Kyphi (in Egyptian), which means a substance to be burnt, (as does the word perfume), or incense in the religious temples and added to beverages for medicinal purposes. In the first century of the Christian Era, Plutarch, biographer and author, came across a medical treatise written three centuries earlier about the preparation of Kyphi materials and writes about the spiritual effects of Kyphi: "It emits a sweet effect and beneficent exhalation by which all is changed, while the body being moved by the

whiff softly and gently acquires a tempura that seductively brings on sleep, so that without intoxication it releases and loosens the chain-like sorrows and tensions of daily cares.”

This is first example of the recognition of the effects of aromatherapy. The ingredients quoted by Plutarch are raisins, honey and wine, myrrh, resin, cyperus grass, rush, large and small juniper berries, sweet flag and cardomom.



Philae Temple was completed around 690 AD and is considered by many to be the last of the ancient temples constructed in the “classic” Egyptian style. It is one of the many temples throughout Egypt that were built in honor the goddess Isis, and it serves as a remarkable example of the cult that was built around her story, and one which includes Osiris and Horus. (Photo: ~Courtesy of Laura DePrado)

Aelius Galen, the Greek physician working around A.D. 200, took a great interest in Kyphi for medicinal reasons, including a prescription in his essay “On Anecdotes” as a remedy to treat serpent bites. Rufus also prescribed Kyphi for lung and liver complaints. Pedanius Dioscorides, a Greek physician, pharmacologist, and botanist, refers to the use of Kyphi in temples, and also as an anecdote and remedy for asthma. He compiled *De Materia Medica*, a five-volume Greek encyclopedia about herbal medicine and related medicinal substances that was widely read for more than 1,500 years.

Considering Egyptians’ highly developed pharmacopoeia, they must have had “physics gardens” and most likely in connection with a temple as the priests were the ones who had knowledge of the medicinal properties of plants, according to author Dr. Lise Manniche. This Egyptologist has reconstructed an herbal of 95 species of plants and trees used before, during and after the pharaonic period in Egypt.

As a columnist and horticultural therapist, the opportunity to travel to Egypt to visit the Edfu Temple and the Karnak Temple provided perspective and education on how plants and recipes derived from them helped give birth to the science of aromatherapy. In my opinion, the existence of therapy gardens, healing gardens, medicinal gardens, and the application of horticulture as therapy today provides merit and historical support for alternative medicine.