



2021 | Volume 15 | Issue 1&2

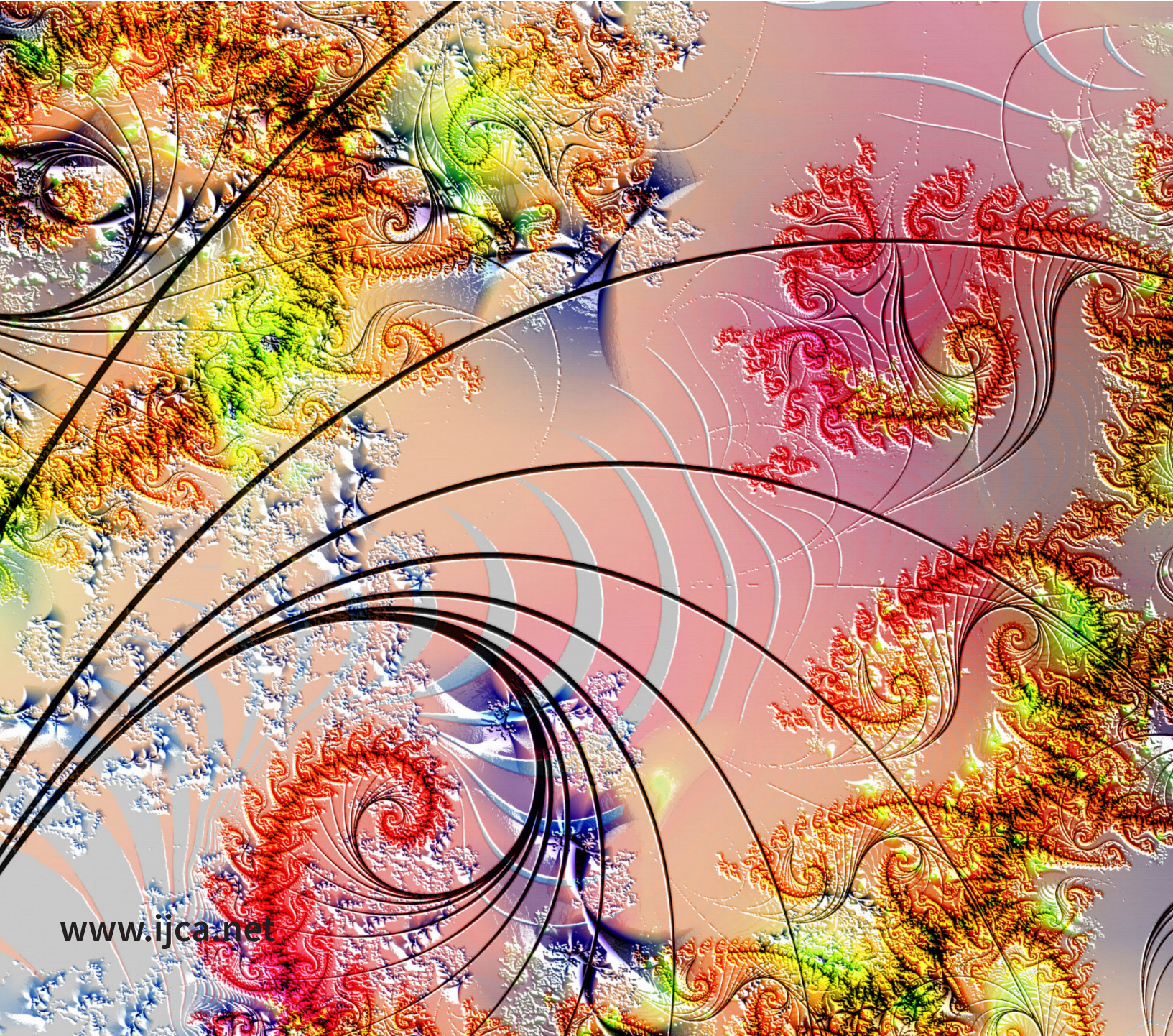
*Resiliency: Coping in Crisis*

ISSN 1961-7623

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF **Clinical Aromatherapy**

Editor: Rhiannon Lewis

A unique resource for enhancing clinical practice  
Written by practitioners for practitioners



[www.ijca.net](http://www.ijca.net)

## EDITORIAL

2020. A year to remember. A year that will be forever marked with memories of continuously walking a tightrope of adaptability, adjustment, flexibility and resourcefulness against the uncertain and fearful backdrop of the pandemic.

A year that has forced us all to draw deep on our resiliency reserves, to think outside of the box - all the while retaining our drive and passion to serve, to educate, to contribute and to continue to make an aromatic difference in people's lives.

A year that, along with disappointment, despair, loss, grief, isolation and insecurity has also brought deeper awareness of what is important, gestures of kindness, gratitude and appreciation of our own strengths as well as unexpected opportunities for personal and professional growth.

A year to dedicate the theme of Resiliency: Coping in Crisis for the International Journal of Clinical Aromatherapy.

This special edition of the IJCA - now incorporated into the International Clinical Aromatherapy Network - is dedicated to resiliency in its many facets.

Together we explore and celebrate how practitioners, educators and healthcare teams around the world have been navigating the pandemic period, coping in crisis and who are continuing to make that aromatic difference – drop by drop.

It also explores the wider concepts of resilience and how aromatherapy as a holistic modality is exceptionally placed in its contribution to help strengthen a person's general resiliency reserves.

With warm and healthy regards and my deepest thanks for supporting the IJCA.

Rhiannon Lewis

### Editorial Advisory Board

Pat Antoniak (Canada)  
Pam Conrad (USA)  
Ann Harman (USA)  
Wendy Maddocks (New Zealand)  
Stribor Markovic (Croatia)  
Naho Maruyama (Japan)  
Mark Moss (UK)

Sandi Nye (South Africa)  
Laraine Pounds (USA)  
Juergen Reichling (Germany)  
Carol Rose (New Zealand)  
Marianne Tavares (Canada)  
Marco Valussi (Italy)  
Sandy Van Vuuren (South Africa)

#### Rédaction/Publication:

Essential Oil Resource Consultants EURL  
Chemin des Achaps  
83840 La Martre  
FRANCE  
Tel/fax: (+33) 483 11 87 03

Rédactrice/Editor: Rhiannon Lewis

Email: editor@ijca.net

Depot legal: à parution

ISSN: 1961-7623

Cover image: Copyright 2021 Pascal Duvet

#### Disclaimer

The Publisher cannot accept responsibility for any injury or mishap to persons or property from the use of any methods, products, instructions or ideas referred to within this publication. The views expressed in the IJCA are not necessarily those of the Publisher or members of the Editorial Board.

#### Advertising

Advertising enquiries should be addressed to the Editor. Although all advertising material is expected to conform to ethical standards, and inclusion in this publication does not constitute guarantee or endorsement of the quality or value of such product or of the claims made of it by the manufacturer. The Publisher reserves the right to refuse any advertising that is considered inappropriate.

**Essential Oil Resource Consultants** No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without prior written permission of the Publisher.



an  
**essential oil resource consultants**  
publication

# The power of aromatherapy massage to nurture resilience: a personal perspective

Annie Prince

Clinical Aromatherapist and educator, Auckland, New Zealand  
annieprince@xtra.co.nz

**This paper considers the question of stress in modern life, the need for resilience and what that means and how aromatherapy massage using essential oils is, in my opinion, uniquely placed to help bolster said resilience. Based on my own clinical practice, this paper explores the different facets of an aromatherapy treatment, the preparation, the conversation, the oils, the touch and, in particular, the vital importance of focused intent and human connection between therapist and client.**

## Introduction

The American Psychology Association (2012) defined resilience thus:

*“the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors.”*

In light of this, and our fast paced world, I encounter very few clients who are not in need of resilience to a greater or lesser degree. Stress is a mind/body phenomenon, intrinsically linked to the emotions, affecting the whole person (Van der Kolk, 2015).

In her ground breaking book, *The Molecules of Emotion* (1997), Candace Pert describes how emotions exist in the body as information chemicals running every system and how

*“...repressed traumas caused by overwhelming emotion can be stored in a body part.”* (p.141)

Considering this premise, the ability of aromatic molecules to affect the limbic system, impacting memories and emotions coupled with the power of touch to release physical and emotional tension, I believe aromatherapy, in particular aromatherapy massage, has a unique role to play in nurturing resilience.

## Stress in our current times

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020), more than 264 million people suffer from depression worldwide. In my own country, the 2017/2018 New Zealand Public Health Survey (Published by Community and Public Health New Zealand) revealed that one in six adult New Zealanders would be diagnosed with a mental disorder at some time in their lives. This includes depression, bipolar and anxiety disorders. Shockingly, we have one of the highest youth (15 to 24 years) suicide rates in the developed world (Ministry of Social Development: The Social Report, 2016).

Why is this? Why are stress and anxiety so rampant in our modern world? Apart from the obvious major traumas such as abuse, divorce, serious illness, bereavement, poverty, deployment in theatres of war, to name a few, I see how the subtle stresses that build up insidiously over time contribute to breaking point. The sheer pace of life in the 21st century, the constant pressure to succeed, to pay bills, to put food on the table; demanding jobs leaving no time to unwind, relax, nurture relationships, indulge in self care; the lack of social connection, nature deficit syndrome, sedentary lifestyles coupled with poor nutrition; worry about climate change, pandemics, our very future here on earth, all, I believe, chip away at our fortitude and slowly undermine our resilience.

The WHO's GAP action mental health programme

has developed brief intervention manuals for mild to moderate depression that may be delivered by lay workers for example, the use of behaviour activation, relaxation training, problem solving and strong social support.

Interestingly, these are all elements of an aromatherapy treatment during which the in-depth consultation raises issues to be resolved, a supportive bond develops between therapist and client and deep relaxation takes place.

## Resilience

Resilience is having the ability to cope with stress, to bounce back after hardship, to adapt mentally and emotionally, returning to a state of homeostasis where the parasympathetic nervous system rules, rather than the sympathetic.

This involves addressing the five pillars of holistic wellbeing: Mental; Emotional; Physical; Spiritual and Social.

## How can an Aromatherapy massage nurture resilience?

The following four aspects of an aromatherapy treatment are inextricably linked in my view:

1. The Preparation
2. The Conversation
3. The Oils
4. The Massage

### 1. The Preparation

Underpinning all four aspects is the power of intent to nurture the client, to restore a degree of homeostasis. For me, the nurturing begins an hour or two before the appointment, heading out to the herb garden to commune with the plants, to select fresh herbs for a tea blend appropriate for the client's needs. A tray is prepared with a linen cloth and sprig of flowers. It is the little things that count. Attention to detail shows that I care. Next, the sacred spaces are made warm and welcoming with fresh flowers, beautiful linen, candle light. Carrier oils are prepared, hot water bottles filled



FIGURE 1. In the herb garden

and wrapped in warm towels.

Lastly, but most importantly, I prepare myself. I 'tune in' to ask for guidance in order to listen well, ask the right questions, give the right answers, choose the right oils and give a wonderful treatment. I bless the fellow human being coming to try and make sense of life.

*“Even the most biological and purest essential oils can never replace the warmth of light from the small flame that shines in the depths of the heart.” (Pénoël & Pénoël, 1998; p.229)*

### 2. The Conversation

Trauma expert, Van der Kolk, in his book *The Body Keeps the Score* (2015), states that to resolve traumatic stress, we must restore the proper balance between the rational and emotional brains. He puts self-awareness at the core of recovery and talks about conducting “limbic system therapy” to restore the



**Figure 2. A forest garden view from the treatment space**

emotional brain to a quiet state in which it can *“take care of the housekeeping of the body”* (p.207), ensuring eating, sleeping, connection with intimate partners, protection of children and defence against danger.

The conversation is a vital part of the treatment. It is the means by which I obtain a snapshot of the client mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually. A welcoming cup of herbal tea, warm rug for the knees, assurance of confidentiality and consent for the treatment set the scene. I am fortunate to look out on a forest garden, so I have nature on my side, a setting conducive to relaxation. No nature deficit syndrome here. There are no time pieces or electronic devices in my consultation or treatment rooms. None. No distractions from the conversation which would imply *“I only care about you for a limited time”*. I am fortunate there are no time restrictions. I choose to work that way.

*“Deep listening is the kind of listening that can help relieve the suffering of another person. You can call it compassionate listening. You listen with only one purpose: to help him or her to empty his heart.”* Thich

Nhat Hanh interviewed by Oprah Winfrey (2012)

The client history form is the basis for the conversation and is filled in manually by me. I feel very strongly about not leaving this task to the client. It is so important to build up trust, respect, empathy by engaging in a conversation face-to-face, maintaining eye contact, monitoring body language, following the thread of conversation which may lead to questions that are not written down. As cited in Battaglia (2005; p.347), Murtagh (1999) describes the role of listening with all of our senses, *“to the sounds and to the silences”*, to the messages encoded in the words. In an aromatherapy treatment, *“the life story of a woman or a man receives recognition and respect.”* (Schnaubelt, 1999; p. vii).

My client history form is carefully structured to cover personal details, health history, lifestyle, relationships and emotional state. The final question is a series of words (Table 1.) describing emotions. The client is asked to circle the ones that they have predominantly felt over recent months. This is often the key to unlocking the floodgates of emotion, to tapping into underlying issues in the subconscious. At this stage,

**Table 1. Emotional words used in my aromatherapy consultation process**

**Please circle the words describing the predominant feelings you have experienced over the past few months.**

**Do not analyse them. It does not matter how many or how few and please feel free to add your own.**

Anxious Fearful Relaxed Depressed Despairing Happy Joyful Sad Angry Resentful  
Envious Contented Optimistic Pessimistic Enthusiastic Positive Ambitious Intolerant  
Critical Compassionate Loving Generous Overburdened Fragile Worried Vulnerable  
Tired Hopeful Hopeless

trust has been established and it is not uncommon for tears to flow, a healthy release in itself.

Through unhurried conversation in a safe, nurturing environment with no time constraints, the client feels valued and develops greater self awareness achieving clarity around mental, emotional and spiritual issues. We enlist the power of the mind through talk and access the emotions through bodywork thereby creating a “loop of healing” (Pert, 1997; p.274). The bond which is built up between therapist and client provides a secure anchor of support, a safe place. In our time-poor, technology-driven lifestyle, this connection and ‘time out’ is of great benefit.

### 3. The Oils

The beauty and power of essential oils is their “*breathhtaking versatility of application*” (Holmes, 2016; p.26). The complex mixtures of chemical components affect the body physiologically but also on a subtle energy, emotional and psychological level (Rhind, 2012).

Aromatic molecules, as we know, use the olfactory highway as an open route to convey their messages to the brain’s limbic system, the seat of memories and emotions. These chemical messengers impact structures such as the amygdala, hippocampus and hypothalamus thereby producing an emotional response and the release of neurochemicals which, in turn, influence various bodily systems including the nervous, endocrine and immune. They thus work on many levels, mental, emotional, physical, spiritual - the pillars of holistic health, the bedrock of resilience. Fragrance influences how we think, feel and behave. Essential oils “*possess properties which can affect*

*the mind and emotions, to sedate, calm, uplift. They also have effects on bodily systems and they can evoke memories, change perception, calm agitation, relieve stress, activate cognitive responses and affect intercommunication.*” (Price & Price, 2012; p.144)

Mastering the art of the personalised blend requires skilled questioning and a good knowledge of the workings of the oils on all levels from their chemistry to their energetic signatures. Based on the client’s needs and with the quality of the essential oils being paramount, I choose:

- an essential oil for inhalation: one drop in a bowl of hot water placed under the massage table
- three essential oils for the massage blend at around 2% concentration
- diluted *Rosa damascena*, (rose otto), for the face.

### 4. The massage

Touch has a great deal to do with the Mind/Body Connection.

The relatively new science of Psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) explores the mind/body connection with the premise that homeostasis involves the interaction between behaviour and the nervous, endocrine and immune systems. Physical disease is regarded as a powerful expression of a patient’s emotional themes and life stories. High stress is a mind/body connection (Broom 2018, Tanzi & Chopra, 2018 ).

Sometimes described as the mother of psychoneuroimmunology, Pert (1997) holds a similar viewpoint stating that

*“The body and mind are not separate, and we cannot*

*treat one without the other.”(p.274)*

What’s more, she showed through her research how, *“the emotions travel between the two realms of mind and body as the peptides and receptors in the physical realm and as the feelings we experience and call emotions in the nonmaterial realm.”* (p.261)

She believed that the biochemicals of emotion run every system of the body. In her view, the body is the subconscious mind and cannot be healed by talk alone.

Massage is regarded as one of the truly holistic health maintenance therapies because it promotes the flow of blood and lymph, improves nervous conductivity, soothes tension, increases vital energy and promotes a sense of emotional wellbeing. By inducing a state of relaxation, we can ease muscle tension which often relates not only to physical pain but psychological tension and repressed emotions.

*“Feeling worthless? Get a massage, a spinal adjustment, or a lot of good hugging, and see what happens. Your mind, your feelings are in your body and it is there in*

*your somatic experience that feeling is healed. ”* (Pert, 1997; p.293)

Aromatherapy massage combines the physiological effects of massage with the therapeutic holistic effects of essential oils. The full body aromatherapy treatment which I personally perform, is head to toe, deeply relaxing to the central nervous system, nurturing, not painful, incorporating different techniques such as Swedish massage, holistic pulsing, acupressure points, reflexology and lymphatic drainage. Where necessary, anointing of the chakras is included using one drop of a highly diluted essential oil.

During the treatment, intent and focus are very much to the fore working with the oils while being acutely aware of the life story I have just heard and the needs of the person before me. Acutely aware too, of the privilege it is to touch another human being. I am reminded of the beautiful words of Tracy Walton (cited in MacDonald 2014; p.122):

*“By touching a body, we touch everything that has ever happened to it...We reach across the isolation of the human experience and hold another person’s legend.”*



**Figure 3. The treatment space**

With this in mind, I work with intent and from the heart.

To complete the treatment, the aura is spritzed with an aromatic mist to cleanse and protect energetically. Afterwards, the transformation is generally remarkable. The eyes are revealing: they have more life. There is colour in the cheeks, the shoulders have dropped, the body is relaxed, movement is slow, the breath is calm, the voice is quiet. The tyranny of the intellect has been stifled. There is often a sense of euphoria or bliss. It is like watching the parasympathetic nervous system kick in, in slow motion.

For serious, deep seated issues of course, this is only the first step on the road to recovery but it can be a very important one in activating the reset button for change, in laying the foundation of resilience.

## Aromatic Allies

The ‘individual prescription’ as described by Maury (1989), forms the basis of the treatment blend. However, there are certain essential oils that I find indispensable allies for dealing particularly with stress and trauma. Here are a few examples. There is no chemistry analysis here. I am working with the ethereal properties of the oils.

### *Cistus ladaniferus* (rock rose)

This oil is used for deep trauma and shock. It is nicknamed the ‘phoenix plant’ for its ability to rise from the ashes of burnt earth. It is a beautiful analogy. Who amongst us hasn’t had to rise at some point in our lives, from the ashes of trauma?

I remember the young man tense, exhausted, depressed, eyes sunken, cowed by the state of the world’s inequalities and injustices; plans in disarray because of a pandemic. One drop of *Cistus ladaniferus* on a cotton ball, one intake of breath was all it took to fire the parasympathetic nervous system into action. Deep sighs, shoulders dropped, the body slumped in the chair, the eyes closed, a calm settled around and within him. It was extraordinary. The light in the eyes came back, the mind became quiet, the spirit was uplifted.

### *Helichrysum italicum* (immortelle, everlasting)

This oil is known as the wound healer on all levels. Wonderful for deep knots in the psyche, for anger, resentment, unfinished business (Mojay 1997). It is a sacred oil with which to anoint the solar plexus where we digest life’s experiences and store pain.

I remember the client who for years carried rejection and a profound lack of self worth and held it all in the solar plexus. *Helichrysum italicum* healed her. It took time, but it worked

### *Cupressus sempervirens* (cypress)

Called the ‘oil of transition’, cypress excels when used for painful change. I love the beautiful description; “*When we are ready to move forward it holds space for the soul to remain in balance. It brings, structure, strength and protection.*” (Zeck, 2014; p.80).

I remember the anosmic patient who, although the smell eluded her, was fiercely drawn to the energy of *Cupressus sempervirens* to help her through traumatic events in her life.

### *Agonis fragrans* (fragonia)

The Peacemaker oil. For mental/emotional balance, and for recurring patterns of behaviour (Zeck, 2014). Warner (2018) describes Fragonia’s ability “*to see us through a crisis*” (p.98) and includes fragonia as one of her sacred oils.

Pert (1997) talks about releasing traumatic stored memories from the autonomic ganglia either side of the spinal cord. *Agonis fragrans* is perfect for this when rubbed, diluted, along the spine.

I remember the little eight year old boy who said to me “*When I feel angry I go to my schoolbag and sniff my fragonia aromastick and I feel better*”.

### *Rosa damascena* (rose otto)

The Queen of flowers, with a high energetic vibration that connects to the heart, the giving and receiving of love. It is the scent of angels some say, a gift for the bereaved and the sad.



I complete all of my treatments with a rose facial/ inhalation. It brings everything together to a place of love and equilibrium.

I remember countless new mothers struggling with post partum depression who found my Feminine Balance Spritzer a life saver: *Rosa damascena* (rose), *Agonis fragrans* (fragonia) and *Pelargonium graveolens* (rose geranium) helped to balance their emotions.

### ***Melissa officinalis* (Lemon balm, melissa)**

This oil softens extreme emotions, gladdens the heart, directs us to what we have to be thankful for. For those easily traumatised by confrontation, I find that *Melissa officinalis* applied to the heart chakra brings peace and courage (Mojay 1997; Zeck 2014; Holmes 2019).

## **Conclusion**

To survive the stresses of modern life, we need to be resilient. While there are many ways to deal with stress and trauma including lifestyle changes, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, Emotional Freedom Tapping and medication, I believe that aromatherapy massage is in a league of its own as it marries talk therapy with bodywork: “*the gateway to the mind*” (Pert, 1997; p274) and the use of essential oils whose aromatic molecules have a direct pathway to convey their information to the limbic system. There, their olfactory messages trigger the release of neurochemicals which affect mood and behaviour and their energetic signatures in a mysterious way reach into the crevices of the human psyche.

It requires skill and training in the art and science of aromatherapy and bodywork along with a deep connection to and knowledge of these extraordinary plant extracts to effectively nurture resilience using aromatherapy massage.

## **References**

- American Psychology Association (2012). *Building your resilience*. Retrieved 1 June 2020, from <https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience>
- Battaglia, S. (2018). *The complete guide to aromatherapy*. Foundations & materia medica (3rd Edition, Vol. 1). Black Pepper Creative.
- Battaglia, S. (2019). *Aromatree: A holistic guide to understanding and using aromatherapy*. Black Pepper Creative.
- Battaglia, S. (2020). *Aromatherapy and Chakras*. Black Pepper Creative.
- Bowles, E. J. (2003). *The chemistry of aromatherapeutic oils* (3rd ed). Allen & Unwin.
- Broom, B. (2018). *Meaning-full disease: How personal experience and meanings cause and maintain physical illness*. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9780429477140>
- Buckle, J. (2015). *Clinical aromatherapy: Essential oils in healthcare* (Third edition). Elsevier.
- Community and Public Health New Zealand (2020). *Mental Health and Illness*. Retrieved 1 June 2020, from <https://www.cph.co.nz/your-health/mental-illness/>
- Holmes, P. (2016). *Aromatica: A clinical guide to essential oil therapeutics: Principles and Profiles* (Vol. 1). Singing Dragon.
- Holmes, P. (2019). *Aromatica: A clinical guide to essential oil therapeutics: Applications and profiles*. Singing Dragon.
- Kelly, R. (2000). *Healing ways: A doctor's guide to healing*. Penguin.
- Kennedy, D. O. (2014). *Plants and the human brain*. Oxford University Press.
- MacDonald, G. (2014). *Medicine hands: Massage therapy for people with cancer* (3rd edition). Findhorn Press.
- Maury, M. (1989). *Marguerite Maury's guide to aromatherapy: The secret of life and youth*. C.W. Daniel.

- Mojay, G. (1999). *Aromatherapy for healing the spirit: Restoring emotional and mental balance with essential oils*. Healing Arts Press.
- Murtagh, J. (1999). *General practice*. McGraw-Hill.
- Oprah Talks to Thich Nhat Hanh (2010). Oprah.Com. <https://www.oprah.com/spirit/oprah-talks-to-thich-nhat-hanh>
- Pénoël, D., & Pénoël, R.-M. (1998). *Natural home health care using essential oils: An introduction to the theory, practice and technique of integral aromatherapy (Osmobiosis)*. Éditions Osmobiose.
- Pert, C. B. (1997). *Molecules of emotion: Why you feel the way you feel* (1st edition). Scribner.
- Rhind, J. P. (2012). *Essential oils: A handbook for aromatherapy practice* (2nd edition). Singing Dragon.
- Schnaubelt, K. (1998). *Advanced aromatherapy: The science of essential oil therapy* (1st U.S. ed). Healing Arts Press.
- Schnaubelt, K. (1999). *Medical aromatherapy: Healing with essential oils*. Frog.
- Schnaubelt, K. (2011). *The healing intelligence of essential oils: The science of advanced aromatherapy*. Healing Arts Press.
- Ministry of Social Development (2016). *Suicide: The Social Report 2016 – Te pūrongo oranga tangata*. Retrieved 1 June 2020, from <https://www.socialreport.msd.govt.nz/health/suicide.html>
- Tanzi, R. E., & Chopra, D. (2018). *The healing self: Supercharge immune system and stay well for life*. Penguin Random House.
- Van der Kolk, B. A. (2015). *The Body keeps the score: Brain, mind and body in the healing of trauma*. Penguin Books.
- Warner, F. (2013). *The soul midwives' handbook: The holistic & spiritual care of the dying*. Hay House.
- Warner, F. (2018). *Sacred oils: Working with 20 precious oils to heal spirit and soul*. Hay House.
- World Health Organisation (2020). *Depression*. Retrieved 1 June 2020, from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression>
- Zeck, R. (2014). *The blossoming heart: Aromatherapy for healing and transformation*. Aroma Tours.



ICAN: Your one-stop international resource for professional aromatherapy



INTERNATIONAL  
CLINICAL  
AROMATHERAPY  
NETWORK



CREATE  
*Find innovative ways to improve your therapeutic interventions*



ATTEND  
*Join classes and educational events related to your field*



CONNECT  
*Exchange with like-minded professionals around the world*

## Become a member of our global aromatic community!

Register today for a basic free membership and see what makes ICAN the most innovative platform for professional aromatherapy.

ICAN is a one-stop international resource for expanding, nourishing and deepening your professional aromatherapy connections, knowledge and skills!

If clinical aromatherapy is your passion, your motivation, your goal or your experience, ICAN provides you with a safe, supportive and professional online environment to connect, express and learn.

We offer memberships for professional practitioners, educators, students, researchers, suppliers, growers and distillers.

Contribute to the future of aromatherapy by becoming an ICAN member today!

[www.clinicalaromatherapynetwork.com](http://www.clinicalaromatherapynetwork.com)

[admin@clinicalaromatherapynetwork.com](mailto:admin@clinicalaromatherapynetwork.com)

Find us on social media: @icanaroma