

Making Scents

Using Aromatherapy with your Horse

By Catherine Bird

I was introduced to aromatherapy about two decades ago. At the time I was working at a natural therapy college and it came across my desk as a correspondence course. My scepticism was high, and I laughed at the thought of an aroma having an effect on anyone. Well, I then attended an evening lecture on the topic and found it more convincing. My first modality as a therapist became aromatherapy and I was soon lecturing at several colleges dispelling the same scepticism I had generated myself.

As a rider I was keen to try my new found knowledge on horses, but my peers were not receptive at that time, so I put the idea aside and focused on working with human clients. Then a visit to a psychic convinced me it was finally time to play with essential oils with horses. This was about fifteen years ago and with the help of my State's mounted police and some local stables at the time, my ideas were tested and I now use essential oils with nearly every horse I am asked to help in my business.



With humans when they inhale the aroma of an essential oil, the scent molecule is registered inside the nasal passages and then messages are registered within the limbic system of the brain. This part of





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the brain is the same as in the horse, it holds memories, the survival flight/fight mechanism and a complex trigger for the hypothalamus gland into action and instruct the body's glands to tune up and do their stuff, so we can use essential oils to assist our horses with behavioural and health issues.

One of the most rewarding aspects of using aromatherapy with horses is how quickly they can respond when you are looking at issues that have affected their behaviour. The insecure or the less than confident gelding who holds a traumatic memory from his neutering will often let go of the issue with an offering of Ylang Ylang; the mare who has been pushed too hard to make the grade and become internalised will often open up to the scent of sweet orange as it gives a warm motherly hug with its aroma; or the horse who may be fearful because of harsh treatment may be able to step into their own once they have been assisted to move beyond this memory with Everlasting.

What I find amazing with the use of scent to help our horses, is that it is so simple in its applications. In a session, once I have assessed a horse or given it some physical therapy, I will offer the horse a selection of essential oils, often no more

than six if I have accurately surmised this horse. All I have to do is open each bottle separately, and waft the open bottle under the horse' nostrils about four to six inches away. If I have chosen one of which the horse agrees will assist, he will move closer to me. He may just simply hang his head over the bottle and inhale, or he will do a flehmen to capture more of the scent within his nasal passages. If I have chosen an essential oil he disagrees with, then he may walk away from me or simply turn his head.

If they are primarily essential oils that assist a physical aspect, I may apply a diluted blend to the areas I have identified in a body work session, or allow the horse to taste the essential oil to trigger a biochemical response in his body.

Care does have to be taken if you are competing at FEI levels where you may be tested for drug use as some essential oils do contain constituents that will test positive. Some associations list eucalyptus and peppermint as prohibited. Also, any essential oil with a high camphor content such as rosemary should be used with care. As a general guide, most essential oils will be metabolised out of the horse's body system via the urinary tract within a week. However, it would be wise to check with a trained aroma

therapist as heavier resin based oils may take longer than this.

One important aspect of using essential oils with your horse is to have fun with it. It will help you open up to other areas of communication with your horse and a way to find a connection that may be currently alluding you.

These are potent tools and you do not need to apply directly to the skin to have an effect and if you apply undiluted they may hurt his skin, the power of the scent takes nanoseconds to have a response, so no need to apply to bridles or halters. This can have a reverse effect as your horse's sense of smell does not fatigue like yours does, so he is stuck with that scent all day and it could become very irritating quite quickly.

Essential oils are not to replace your veterinarian or trainer; they are simply a tool to assist you as a rider with your horse. **HT**

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Aromatherapy

for horses

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