Aromatic Waters

What are Aromatic Waters?

An aromatic water is water enriched with both the essential oils and the water-soluble volatile components of a plant. They are also known as ‘hydrosols’, and were historically created as a by-product of the steam distillation of essential oils from plants. Now they are produced in their own right, for their medicinal properties. They are much safer to use than pure essential oils as this method extracts gentler-acting constituents from the plant.

Why Make An Aromatic Water?

Aromatic waters are beautiful, fragrant & gentle medicines, which can be used in a huge variety of ways, both internally & externally. Unlike essential oils which are very potent & can damage the mucous membranes of the body, aromatic waters are very safe to take, have no contraindications and can be used for long periods of time. They don’t interfere with medication and are suitable for babies, children & breast feeding women, and people who choose not to, or cannot take herbs in alcohol.

Aromatic waters only need a tiny quantity of plant material as compared to making essential oils e.g. to make one litre of lavender essential oil you need an average of 150kg of lavender flowers. To make one litre of hydrosol, 2 kilos of fresh plant material is usually sufficient.

Making Aromatic Waters

Essentially the process of creating an aromatic water is to separate volatile liquids from the non-volatile parts of the plant. Water is heated to create steam which rises & passes through your plant parts. The steam bursts open the cells of the plant & then carries the light, aromatic molecules along with it. Sometimes an essential oil will be floating on the surface of the aromatic water, which you can gather if you choose.

To do this you need: a ‘still’ in which water is heated, a ‘condenser’ to cool the vapour, and a ‘receiver’ to collect the distillate. Traditionally copper stills are used for distillation – they are stunningly beautiful & available to buy online, but are expensive for infrequent home use, and the same result can be achieved on a small scale with a simple home-made still made out of common household items.

DIY Home Still – What You Will Need:

- a medium or large pot with a lid
- a small bowl to place inside the pot
- something sturdy to stand the bowl on to stop it moving e.g. a steamer or brick (see left)
- a few separate freezer bags filled with ice cubes.
- Optional: (wetted filter paper & pipette for catching any essential oil produced)

Instructions:

Clean your equipment

2. If harvesting your own plant material, collect on a dry, sunny & still morning for best results

3. Place approximately 3litres of water in your pot. Ideally use mineral or spring water if available to you
4. Add approximately 200g of your chosen plant to the water (this can be more depending on the size/weight/part of the plant, according to your judgement)
5. Leave this to soak for a few hours
6. Place your steamer or other sturdy holder into the pot & stand the bowl on top of it
7. Place your lid on the pot, and turn on the heat. Bring the pot slowly to a boil
8. As soon as the water begins to simmer, turn the lid upside down, and put it back on the pot. Lay a bag of ice cubes on top of the lid
9. Adjust the heat so that the liquid continuing vaporizing, but is slowed down
10. Don't open the pot or the steam will escape! The aromatic water vapour will be rising to the lid, cooling down, condensing and flowing to the lowest point of the upside down lid, then dripping & collecting in your bowl.
11. Gather a bottle or jar to store your aromatic water in & place a wet paper filter into a funnel & into the mouth of the jar/bottle
12. When your aromatic water has finished collecting, and has cooled, pour it through the filter paper – if any amount of essential oil has been produced, you can now gather it from the paper with a pipette
13. Label, bottle & store your aromatic water

Herbs Well Suited to Making into Aromatic Waters

Three types of plants are used:
1) Plants rich in essential oils e.g. lavender, thyme, chamomile, elderflower, fennel, peppemint, pine
2) Plants with small quantities of essential oil e.g. lemon balm, yarrow, rose, meadowsweet
3) Plants without essential oils but which produce interesting hydrosols from their volatile constituents e.g. plantain, nettle, cornflower, horsetail

How to Use Aromatic Waters

They can be used both internally & externally. For internal use, try having a teaspoonful twice a day, or adding them to your herbal tea. Externally they can be applied directly onto a piece of cotton wool & rubbed on the skin, or added to spray bottles to spritz on.

Internally: average adult dose is 10ml three times daily, either neat or diluted with water. The daily dose of 30ml can also be added to 500ml of water and sipped through the day, or sprayed into the mouth. (Four sprays is the equivalent to about 1ml)
Externally: They can be added to lotions, sprays, compresses, inhalations, facial steaming, clay masks, creams or a base cream, mouthwashes, gargles, baths.
When applied to the skin, aromatic waters make mildly astringent tonics for everyday use.

Preservation & Storage

Aromatic waters should be stored in glass bottles away from direct sunlight, and in a cool atmosphere. They can usually be kept for up to a year, and plants with a higher aromatic content produce aromatic waters which can be kept much longer e.g. rose, rosemary, & rose geranium.

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