

Animal Aromatherapy and Essential Oil Safety

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As aromatherapy continues to gain acceptance within the Holistic and CAM (Complementary Alternative Medicine) field, there is also increasing interest in incorporating aromatherapy and other natural therapies for use with our animal friends.

It is important to note that animal lovers always want what is best for their pets, and often will seek out information and advice via the internet, blogs and social media groups: the information may not always contain safe use, or applies to actual use with animals. If you do choose to work with essential oils for your pets, it is best to seek out a professionally trained aromatherapist with additional training in animal aromatherapy, and to communicate with your veterinarian if your animal friend has any known allergies or serious health issues before using essential oils. Some essential oils are contraindicated for use with certain health care conditions.

Essential oils for canines (dogs) and equines (horses), and with some other farm animals, can be used topically for spot application, massage therapy and for skin and hoof/paw care. Inhalation therapy is also used with tools such as an atomizer-diffuser type unit, and with mist spray bottles to infuse the aromatic scent and healing properties into the environment.

Essential oil use for felines (cats) is very limited due to a cat's sensitive metabolic system and their internal organs: the liver and kidneys do not breakdown certain substances due to lack of enzymes.

Some hydrosols-hydrolats (the aromatic-water byproduct that remains after the steam distillation process of plant material: flowers, leaves, twigs and bark for essential oil use) can be a gentle and safe alternative for animals, and even for cats if used in minute amounts: Always use under the guidance of a professional aromatherapist.

The information below contains basic and common-sense guidelines for essential oil safety with our animal friends.

Do not use essential oils with the following:

- Cats/Felines (due to their highly sensitive metabolic systems, cats and essential oils do not mix)
- Fish and reptiles (due to their pH levels and aquatic environments)
- Birds (due to their respiratory and metabolic systems)
- Pet rodents and small mammals (gerbils, hamsters, rabbits, rats etc.) (There is not enough research on this topic, other than actual animal-testing and research results gained for knowledge use with humans).

Essential oils for use with animals may include the following safe methods of application:

- Inhalation
- Diffusion (avoid use near fish tanks or any bird's cage/area)
- Topical (spot application, massage therapy, bathing).

Safety Precautions and Contraindications:

- Keep all essential oils and aromatherapy products out of reach of children and pets.
- Do not give essential oils internally to your pets/animal clients.
- Animals will often lick the area where essential oil blends/botanicals have been applied. This normally does not cause a problem – but watch to make sure that the animal does not have an allergic reaction, or negative response. If they do, wipe the area with a cool wet cloth and diluted mild soap, rinse and repeat. If necessary seek immediate veterinarian assistance.
- Other and more serious clinical signs to watch for with your pet that can result from ingestion of essential oils are: vomiting, diarrhea, depression, lethargy, weakness, excessive drooling/salivation, mouth sores, seizures, tremors, increase in liver enzymes and temporary paralysis. (1)
- Do not get essential oils near or in the eyes. If essential oils accidentally get into the eyes or sensitive areas, flush the area with water or sterile saline solution until the area is clear. If water is not helping, try a bit of milk which will help to absorb the essential oil residue.
- Never apply essential oils directly to an animal's muzzle area, inside nostrils, ears or mouth, and genital areas.
- Do not force essential oils onto animals by way of a head or muzzle mask breather-type device/gear.
- If irritation occurs (this can happen via topical, diffusion and inhalation) discontinue use of essential oils and re-evaluate. If animal has a coughing or breathing issue due to the aromas, remove the animal from the area and, if symptoms persist or get worse, contact your veterinarian.
- Do not apply essential oils neat (undiluted) to animals. Essential oils should always be diluted when applied topically to animals. Over-use of essential oils and neat applications can cause sensitization issues.

- There are certain essential oils that should not be used with animals: one in particular is tea tree (*Melaleuca alternifolia*), which for some pets can cause poisoning and other serious health concerns (2, 3).
- Do not apply a controversial and unsafe technique called: Raindrop Therapy (RDT) to your animals. This and other 'neat and excessive drops of essential oil type-applications' can cause sensitization, severe allergic reactions, skin sensitivity, respiratory difficulties, dermal burns, toxic overload and other serious health concerns.
- Remember: Less is best with essential oil use, do not be tempted to think that if it's good, then more is better. This is especially true with sensitive animals: they are entrusting us to use essential oils safely and wisely. Always use the rule 'when in doubt ...don't.'
- When using essential oils within a barn or kennel type facility it is best to store aromatherapy products in aroma-safe containers and in a locked cabinet. Keep away from animals and children.
- Be mindful of your fellow barn/stable/kennel mates and their animal friends. Remember that not everyone can tolerate the same aromas that you and your animals enjoy. Smell is unique to each individual and lavender is not loved by all!

References:

- (1) ASPCA Animal Poison Control <http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/poison-control/>
- (2) Pet Poison Helpline: <http://www.petpoisonhelpline.com/poison/tea-tree-oil/>
- (3) National Capital Poison Center: <http://www.poison.org/poisonpost/winter2010/teatreeoil.htm>

Resources:

Animal Poison Control Center: 1-888-426-4435

Tea Tree Essential Oil-Toxic to Cats Article: <http://www.messybeast.com/teatree.htm>

The Lavender Cat: www.thelavendercat.com

NAHA (National Association for Holistic Aromatherapy) www.naha.org

The Holistic Animal Association: www.holisticanimalassociation.com

Content provided from the: Animal Aromatherapy Practitioner Certification Course(sm): www.ashitherapy.com

NB: You can also read more on this subject via: Kristen Leigh Bell's book 'Holistic Aromatherapy for Animals', available at the NAHA Bookstore.

Disclaimer: The information contained in this handout is for personal awareness only: it is not meant to diagnose or treat any serious health problems or conditions, or take the place of professional health or veterinarian care.

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