

## The myths reviewed

### LEMON OIL

Original version posted Feb 2004, to the ATFE newsgroup.

There are vast numbers of posts on social media sites and websites about what lemon oil can do. Therefore, I thought it opportune to wade through my old newsgroup posts and create a new article on this issue. Don't think I am saying that lemon oil is of no use, it is, but just not for most of the physical ailments you will see listed.

This review is intended to help people understand why so many urban myths have grown in aromatherapy, and perhaps where that information may have originated.

#### Various untrue claims found on blogs in books and in courses

**Lemon oil is "astringent"** is quoted in the majority of aromatherapy books, on websites and in course notes. It is not! [See notes below](#).

**"Lemon oil is best known for its ability to cleanse toxins from any part of the body"**. Any mention of the words 'detox' or 'detoxification' are beauty trade hype.

**"Lemon essential oil is antiviral"**. The oil is not, the juice might be.

**"The oil cleanses body and lymphatic system"** This is hype to sell oils. Hardly any essential oil penetrates the skin so it cannot get into the lymphatic system.

**"Lemon oil can reduce cellulite"** Not true, this is hype to sell oils and typical of the fairytales the beauty trade promote to mislead their customers.

**"Lemon oil improves weight loss"** Not true if the aim is for it to work via its absorption through the skin.

**"2 to 3 drops of lemon in each glass of water you drink will not only kill the nasties in your tap water but will also provide a gentle detox"**. [You can't mix oil and water](#). It is doubtful that lemon oil will kill bugs in water at that level of use. *Detox* is just sales hype again.

**"Lemon oil is fantastic for inflammation"**. So if you accidentally get lemon oil in the eye it does not cause instant burning and inflammation? These dangerous idiots should try some of their recommendations!

**"Lemon is antiseptic. It stimulates digestion by supporting the liver"**. Lemon oil is very unreliable as an antimicrobial agent. It can start losing that property within a few weeks of production. The claim of "supporting the liver" looks to me like the use of lemon **juice** in certain types of diet, certainly **not the oil**.

Many of the above untrue claims have been *invented* by the teachers and pseudo experts in multi level selling companies. Therefore I have attempted to find out the origins of the information that they might have used.

#### The old herbals:

I have several old pharmacopoeias and herbals dating back to Ancient Greece. In none of those is lemon oil suggested as an *astringent*. In most of these books the oil is just listed as a flavoring agent. That is despite them listing other essential oils along with their medicinal uses.

One of my most prized possessions is 'Hills Herbal' or 'The Family Herbal' 1812, by Sir John Hill MD. He only describes the uses for lemon peel and juice for stomach problems.

'A modern Herbal' by Maud Grieve. A passing mention of lemon oil for flavoring but a big section on the juice. It is stated that: "*Locally it is a good astringent*". Since that book was one of the most commonly available when the early aromatherapy books were written, my guess is that is one source they have used. The early aromatherapy authors have done the usual and switch the use of the juice to the use of the oil. Clearly the more potential uses they could throw together the more people will buy their books as well as the oils.

#### Essential oils & aromatherapy books:

The excellent book by Gattefosse first published in 1937 makes no mention of lemon oil as an *astringent*. He only lists it for stomach ailments which would be internal use, and one for a vague "*against venom*". That is despite him providing a huge list of reference works. Clearly he could not find much on the medicinal uses for the oil.

'The Secret of Life and Youth' by Marguerite Maury published in 1961 is often credited as the first true aromatherapy book. However, most of its contents are beauty therapy related and about complementary therapies and diet. She only talks about essential oils in a generalised way. In most of the cases cited she does not specify which oils were used or how. In the section on diet she is talking about the use of **herbs** and not essential oils.

On page 128 she mentions the use of "*lilac oil*". Such a statement indicates she only had a limited knowledge of essential oils as that essential oil does not exist.

On page 178 she talks about lemon oil and orange but in the context of the fruit being used, not the pure essential oil. She says "*when lemon is used in a dish (cooking) it dissolves the fat and cleanses fish and meat*". That one sentence has been corrupted by later teachers into "lemon oil dissolves fat".

Page 230 contains very important advice for those who advocate the internal use of essential oils in that Maury says "*An essence for external use can contain terpenes, but for internal use they must be removed at all cost*". Yet the dangerous followers of the multi level companies constantly advocate the internal use of the whole oil.

So the source for "**lemon oil is astringent**" does not come from the above book.

The earliest aromatherapy book I can find making this claim on lemon is 'The Practice of Aromatherapy' by Jean Valnet published in 1980. What most subsequent aromatherapy authors failed to realize - **when they copied his work** - was his book is mainly a herbal, rather than a sound book on essential oils. With the 'Properties and Therapeutic uses' he fails to define if he meant the use of the fruit or its oil, yet the first paragraph refers to the "essence" which in his view seems to mean the oil. This author throws in everything barring the kitchen sink as being treatable using lemon oil, from malaria to stomach ulcers.

The next book making therapeutic claims for lemon is 'Aromatherapy A-Z by Patricia Davies' 1988. She makes numerous claims about what lemon can do but fails to define if she means lemon juice or lemon oil. As a herbalist I know most of those attributes are for the juice not the oil. She also gives no references on the source of most of her information. She says that "**lemon is an astringent**" and leaves it up to the reader to guess if she means the oil or the juice. As with several subsequent authors she cites the book by Valnet to justify her therapeutic use claims.

'Aromatherapy' by Daniel Ryman first published in 1991 (one of only a couple of early aromatherapy authors I have any respect for). She goes to great pains to differentiate between the use of lemon juice and lemon oil. I can immediately spot copies and corruptions of her work in many of the subsequent aromatherapy books.

The next book I looked at is 'The Encyclopaedia of Essential oils' by J. Lawless first published 1992 in which she does say "**lemon oil is astringent**", plus a heap of other unreferenced medicinal claims mainly based on the juice not the oil.

'The Aromatherapy book' by Jeanne Rose published in 1992 quotes Valnet as saying "**lemon**" is "**astringent**" and gives a whole string of uses that are based on the juice not the oil.

At the risk of boring you, I am not going to mention the plethora of subsequent aromatherapy 'novels' as I call them. Almost all of them are copied from the early aromatherapy books and later authors just tweaked the information here and there. I know of two such authors who privately admitted that their books were based around the courses they attended. Courses where the teachers based most of their lessons on the books already mentioned above.

#### Beauty therapy books:

These are numerous but most of the books that I have checked are very specific about using lemon juice for a variety of skin and hair formulas. So as with the herbals, the early aromatherapy writers have taken what they knew about lemon juice and just transferred those actions to lemon oil. It should not be forgotten that many of the early aromatherapy authors were beauty therapists.

#### Summary

The unfortunate aspect of the incorrect claims on the uses for lemon oil is that the public and therapists read these books and blogs and assume that the authors were/are experts. Some of the claims have a real chance of causing harm, particularly those on the internal use of the oil for medical conditions. If you are told that lemon oil can help such a condition ask the person promoting the information for its source. Check to see if the reference is valid such as is the research in-vitro lab testing or is the test on the fruit or the essential oil. Do not take lemon oil internally for medical conditions; this is because lemon oil can be adulterated with synthetic fragrance chemicals.

Source and copyright:  
Martin Watt © 2018  
<http://www.aromamedical.org>