

Sandalwood Oil: Calming and Beyond

An essential oil obtained from steam-distilling chips and billets from the heartwood of the *Santalum album* tree, sandalwood oil is popularly used in perfumery, cosmetics, and sacred unguents (soothing or healing salve). But beyond these practical uses are the time-tested calming and therapeutic properties for which it is used in aromatherapy. Learn more about the uses and benefits of sandalwood oil in this article.

What Is Sandalwood Oil?

Sandalwood essential oil is derived from the heartwood of the sandalwood, which is a hemiparasitic evergreen that grows by joining the root system of other trees.¹ The tree belongs to the Santalaceae family and is also known as East Indian sandalwood.²

Sandalwood oil has been used since over four thousand years ago, making it among the oldest-known materials used for its exotic scent. It has found its way in fragrances, cosmetics and personal care products, and meditative/spiritual practices.

This essential oil is extracted through steam distillation of pieces of wood from matured sandalwood trees that are ages 40 to 80.³ Eighty years old is preferred, because the older the tree, the more oil available and the stronger the aroma. The oil has a woody, exotic smell that's subtle and lingering. Its color ranges from pale yellow to pale gold. Although expensive, it has many wonderful characteristics that make it useful and beneficial for health and wellness. For one, sandalwood oil creates a calming, harmonizing effect for the mind, helping reduce tension and confusion.⁴ It is also traditionally used in Ayurveda, India's holistic health system, for the treatment somatic and mental disorders.⁵

Uses of Sandalwood Oil

As early as 4,000 years back, sandalwood has already been used, with caravans carrying the wood to places like Egypt, Greece, and Rome. Many temples were built from it, while the Egyptians used the oil in embalming. Sandalwood used to be made into furniture and caskets, but as the tree has become nearly extinct, it is only used today for distilling the oil.

At present, sandalwood oil is widely utilized for its calming and relaxing effects.⁶ It is in demand as incense and is recommended in Swahra yoga for "the union of the senses" and in Tantric yoga for awakening sexual energy. It can be used for depression, daily stress, and states of anxiety, fear, or chronic illness.

This essential oil is well-regarded in skincare, as it tones and relieves itching, inflammation, and dehydrated skin. Rashes, scar tissue, eczema, psoriasis, acne, and dandruff are just some of the issues it can assist with.

The Living Earth Beauty blog states that apart from topical application, you can also steam-inhale sandalwood oil – fill a large bowl with steaming water, cover your face and head with a towel, and breathe. This can be a good remedy for respiratory concerns and skin conditions that emerge on the face. You can also dry-condition with the oil, adding a few drops to your dry hair after a shower or during the day to restore moisture.

Remember, though, that I do not recommend using sandalwood essential oil raw on your skin. Mix it with some type of carrier oil, such as jojoba.

The other functions of sandalwood oil include use in:⁷

- Perfumery products
- Aromatherapy
- Religious rituals (as incense in temples and meditation garlands/beads)
- Gargling
- Vaporizers and burners
- Psychological profile

A study⁸ shows, too, that sandalwood oil could be an effective chemopreventive agent against chemically induced skin cancer in animal models.

Composition of Sandalwood Oil

At least 80 to 90 percent of sandalwood essential oil is composed of sesquiterpenic alcohols, most of which are two closely related molecules: alpha-santalol (50 to 60 percent) and beta-santalol (20 to 25 percent). These molecules are the source of its rich fragrance.^{9 10}

The main chemical components are santalol, santyl acetate, and santalene.¹¹

Benefits of Sandalwood Oil

Organic Facts provides a rundown of sandalwood benefits¹² for health and wellness. Here's a partial list:

- **Antiseptic** – This oil is a good antiseptic agent and is safe for both internal and external application. It helps protect internal wounds and ulcers from infections; when applied to skin, it protects wounds, sores, boils, and pimples from getting infected.
- **Anti-inflammatory** – The essential oil and paste are effective as anti-inflammatory agents. They have a cooling effect and relieve all types of brain, digestive, nervous, circulatory, and excretory system inflammation, which result from infections, fevers, antibiotic side effects, insect bites, wounds, and poisoning.
- **Antispasmodic** – This oil works against spasms and contractions by relaxing nerves, muscles, and blood vessels.

- **Astringent** – Although very mild, sandalwood oil can induce contractions in your gums, muscles, and skin, offering benefits like better muscle strength and a tighter skin.
- **Deodorant** – There are individuals who use sandalwood oil to relieve body odor.
- **Disinfectant** – Its fragrance keeps microbes and small insects away, which is why it is widely used in incense sticks, sprays, fumigants, and evaporators for disinfecting large areas.
- **Emollient** – It soothes skin, relieves inflammation and irritation, cures infections, and promotes a fresh, cool feeling.
- **Expectorant** – It is specifically effective in treating coughs, but it also fights the infections that cause the cough, cold, flu, or mumps.
- **Memory booster** – Sandalwood oil improves memory and stimulates concentration. It keeps your brain cool and relaxed, and saves you from unnecessary stress and anxiety.
- **Tonic** – It is soothing on your stomach and the digestive, circulatory, and nervous systems, helping them function harmoniously.

How to Make Sandalwood Oil

To make sandalwood oil,¹³ billets of wood are chipped and reduced to a powder. Most sandalwood oil today is produced by steam distillation of the powder. The high boiling nature of the oil makes the process rather slow, taking many hours to complete.

The yield of oil is highest in the roots and lowest in chips, which are a mixture of heartwood and sapwood. The oil content of the heartwood varies from three to tree, and is higher for older trees. Light-colored wood yields three to six percent oil, while dark brown wood yields about 2.5 percent oil. Furthermore, oil from younger trees has a slightly lower santalol content than the mature trees, which makes it ill-advised to harvest at a very young age.

eHow.com¹⁴ provides a quick recipe for homemade sandalwood oil:

Things you'll need:

- 1 cup carrier oil (olive or jojoba)
- ¼ oz. sandalwood powder
- Medium saucepan with lid
- Spoon
- Oven
- Cheesecloth
- Jar with lid

Instructions:

1. Preheat the oven to 200 degrees Fahrenheit.
2. Pour 1 cup of the carrier oil into a saucepan, and stir in the sandalwood powder.
3. Cover the saucepan and place it in the oven, allowing the sandalwood and oil to cook together for two to four hours. Check frequently and stir to prevent burning.
4. Strain the mixture into a jar using cheesecloth. The oil is ready for use.

According to eHow, the quality of the oil will depend on the quality of the sandalwood powder used. Homemade oils like this one will last approximately six months before its contents start to decompose. So make sure to label your jars with the date they were made. Store them in a cool, dry place as well.

How Does Sandalwood Oil Work?

The benefits of sandalwood oil can be harnessed different ways.¹⁵ In vapor therapy, it can be used as an aphrodisiac, as well as to help address coughs, bronchitis, chest infections, asthma, insomnia, nervous tension, and stress. It can also be blended into a massage oil or added to your bath water. In this form it can assist with bladder infections, chest infections, and relaxation, to name a few.

Sandalwood oil can be diluted and used as a gargle if you have a sore or dry throat. You can also use it in a lotion or cream to improve chapped, dry, or inflamed skin. It can moisturize and hydrate skin, serving as a wonderful addition in your anti-aging skincare regimen.

Essential oils generally blend well with one another, but I believe sandalwood oil is best blended with bergamot, black pepper, geranium, [myrrh](#), rose, lavender, ylang-ylang, and vetivert.

Is Sandalwood Oil Safe?

Sandalwood oil is generally safe for use, but there are warnings and precautions. Essential oils are meant for topical use only, so I do not advise ingesting sandalwood oil. When applying it onto skin, dilute it using a carrier oil, soap, lotion, or a buffering agent.¹⁶

Breastfeeding mothers and young children should avoid using sandalwood oil. Additionally, the oil may cause an allergic skin reaction in certain individuals, so it is important to test it on a small area of skin first. Those who suffer from some type of medical condition, such as liver disorder and cancer, should also take extra precaution using the oil in aromatherapy.

Side Effects of Sandalwood Oil

Individuals with a known allergy or hypersensitivity to sandalwood or its constituents should avoid using the oil, as there are reports of sandalwood causing dermatitis, and sandalwood oil causing photoallergy. But there are very few reports of sandalwood side effects – of the available literature, there are a few cases of the allergic reactions mentioned above.¹⁷

Sandalwood can be used to calm and relax pets,¹⁸ but certain oils can be very toxic to cats, so I believe it is necessary to consult your veterinarian first.