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Chemistry and essential oils directory

Learning objectives

This chapter covers the following

- classification of essential oils
- chemotypes
- categories of essential oils
- synergy
- harmony
- directory of essential oils

This chapter explores the underpinning knowledge of the essential oils. It is important to have a good understanding of the information contained in Chapter 2, Foundations of chemistry, before you work through this directory as this is essential to your understanding of the classification of essential oils.

The chapter is laid out so it can be used as a reference guide to develop your blending skills. It lists the properties of each oil, its uses and other information essential for safe use.

Classification of essential oils

When an essential oil is analysed it will reveal that the following.

- It has only a few chemical constituents that can be classified as *major*, e.g. limonene in lemon oil.
- There are a large number of *minor* constituents, which give the character to the essential oil odour.
- There are hundreds of *trace* constituents giving individual qualities to each oil.

There is no simple link between the chemical constituents and the therapeutic value or hazards of an essential oil. However, having an awareness of the chemical composition of an oil will help give guidance.

Every essential oil can be classified in several ways. Each essential oil has a basic building block made of the compounds hydrogen, carbon and oxygen. Different combinations of these three molecules create different compounds.