

OIL THE ESSENTIALS

Susan Jose

Essential oils have more or less been a part of every girl's beauty arsenal. The reasons vary — dabbing some of it for simple vanity, burning it in your room for a special night or depending on it to calm yourself down to combat stress and anxiety. However, it seems that a lot of times aroma oils and essential oils are confused with each other. While aroma oils may imitate the smell and provide similar benefits, essential oils are the real deal.

Alka Shah, who has been practising aromatherapy for the past 20 years, explains, "Essential oils are concentrated as they contain the actual essence of the flowers, roots and herbs from which the oils are extracted. Thus, they have therapeutic properties. The aroma oils are synthetically made to resemble the smell of the actual substance. So, though they smell good, they do not have any healing or therapeutic value."

BENEFITS OF ESSENTIAL OILS

Essential oils are predominantly used in aromatherapy treatment. "Research studies have indicated that the use of aromatherapy has both physical and psychological benefits. It is used not only as a preventative approach but also as an active treatment during acute and chronic stages of illness. It helps with skin issues, reducing anxiety, curbing stress, mood upliftment and more," says

Namrata Dagia, curator of aromatherapy bath salts and candles, and founder, The Illuminating Zone.

THE WAY IT WORKS

While inhalation is an easy way to reap their benefits, one can also opt to apply them on several points such as the temples, centre of the wrist but above the palm and below the ear lobes on the back of the ears. As the oil is inhaled, it leads to a change in activity of the neurons in the brain, which results in experiencing a changed mood or emotion.

Neeta V Shetty, founder of essential oil blends and skincare products, Kimara Essentials, goes on to list some of the most popular essential oils and their benefits.

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EUCALYPTUS:

It is used to relieve body aches and pain. Some respiratory system issues also are soothed with eucalyptus oil. It is good for overall health.

Love essential oils but confused about which ones to use and when? Here's a guide curated by experts for your woes

FRANKINCENSE:

It's often used for spiritual purposes as it has a very calming, meditative and relaxing effect without having the sedative quality.

VETIVER:

It relieves symptoms of stress and anxiety. It also assists with anger management.

TEA TREE:

It supports and enhances the immune system. It is excellent for skin nourishment and can be used to treat sunburns and tan. It also has antibacterial properties.

PEPPERMINT:

It is a rejuvenating and energy-boosting oil. It can help relieve headaches as well as improve cognitive performance.

LAVENDER:

Helps in reducing anxiety, promotes calmness, heals wounds and burns. It also has cell regenerative properties, as well as soothing and balancing properties. It's used for general skin care.

BERGAMOT:

It has a smell quite close to orange. However, it is a wonderfully complex oil, which helps in dealing with depression, sadness and grief.

YLANG YLANG:

Its antidepressant properties help alleviate stress and reduce anxiety. It is also antispasmodic.

SANDALWOOD:

This oil focuses more on relaxation and sleep, while calming a tired mind and body.

GERANIUM:

It improves blood circulation, thus enhancing tone and texture of the skin. It can also help people with varicose veins.

Treats with no strings attached

Sarojini Jose

While we all love indulging in cakes and pastries, especially around Christmas, our health restrictions end up giving us a hard time. However, there are many recipes that replace ingredients to give us vegan, sugar-free, gluten-free, nut-free and dairy-free delicacies. From Cacao Cake and Strawberry Tart to Pineapple Sheera and Avocado And Kiwi Panna Cotta, take your pick.

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AVOCADO AND KIWI PANNA COTTA

Ingredients:

For the base
■ 100gm desiccated coconut, 3gm baking powder, 100gm cassava flour, 3gm baking soda, 15gm coconut milk, 5gm extra virgin olive oil, 1gm vanilla extract, 30gm coconut sugar

For the panna cotta

■ 100gm coconut milk, 100gm coconut cream, 30gm coconut sugar, 2gm vanilla extract, 8gm agar agar, 100gm avocado

For the jelly

■ 100gm kiwi (pureed), 4gm agar agar

Method:

In a bowl mix desiccated coconut, cassava flour, baking soda and coconut sugar. Fold in the extra virgin olive oil and coconut milk and pour in a greased baking tray. Bake for 12 minutes at 160 degrees Celsius.

For panna cotta and jelly

■ In a mixing bowl add coconut milk, coconut cream, avocado puree, coconut sugar and vanilla extract. Dissolve agar agar powder in warm water and add to the mixture. Strain it through a fine strainer and pour the mixture in a silicone mould. Let it set in the refrigerator for an hour

■ Place a pot over medium heat, pour the kiwi puree

and reduce it to half. Turn the heat off, add agar-agar and mix well. Pour it on the panna cotta and let it set in the refrigerator for 20 minutes to form a layer.

■ De-mold it from the silicone mold on the coconut base. Serve cold garnished with fresh berries, berry compote and fresh mint.

Health Benefits:

"The two main components of this dessert are avocados and kiwi. The avocado is a rather unique fruit. It is a green, pear-shaped fruit which is loaded with healthy fats, fibre and various important nutrients. While most fruits consist primarily of carbohydrates, avocado is high in healthy fats. Avocados are also a high in vitamins and minerals. Kiwi is an excellent source of vitamin C. It is loaded with antioxidants, serotonin, dietary fibres and omega 3 fatty acids," says Abdul Shaikh, junior pastry chef, Sorted Delicatessen.



TAPIOCA AND PALM JAGGERY PARFAIT

Ingredients:

■ 50gm tapioca, 200ml milk, 25gm palm jaggery, 20gm tender coconut, 50gm litchi (optional), 20ml condensed milk, 10gm pistachio

Method:

■ Soak the tapioca pearls in water for 20 minutes

■ Take the milk in a pan and boil the soaked



STRAWBERRY TART

Ingredients:

For the tarts
■ 1 cup jowar flour, ½ tsp ground chia seeds, 3tbsp chilled butter, 1tsp sweetener, a pinch of salt

For the filling

■ 200gm strawberries, 1tsp sweetener, 2tsp cornflour, a dash of lemon juice

Method:

■ Combine all the ingredients and rub it between palms

■ Add little water and knead it into a soft dough

■ Roll the dough gently. Put it into two six-inch pie dishes

■ Prick it with a fork and blind bake it in a pre-heated oven at 180 degrees Celsius for 15 to 20 minutes

■ Keep aside to cool completely.

For the filling
■ Combine the strawberries in a cup of water, mix well, and cook the mix till it is mushy

■ Combine the cornflour with 1tbsp of water, mix well and

add to the strawberry mixture

pistachio and serve.

Health Benefits:

"Palm jaggery is an excellent substitute for white sugar in cakes and puddings as it keeps them moist. It tastes equally sweet, but it gives the parfait that touch of rich and robust flavour. Also palm jaggery is high in nutrients and glycaemic index," says Amit Bajaj, executive chef, Glocal Junction.

For the tarts

■ Combine all the ingredients and rub it between palms

■ Add little water and knead it into a soft dough

■ Roll the dough gently. Put it into two six-inch pie dishes

■ Prick it with a fork and blind bake it in a pre-heated oven at 180 degrees Celsius for 15 to 20 minutes

■ Keep aside to cool completely.

For the filling

■ Combine the strawberries in a cup of water, mix well, and cook the mix till it is mushy

■ Combine the cornflour with 1tbsp of water, mix well and

add to the strawberry mixture

■ Once thick, add the sweetener and lime juice, mix well and cool.

Assembling the dish
■ Take the tarts, fill with strawberry mixture

■ Garnish it with mint sprig and serve chilled.

Health Benefits:

"This is a gluten-free and sugar-free treat. You can replace jowar with any other gluten-free flour like bajra, rajgira (amaranth) or buckwheat," says Rakhee Vaswani, celebrity chef and owner, Palate Culinary Studio and Academy.



PINEAPPLE SHEERA WITH CARMELISED PINEAPPLE

Ingredients:

For the pineapple sheera
■ 1/2 cup pineapple (peeled and chopped), 1/2 cup semolina, 1/2 cup ghee, 1 pinch saffron, 1/2 cup sugar, 4 cashew nuts, 4 almonds

For the caramelised pineapple
■ 1 small pineapple, 1tbsp butter, 1/4 cup sugar

For the coco mascarpone mousse
■ 1/2 cup heavy cream, 1 1/2 tsp powdered sugar, 1/2 tsp vanilla essence, 112gm mascarpone cheese, 1/2 tsp coconut essence, 1/4 cup thick coconut milk, 2tbsp coconut rum

For saffron and ginger syrup
■ 1/8 cup sugar, 1/8 cup water, 1/4 tsp saffron, 1/4 tsp fresh ginger (chopped)

For garnish
■ Edible flower (optional), dehydrated pineapple (optional), toasted dried coconut, cacao nibs (optional)

Method:

For the sheera
■ Heat ghee in a pan, add semolina and cook stirring continuously till it turns golden brown

■ Add saffron and mix. Add chopped pineapple and cook for three to four minutes

■ Add a cup of water, mix well and then cover with a lid and cook on medium heat for three to four minutes

■ Ideally consume within three days of preparation. Refrigerate if keeping longer than three days. Freeze for even longer storage.

Health Benefits:
"This recipe is my attempt at creating a nutritious, vegan and gluten-free cake from scratch with ingredients that are available locally," says Raveena Taurani, founder and CEO, Yogisattva.

■ Now, add sugar and keep stirring the mix till all the moisture evaporates and semolina is cooked fully

■ Add chopped nuts to it and keep aside.

For the caramelised pineapple
■ Peel and cut the pineapple into slices and core it with a round cutter

■ Heat butter in a non-stick pan over medium high heat

■ Coat pineapple slices with sugar and place in hot pan

■ Cook turning once and keep shaking the pan often, until golden brown. This should approximately take no more than 10 minutes

■ Set the pineapple aside.

For the coco mascarpone mousse
■ Using an electric mixer, whip the heavy cream with powdered sugar, vanilla essence and coconut essence

■ Beat until cream thickens and forms thick peaks, about three to four minutes

■ In a medium bowl, beat the mascarpone cheese, coconut milk and coconut rum until just combined

■ Using a rubber spatula, fold in half of the whipped cream until just combined

■ Add the remaining and repeat until just incorporated

■ Chill mousse for at least an hour before serving.

For the saffron and ginger syrup
■ Combine all the ingredients in a pan

■ Turn on medium heat and stir until sugar is dissolved

■ Then turn off the heat and allow syrup to steep until it has cooled

■ Strain and transfer to a bowl

■ Store it in the refrigerator.

Assembling the dish
■ Scoop out the sheera on a serving plate followed by caramelised pineapple rings

■ Top it up with dollops or quenelle of coco mascarpone mousse and drizzle on it the saffron and ginger syrup

■ Garnish it with edible flower, toasted dried coconut, dehydrated pineapple and cacao nibs, and serve.

Health benefits:
"We can say that it is the best representation of a pina colada dessert version, as sheera or halwa is loved by all. What's more is that pineapple is rich in fibre and good for digestive issues," says, Nishant Mitra, Head Chef, Eddie's Bistro.

