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Nature of aromatherapy is oils

Highland Park: Expert says scent is secondary to internal effects

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By ANGELA JOHNSON / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

When Michelle Shelmire first went to France to study aromatherapy, she just thought it would be a fun thing to do.

"I had no idea it would change my life," said Ms. Shelmire, owner of Flower Road Natural Therapies in Highland Park.

Since her introduction to the field, she has studied in the Languedoc region of France for the last seven years.

Aromatherapy is the use of essential oils, those derived directly from the plant material, to create a physiological effect in the body

"I got into it because I was not well. I was a dancer until I was 35; then I had a clothing line for a while, and then I got really sick," Ms. Shelmire said. "I was under a lot of stress. I had been on inhalers, and they weren't really working, so I started searching out other alternative ways to deal with my asthma."

After she got started in the field, Ms. Shelmire obtained her massage license and was invited to study with Patrick Collin, a world-renowned aromaterapist, in clinical aromatherapy.

Contrary to popular belief, smells aren't critical to the study and application of aromatherapy, she said. Smells are more important in aromacology, the study of how smells affect the mind.

"We never smelled any oils because, again, it doesn't matter what the oils smell like," Ms. Shelmire said of her aromatherapy studies with Mr. Collin. "What is important are the chemical families and the reaction they have inside the body."

Although often referred to as "new age" healing, aromatherapy actually is an ancient field. Ms. Shelmire works from the ancient Hippocratic system, which separates people into phlegmatic, melancholic, sanguine and choleric categories. The system provides a starting point in understanding a person's natural makeup.

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Photos by MONA REEDER/DMN

Michelle Shelmire, an aromatherapist and owner of Flower Road Natural Therapies in Highland Park, says that contrary to popular belief, scents aren't crucial to the practice of aromatherapy. The key is the body's internal reaction to the oils.

This natural medicine system has been around 2,500 years, along with Ayurvedic medicine and traditional Chinese medicine. Pierre Franchomme, a French scientist, created a system in the late-1900s of using two charts – one of the Hippocratic temperaments, the other of essential oil families – to develop a basis for formulating essential oils for individual healing.

Aromatherapy treatment is Ms. Shelmire's most popular service and the most common way she applies essential oils. It is a combination of Swedish stroking and lymphatic drainage along with the application of the individualized formula.

Ms. Shelmire also works with a plastic surgeon to help clients recover from various lifts and liposuction.

Rick Lawrence has used aromatherapy to treat a shoulder problem for the last year. He said the results have been impressive.

"After about two months of treatment, it completely disappeared." The treatment also helped his allergies and knee problems, he said.