

The Essential Oil of Plai

A new oil has recently come to the attention of aromatherapists in New Zealand, and it's sweeping through Aromatherapy circles as the Number One essential oil for pain control. That oil is **Plai** (pronounced like "ply" as in plywood).

Plai (Zingiber cassumunar) is a relative of Ginger, but has a milder odour. Ginger, with its strong anti-spasmodic and analgesic properties, we already know to be an excellent oil for tired and sore muscles. Plai is even more potent in those characteristics, and its pain-relieving properties are truly phenomenal. An example illustrates how powerful Plai's analgesic or pain-relieving properties are.

An aromatherapist in New Zealand works with patients with life-threatening illnesses, helping them with issues such as pain relief. She is astounded at the effectiveness of Plai (even in low concentrations, in a carrier oil) for the relief of bone cancer in the spine (a VERY painful condition).

A major difference between Ginger and Plai is that Ginger is warming and stimulating, while Plai is cooling. In addition to its analgesic effect, Plai has strong anti-inflammatory properties, and it is this that gives it its cooling effect.

The essential oil of Plai is steam distilled from the rhizome (roots) of the Plai plant, which is grown in Thailand. Plai is generally harvested from the wild, and it has been used as a healing plant by the indigenous people of Thailand. In more recent times the essential oil has been used by Thai massage therapists.

Properties of Plai

As well as being a powerful analgesic, Plai has strong anti-spasmodic and anti-inflammatory properties.

1. Muscular pain and cramping

Plai's properties make it ideal for application on:

- Muscle aches and pains
- Inflammation
- Joint problems
- Muscle spasms
- Sprains and strains

In other words, for any kind of muscle, joint or connective tissue pain, discomfort or damage, the oil of Plai will give amazing relief. Certainly, there are also other essential oils that can give very good relief for conditions such as these — in particular, Kunzea and Helichrysum. However, neither of those two oils can give the same degree of instant, immediate relief, nor the same degree of longer-term recovery, as Plai oil.

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2. Joint problems and inflammation

Plai has been used successfully to treat various joint problems, especially where inflammation is present. Examples include bursitis of the knee, and tennis elbow, both painful conditions due to inflammation of soft tissues in the joint.

Plai has also helped ease the pain and inflammation of arthritis. One case study mentions a man who had arthritis in the left knee for some years. He used a blend of Plai, Black Pepper and Lemon for 4 to 5 days, and found immediate relief within half an hour, and after each treatment after that. Even though he just used the blend for a few days, his arthritis and inflammation subsided over a period of several months, with only the occasional flare-up.

Suggested oils for a joint blend, in with the Plai, include Black Pepper, Lemon, Orange, Himalayan Cedarwood, Helichrysum and/or Kunzea.

3. Menstrual and female health problems

Applied externally Plai has been used successfully for the relief of menstrual cramping, and endometriosis. One suggested blend for this application is to mix Plai with Marjoram and Orange, and apply across the lower back and front abdomen every 15 minutes until pain subsides. Geranium is also a good oil to add to a blend for female hormonal issues.

4. Digestive upsets

Ginger is well known for its healing effect on the digestive system, and Plai is no exception. It has been used externally to treat digestive upsets, and specifically for irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

For IBS a blend of Plai, mixed with other essential oils in a carrier oil, can be applied across the abdomen any time there is cramping and pain. Suggested oils to include in this blend are Black Pepper, Orange and Tarragon.

5. Dental problems

The author has personal experience of Plai's amazing pain-relieving properties, when I developed severe toothache at the start of Easter. The pain control blend I first used didn't really change the level of pain, which was so severe that sleep was difficult. However, after adding Plai to the blend, the pain was soon gone, and I could enjoy the remaining days of Easter until I was able to pay a visit to the dentist. The inflammation that was causing the severe pain also subsided with the continued regular application of Plai — so much, in fact, that antibiotics were not required after the tooth extraction.

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Plai has also been used successfully for relieving pain and aiding healing after tooth extractions.

Using Essential Oils for Massage

When using essential oils in massage, it is important to dilute them in a carrier oil. If you are applying the essential oils to a large area of the body of healthy adults, the general rule is not to exceed a 5% concentration of essential oils.

To make a 5% dilution, add 20 drops total of essential oils to 20 ml of carrier oil. If you are blending several oils, the total amount of essential oil should add up to no more than 20 drops in 20 ml of the carrier oil. If you use a different amount of carrier oil, then vary the number of drops of essential oil accordingly (eg. 10 drops total in 10 ml of carrier oil).

For more information about using Plai, or blending it into suitable synergistic blends, please contact the author, Glenys Earle, at info@nmoils.com

Summary

Plai is still a relatively little known oil, and doesn't as yet have a long history of use in New Zealand. Aromatherapists are still collecting data as to its properties and potential applications.

However, its performance so far in the areas of pain relief, inflammation and relief from spasms and cramping, suggest that it should be an essential addition to any massage therapist's kit of essential oils. More encouraging, no contraindications so far have been noted.

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(from source material by Peter Archer, Dip Aromatherapy)**

**New Millennium Oils
www.nmoils.com**

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