

The Essential Oil of Kunzea

Kunzea (Kunzea ambigua) is a relatively new essential oil from Australia, which first came to our attention at the end of 2005, at a seminar conducted by Dr Daniel Péroël, the leading French aromatherapist.

Kunzea has a unique chemical composition that makes it a very powerful anti-inflammatory. This property makes it especially good for the relief of joint pain, such as rheumatoid arthritis. It can also be combined into a massage blend with other oils for the relief of sore muscles.

Its strong anti-infectious properties make it a good additive to cold and flu blends, and it is mild and gentle on the skin.

Kunzea is also great for treating insect bites and stings, where it has the dual action of relieving the inflammation and preventing infection from taking hold.

The essential oil of Kunzea is distilled from the leaves and fine twigs of the Kunzea ambigua bush, which grows in Tasmania, Australia.

History of Kunzea

In 1993 John Hood, a farmer in north-eastern Tasmania, was taking a break from working on his 1000-acre farm. He was sitting on a log, in an area of low-grade bush that he was clearing, and he happened to notice that the fence on his north boundary was still in perfect condition, even though it had been built way back in 1958, some 35 years previously. Other fences in the area had fallen into such bad disrepair they had been replaced years earlier.

John noticed that the fence was in especially good condition wherever there happened to be a particular type of bush growing nearby, but in other areas, where this bush was not growing, the same fence had deteriorated, in some cases very badly. John became very curious as to what properties of that bush could have preserved the fence timber for such a long time period.

John knew that none of the trees native to Tasmania were supposed to have substantial amounts of oil, so what was different about this bush? He decided to have it identified and also to extract samples of oil from it, with the possibility foremost in his mind of its powerful anti-oxidant properties being useful in the wood-finishing industry.

However, fate intervened. While John was bottling the oil samples, he happened to spill some oil on his hands. As a result of having worked in the gold refining industry, he had a serious sinus condition, and had lost his sense of smell and partly lost his sense of taste. He often needed to rub his nose vigorously, and he just happened to do this while the oil was all over his hands. In his own words, "the oil blew the sinus problem away". He immediately began to wonder what else the oil might do for other health problems.

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The next step for John was to find a group of “guinea pigs” willing to try out the oil for their various day-to-day minor health complaints. He was able to enlist his large extended family of seven sisters and all their families and friends, around 80 people in total. These people used the oil as their first line of treatment for their various health complaints and accidents, and then reported back to John. As the feedback started coming back, it was “surprisingly positive and diverse”. Armed with this information, John was able to take the first steps towards developing and marketing the oil.

Eventually, samples of Kunzea oil came into the hands of Dr Daniel Péroël, who immediately became very excited about it, together with another new Australian oil, Fragonia™. Kunzea has now been registered with the Australian TGA (Therapeutic Goods Administration), one of the few essential oils on the market to have undergone this process.

Properties of Kunzea

Some of the many therapeutic uses for Kunzea that John and many others since have identified are as follows:

1. Inflammation

We have found Kunzea to be the Number One essential oil for inflammation of all types. This is due to its unique biochemistry of five C15 compounds (see *Kunzea's Unique Chemical Composition* below).

Kunzea has helped many people suffering from the pain of arthritis, especially rheumatoid arthritis. It has also proved itself as effective for many different types of joint pain, including before and after surgery to joints like the knees. Kunzea is mild enough to be rubbed neat on the skin of affected joints.

We have personally found Kunzea excellent for giving amazingly fast relief from the pain and inflammation of insect and spider bites. We have both been bitten by the Australian white tail spider, and in each case, Kunzea relieved the pain almost instantaneously, reduced the redness and swelling within a very short time, plus its anti-infectious properties ensured that no infection took hold. (White tail spider bites are full of bacteria, and if left untreated, can lead to necrosis, or death, of affected tissue.)

Dr Péroël reported the case of a patient of his whom he treated for severe inflammation inside her lungs as a side-effect of radiotherapy for breast cancer treatment. Her lungs were not infected, simply inflamed, as though they had been burnt. During treatment with Kunzea, her body's inflammatory reaction decreased and her energy levels improved. When the Kunzea treatment was stopped after two weeks, her energy level dropped significantly and her inflammatory response started to rise again.

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2. Muscle pain and injuries

Kunzea can also be combined with other oils into a powerful massage blend for the relief of sore muscles. Useful oils to include with Kunzea in a massage blend are Plai, Cajeput, Marjoram, Ginger and Black Pepper.

The well-known Australian aromatherapist, Mark Webb, lists among its many properties that Kunzea promotes rapid repair of soft tissue injuries, such as sprains and strains.

And a testimonial from a physiotherapist has stated that by using a low-dose quantity of Kunzea oil in massage oil, it reduces the dryness of his skin, which is the opposite effect that most massage oils have on the skin of his hands. He has had zero negative reactions from any clients, and also is using the undiluted Kunzea oil for its “significant analgesic effects on painful joints”.

3. Microbial Infections (bacterial, fungal and viral)

Kunzea has strong anti-infectious and antimicrobial properties, which make it a good addition to a blend for treating colds and flu. It is particularly beneficial for reducing the infection in the early-stage onset of a cold.

Kunzea is also excellent for respiratory and throat infections. Use it in a throat gargle or steam inhalation. Kunzea has the added benefit that its anti-inflammatory properties are very good for soothing inflamed respiratory passages and lungs.

For even greater effect, you can add Fragonia to your steam inhalation or gargle. Both oils are gentle and mild, and they have a great synergy together.

The results of microbiological testing undertaken by Tasmanian Laboratory Services show that Kunzea oil is effective against staphylococci and legionella. Mark Webb, in his book “*Bush Sense*”, mentions Kunzea's effectiveness against *Staphylococcus aureus* (golden staph), *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, *Escherichia coli*, and the fungal *Candida albicans*.

4. Dental pain and inflammation

Kunzea oil has successfully been used as a dental antiseptic and anti-inflammatory. One of us, Peter, has several teeth with broken fillings, and has not made it to the dentist yet to have them fixed. With some of the teeth, the gums were sore and somewhat inflamed. By applying neat Kunzea oil, several times daily, with a cotton bud, the inflammation cleared up and bacterial growth is being stopped.

John Hood also commented that he has had similar success with dental use, and that his own dentist now keeps a supply of bottles of Kunzea oil in his surgery. If a patient comes in needing urgent dental work and he is not able to fit them in for a few days, the dentist gives that patient a bottle of the Kunzea oil, with instructions to apply the oil to the broken tooth, and

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the gum of that tooth, every day until they come back for the appointment to have the tooth fixed.

5. Other therapeutic uses

Mark Webb lists a wide variety of conditions that have been helped by Kunzea oil, including the following:

- Skin conditions such as eczema, dermatitis, rashes, and even recurring shingles
- Undernail infections and leg ulcers
- Persistent tinea
- Chillblains
- Minor burns
- Migraine headaches
- Topical bruises.

Mark also recommends Kunzea's use as an insect repellent and room deodoriser. Other sources report its use for odour control in a rest home for the elderly, with the additional benefit of Kunzea having a calming effect on rest-home residents.

Another testimonial is from a doctor who praises the anti-inflammatory properties of Kunzea oil in regard to rapidly healing the small puncture wounds made to veins when doing repeated injections. This was in the context of cancer treatment, where patients are often given many injections in a relatively short time-frame, often leading to a condition where the veins at the injection sites become "so irritated that further injections have to be postponed for at least seven days, usually longer, thus delaying treatment".

This testimonial goes on to state that by rubbing Kunzea oil into the injection site several times per day, he was able to "give over 200 consecutive daily injections with no ensuing irritation at all. The therapeutic response is surprisingly fast; with one patient almost instantaneous."

6. Treatment of horses

Kunzea trials for the treatment of "Greasy Heel" in horses has shown very promising results. Greasy Heel is a condition of horses' hooves that starts out as a bacterial infection and eventually progresses to a fungal condition.

Kunzea's Unique Chemical Composition

Analogous to Fragonia™, another Australian oil, Kunzea is a very balanced and unusual essential oil in its biochemical composition.

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Kunzea contains five C15 (or sesquiterpine) molecules. This is unique in that while some other essential oils may contain two or three, Kunzea is the only one known to contain five of these molecular compounds. Sesquiterpine compounds have strong anti-inflammatory properties, giving Kunzea its powerful ability to relieve inflammation. The five C15 compounds present in Kunzea are globulol, viridiflorol, spathulenol, ledol and bicyclogermacrene.

As with all natural healing products derived directly from Nature, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. The five C15 compounds work together, and in combination with other constituents of Kunzea, in a very holistic and balanced way.

Another unusual biochemical property of Kunzea is that of its two major constituents, alpha-pinene and 1,8 cineole, the pinene is present in a larger percentage than the cineole. This is very unusual, in that the opposite is the case for most other similar essential oils, such as Eucalyptus. The presence of these two compounds gives Kunzea its powerful properties for treating all manner of respiratory conditions.

Its low percentage of cineole means that it is very safe to use on the skin, even at 100% concentration. John Hood states that he has deliberately used Kunzea oil on himself every single day for over 10 years, and has never had a skin reaction or any other adverse reaction.

As with all essential oils, a certain amount of caution is advised when using it neat on the skin, especially for repeated use over a long time-span, and also especially for anyone with sensitive skin. For people with especially sensitive skin, or with a known history of reacting to essential oils, a patch test is advised.

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 Kunzea, or blending it into suitable synergistic blends, please contact the author, Glenys Earle, at info@nmoils.com

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Summary

Although Kunzea is still a relatively unknown essential oil, it has been widely used for many different conditions in Australia during the early years of John Hood's research into its properties.

It has proved itself to be a very powerful anti-inflammatory, as well as a great treatment for infections of all kinds, respiratory conditions, as well as muscle and soft tissue injury.

Kunzea is mild on the skin, and so far there have been no reports of contraindications, including skin sensitisation occurring. In fact, in at least one case, it has proved effective in preventing skin dryness.

Alongside Fragonia™, Kunzea is safe, gentle, and "must have" for every essential oil first-aid kit or massage therapist's essential oil kit.

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

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