Ancient Perfumery

By Kylie Olson
What Was Perfume Used For?

- Incense: Religious temples (everyday use and ceremonies) and households.
- To mask foul smells in public areas. An example of such use was for masking the smell of dead bodies.
- Theaters (rose water sprinkled throughout)
- Public Baths
- Skin: Scenting and moisturizing
- Necklaces: To ward off plague
My Focus: The art of crafting perfumed oils for the skin like people of ancient times did.

- Ways of crafting perfumes: Enfleurage, steeping in oil, steeping in oil and water, pressing, boiling, and steaming.

- I decided to tackle one method: Steeping in oil.

- It’s just like tea! Except it is a longer task with a lot of careful steps.

- Oil perfumes for the skin were known as unguents.
What I needed:

-Research! How other people have recreated ancient perfumes and Pliny the Elder were a lot of help.

-Herbs, oven-safe bowls, crock pots, pot and stove, mortar and pestle, oils, linen tea bags, glass bottles, sharpie, spoon, measuring spoons, and the wonderful wisdom from Lynn Austin.
Oils

- Popular oils used in ancient times were olive oil and almond oil. I used olive oil and apricot oil. Oils without scents worked best because the fragrance from the herbs was what was important.
Herbs

-In the ancient world herbs and spices were of luxury and traded around the ancient world.

-To keep it simple I used a select few of popular (found in many other DIY perfume projects) base notes, middle notes, and top notes. What are those notes I’m talking about?
Herbs I used:

-Base Notes: Frakincense and Myrrh

-Middle Notes: Rose, Cinnamon, Yellow Sandalwood, and Honey.

-Top Notes: Marjoram, Anise, Coriander, and Tonka Beans.
The Ancient Process:

- Create oil
- Gather plants and/or animals and use as necessary
- Use own measurements
- Let steep
- Depending on where the creator of the perfume lived depended on how they steeped their oils.
My Process:

-Go to an herb shop, it is a lot of fun.

-Gather materials needed for steeping.

-Gather oils, base notes, middle notes, and top notes of your choosing. (Take a look around and take a few whiffs!)

-Place the oil in an oven safe bowl, place selected herbs into a linen tea bag, place the tea bag in the bowl of oil, place bowl (covered) in crockpot or stovetop pot, very low heat (so you don’t burn the oil!), let steep between 24-72 hours, squeeze all liquid out of the linen bags, pour perfumed oil into bottles.
The Herb Shop

- A cute little herb shop in Green Bay at 1449 Morrow St. (Small house with no visible shop sign, covered by trees and has a weird driveway, I missed it three times before I found it) Go visit, it is super cool.

- Owned by Lynn Austin

- 1 of 2 herb shops in Green Bay (the other one might be closed actually)

- Mentor and new friend!

- Visit her facebook page!

- She is also in the middle of directing a historical research project of Green Bay’s natural history. www.labaye.org
Perfume #1:

- 2 TBSP of apricot oil
- ¼ TSP of frankincense
- 1 TSP of Rose
- 1 TSP of yellow sandalwood
- 1 TSP of Marjoram
Perfume #2 (My personal version of Telinum):

- 2 TBSP of olive oil
- Small squirt of honey
- ¼ TSP of myrrh
- 1 TSP of cinnamon
- 1 TSP of marjoram
Perfume #3:

- 2 TBSP of apricot oil
- ¼ TSP of frankincense
- 1 TSP of yellow sandalwood
- 1 tonka bean
Perfume #4:

- 2 TBSP of apricot oil
- ¼ TSP of myrrh
- 1 TSP of rose
- 1 TSP of coriander
Perfume #5:

- 2 TBSP of apricot oil
- ¼ TSP of frankincense
- 1 TSP of rose
- 1 TSP of anise
Perfume #6:

- 2 TBSP of olive oil
- ¼ TSP of myrrh
- 1 TSP of yellow sandalwood
- ¼ TSP of cinnamon
- 1 TSP of coriander
- 1 tonka bean
Sources

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Pliny the Elder- Natural History