

Hydrosols: The Distillation of Energy



by Saskia Marjoram

SASKIA MARJORAM is an experienced essence producer who has worked with essences for over 15 years. Here, she shares with us her explorations and musings on the hydrosols she makes using her copper alembic still. She explains the process of distillation and describes the energetic differences she has found between an essence mother tincture and a hydrosol.

MY JOURNEY TO MAKE AND USE HYDROSOLS

I have been learning from flowers my whole life and making vibrational essences for the last fifteen years. Growing up close to nature in the rolling hills and valleys of Stroud, Gloucestershire (UK), my innate love of plants and flowers has continued with parallel careers in gardening and floristry, where I learnt the physical properties of plants before being consciously aware of their energetic properties. Knowing the physical qualities of plants in all of their life stages is, for me, key to understanding their personalities.

I now live in Somerset, where my learning and excitement regarding how plants and humans interact continues to grow. Around five years ago, a friend of mine, Cathy Skipper, who was teaching at the medicinal herb school in Lyon, introduced me to the process of distilling herbs using a copper alembic still. As I have always been interested in the point where the physical and herbal properties of plants and their vibrational/energetic qualities join, hydrosols felt like the perfect crossover point.

Not only did I feel like I had come home when using a still - like lifetime after lifetime of knowledge flooding back in - but I immediately noticed the high vibration of these liquids. Sometimes, when distilling a plant (for instance Mugwort - *Artemesia vulgaris*), the whole room would be pulsating with its energy. In a hydrosol, we have a liquid that not only has all of the herbal qualities of the plant but also its *energy*.

FIRST QUESTIONS

So, of course, the questions start coming. The most pertinent to this article are:

1) What happens if I use the hydrosol instead of spring water to make my flower essences?

2) How different is this to Bach's boiling method?

3) What happens if I dilute this liquid down as if it was a mother essence?

1. USING THE HYDROSOL TO MAKE FLOWER ESSENCES

Using the hydrosol of the plant, instead of spring water, to make a flower essence was the first thing I was drawn to once I started distilling plants. Compared to the ones made at the same time and place as those in spring water (both using the sun method), the hydrosol seemed to address more acute issues.

For example, Willowherb (*Epilobium hirsutum*), held in a hydrosol, came up for people in the first stages of grief/heartbreak; but, as an essence held in spring water, it came up for those suffering from long held grief/grievances. In both cases, Willowherb brings great relief: it works primarily with the heart chakra and helps a person to safely let go.

Hydrosols that contained more essential oils did not feel quite as successful. During the distillation process, the flowers absorbed the oil floating on top which, for me, felt overwhelming and a little too heavy energetically. Many soft tissue plants would be unsuitable to distil and, of course, it would be unsafe to distil poisonous plants.

2. COMPARISON TO BACH'S BOILING METHOD

I had never been drawn to the boiling method and had always used the sun method to make my essences, like many modern essence-makers (although sometimes I used moonlight and the no-cut method too). Therefore, I had not given this area much thought. Those who have studied Bach and his remedies say that his last nineteen essences were made using the boiling method. Here, flowers and plant material are boiled in a non-corrosive pan for thirty minutes to produce a mother essence. These nineteen essences do, it seems, address more acute, intense 'symptoms' than his previous remedies.



This makes sense as the boiling method is so much more vigorous than the sun method. Of course, distillation is more vigorous again as it splits open the cell walls of the plant with steam then recomposes into a liquid form, carrying with it the aromatic components and other chemical constituents of the plant. I feel that distilling a plant is the next stage on from decocting it (boiling method), producing an even more intense energetic experience.

2. DILUTING A HYDROSOL AS A MOTHER ESSENCE

Recently, I have been trialling working with the hydrosols diluted down as you would a mother essence. This has been very interesting and, although I have yet to use them in consultations, so do not have much feedback for them, they feel different from the essences of flowers as, mostly, they are distilled leaves and bark and, to me, feel more earthy, grounded and masculine.

THE DISTILLATION PROCESS

- 1) *Fill the bottom part of the still with spring or well water.*
- 2) *I recommend that you get a still with a column on top - this means that the plant material only comes in contact with steam rather than the cooler boiling water. If you don't have a column the plant material will go in with the spring water. Fill the column as full as possible.*
- 3) *Seal all gaps with a paste of rye flour. This seems to be the only flour that does not crack and come off at high temperatures.*
- 4) *Bring the water up to boiling point, until the hydrosol comes out of the end pipe. Then turn the heat down so that you have a steady stream of drips.*
- 5) *The condenser need to be filled with water which is as cold as possible at all times. I achieve this by using a small electric pump attached to the lower inlet tube and pump it around using a cold water reservoir.*
- 6) *Collect the hydrosol and store in a cool dark place where it should last for at least a year, depending on the plant used. Keep tasting the hydrosol throughout the process to see when the distillation has finished. You will notice a quite obvious drop in quality.*



1

1. Filling the still with well water



2

2. Filling the column with bay leaves



3

3. Sealing the still with rye flour

4. Running
the
still



4



5

5. Inside the condenser

6.
Complete set-
up showing
condenser
and water
pump



6

If you get the chance, I would highly recommend that you get an alembic still and experience the magic of distilling plants for yourself. Mine is a thirty-litre still and probably a bit large for most people - unless you want to start making greater amounts for essence sprays or other things. It costs £350, but you can get smaller ones online for about £100 that are made in Portugal and hold a litre of water.

The process is quite simple, as you can see from the illustrations on the previous page. The main consideration for distilling highly energetic hydrosols is to run the still *slowly*. Most hydrosols that you can buy commercially are the by-product of essential oil production: they run the still 'hard and fast' and, from my experience, these are much less energetic. Only a few plants in the UK give enough essential oil to collect (this floats on top of the hydrosol) and then you would need a still at least as big as mine. Hydrosols are great as alternatives to herb teas, tinctures and for use in skin care.

Bay Laurel (*Laurus nobilis*): Making a Leaf Essence in the Still

“Bay laurel hydrosol is the first choice for cleansing and toning the lymphatic system. It is a fairly broad acting anti-septic, anti-bacterial, general tonic and immune booster.”

Suzanne Catty

Bay Leaf Essence is the diluted hydrosol that I have been drawn to using most. For me, it is fresh, clean and supportive - energising, but protective and very linear in its action. After passing the bottle around at the Chard Essence Group, the following observations were made: “healing the base chakra”; “you won’t deviate from your life’s path with that one”; “powerful and gentle at the same time”; “buzzy” and “open and expansive but safe.”

When I ‘feel into’ the plant, it is strong, sharp-edged and clean. I picture the Greek/Roman statues with their laurel crowns and, before that, the goddesses bestowing them on ‘victors’. The straight, upright growth suddenly takes off speedily - as if it is running a race to the sky; the leaf edges are sharp, keeping everything out of the way as they cut through the air. They feel quite aloof, though the scent of the crushed leaves is enticing.

“Laurel flower essence helps to organise, direct, plan and structure your thoughts in line with your intention. Inspired with the idea and formulating a clear and concise mental picture of exactly what you want, by your intention your highest dreams become a reality”

Findhorn Essences



The garden that has been 'mine' for the last couple of years has lots of bay trees/bushes within its boundaries. They have been slowly giving me their message, but it has taken time for me to properly notice them. I have been drinking the hydrosol in hot water all winter to keep the 'flu away: it feels and smells comforting and reassuring, much softer than the plants in the garden feel. And taking the highly diluted version takes the physical properties away, just leaving the energy, reminding me that it is time to 'get ready, get set, GO.'



IMAGES:

Saskia and the process of distillation courtesy of Saskia Marjoram:
Willowherb, Mugwort and Bay leaves sourced from Shutterstock

WEBSITE:

www.saskiasfloweressences.com

FURTHER INFORMATION

If you would like to trial the bay leaf essence described here, Saskia would be more than happy to send you a bottle for the cost of delivery. All feedback and observations are welcome. Also, if you have any questions about the process described in the article, please feel free to contact Saskia here:

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