

CITRUS

SENSE

Oranges, lemons and grapefruit are seasonal favorites for many, but are they and their oils safe for our animal companions?

BY DR. KIM BLOOMER

Along with all the excitement and anticipation, the holiday season is associated with a variety of traditional scents and flavors. Many are of the citrus variety, whether it's the bowl of tangerines on your sideboard, the orange-scented candles you decorate your house with, or the breakfast grapefruit you serve to your houseguests.

While they smell and taste divine to us, you may be wondering if these fruits and the essential oils derived from them are okay for your dog or cat. I think the occasional piece of citrus fruit is okay as long as it doesn't become regular fare for your animals. Some dogs will "ask" for a piece of orange or grapefruit. And one of my sister's cats loves to occasionally grab the rind of a lemon or orange and munch on it (the peel is where the essential oil comes from).

CITRUS FLEA REPELLENT

8 oz purified water or hydrosol
4 drops lavender essential oil
3 drops peppermint essential oil
2 drops orange or lemon oil
½ dropper calendula tincture
¼ teaspoon vegetable glycerin

Shake well before each use and spritz your dog as needed.



Citrus oils have got a pretty bad rap with animal use. Many people say they're toxic, while others say they're



fine. The truth lies somewhere in between. Like other essential oils, they shouldn't be used neat on cats. Used discriminately, however, and in the form of hydrosols for cats, they can be very beneficial. For example, depending on where you live, fleas can be an issue year round. A natural repellent made from essential oils can be a godsend to your dog (see sidebar on previous page).

Before using citrus oils with your animal, here are some suggestions to keep in mind:

- Know the source of your essential oils. Not all products are created equal. Neither are their suppliers. A so-called "pure" essential oil may contain chemical solvents and other impure ingredients. It's essential to be certain of the therapeutic grade quality and source of your essential oils before using them on either yourself or your animals.

- Listen to your animal – and his likes and dislikes. Just as each of us is unique and individual, so are our dogs and cats. No two are alike, even if they are the same breed. Many people who use the same essential oils I use and trust allow their animals to decide if a particular oil, including citrus, is okay for them. Animals can be very discerning. However, that's not to say you can allow them carte blanche on anything they like. Chocolate is dangerous for dogs, for example, but they'll try to eat it if you don't keep it from them. Use your common sense.

- My good friend and colleague, Dr. Jeannie Thomason, has a saying: "When in doubt, leave it out." I agree. It's always better to err on the side of caution, especially with citrus essential oils.

With care, there's no reason you can't include citrus oils and fruits in your holiday celebrations. Be wise as a serpent and gentle as a dove in your animal aromatherapy use – and enjoy!

THE GRAPEFRUIT QUESTION

A lot of people get confused between grapefruit seed extract and grapefruit essential oil. While both are from the same fruit, they are different products. Grapefruit seed extract comes from the seed, while the oil comes from the skin. Both should always be used in a diluted state with animals, especially the essential oil.

Grapefruit seed extract is often used as a natural antibacterial and can be used to disinfect raw meat. For one pound of meat, take six to eight ounces of purified water and combine it with four drops of grapefruit seed extract (I get mine from Mountain Rose Herbs). Pour the water over the meat. You can drain it off afterwards if feeding raw, or leave it as part of the recipe if you are cooking the meat.

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