

# Spicy Scents

## How to Create Your Own Perfume

In the ancient world, perfumes generally had two to five ingredients, usually spices, mixed with oil.

### 1. Start with oil.

Olive oil was the most common carrier of perfumes in the ancient world, although other oils such as almond were also popular.

### 2. Choose your base notes.

Small amounts of strong, even sometimes unpleasant, scents help bind and blend the final perfume.

Pick one or two of these for your base. A small amount of a single scent is recommended for feminine scents. For masculine scents, use two or a larger amount of one.

Frankincense  
Myrrh  
Labdanum

### 3. Add middle notes and top notes

Middle notes form the heart of your perfume. Top notes evaporate quickly and are the first scent you smell. Choose one to three of each. Use plenty—your final mixture should be at least half spices and half oil.

#### Middle Notes

Rose  
Cinnamon  
Sweet rush  
Styrax

#### Top Notes

Marjoram  
Anise  
Coriander

In the ancient world, perfumes were used to

- worship the gods,
- enhance beauty,
- work magic,
- heal sickness,
- or demonstrate wealth.



Above: Perfume Flask with Lions, Greek, 640–625 B.C.

### 4. At home

For best results, heat your perfume as follows:

Place the oil and spice mixture in a ceramic or glass container. Heat about two inches of water in a saucepan until it boils. Turn it off and put the container in the water until it cools. The heat will draw the fragrant oils from the ingredients to mix with the base oil. Let the perfume steep for twenty-four hours, then strain it. The oil should now be your own original perfume!

\* Parents, please supervise young children for these steps.



Family

Education at the J. Paul Getty Museum  
at the Getty Villa

# Perfumes in the ancient world— see the real objects!

## Exaleiptron



440–430 B.C.

Used in burial ceremonies, this type of vessel likely held perfumes that were offered to honor the dead. It was made to prevent spills—can you tell how?

🔑 Find it on Floor 1: Terracotta and Marble Vessels (Gallery 101 c)

## Incense burners

A.D. 1–50

The ancient world was perfumed not only by precious oils, but also by incense. Temples, public spaces, and private homes were made fragrant by burning some of the same resins (hardened plant sap) used to create perfumes. Examine these objects. Where did the sweet-smelling smoke come out?

🔑 Find them on Floor 1: Dionysos and the Theater (Gallery 114)



## Alabastron and Aryballos

Various dates



These are some of the most beautiful small objects in the Museum's collection. Precious bottles of glass, metal, and painted clay were made to hold expensive perfumes. How much would you pay for handmade bottles filled with a scent designed just for you?

🔑 Find them on Floor 2: Animals in Antiquity (Gallery 201 c)

🔑 Find them on Floor 2: Women and Children in Antiquity (Gallery 207)

🔑 Find them on Floor 2: Molten Color: Glassmaking in Antiquity (Gallery 214)

## Wall Fragment with Cupids and Psyche Making Perfume

A.D. 50–75

A group of cupids tend a perfume shop in this picture. At right, a cupid holds up an alabastron filled with perfume, while Psyche (Cupid's beloved) lifts her arm to smell the scent. Pictures of cupids carrying out everyday activities were meant to be funny, kind of like comic strips in the ancient world!

🔑 Find it on Floor 2: Women and Children in Antiquity (Gallery 207)



## Aphrodite and the Gods of Love

March 28–July 9, 2012

The Greek goddess Aphrodite ruled over love and desire. She inspired mortal women to make themselves beautiful with jewelry and perfumes. Visit this special exhibition to see several finely painted perfume bottles. Can you find the one shaped like a woman's head? (Hint: Look in Gallery 205.)

🔑 Find it on Floor 2: Changing Exhibitions (Gallery 201–205)

Images, from top to bottom: Perfume container, Greek, 440–430 B.C. *Exaleiptron* made of marble and pigment. Gift of Barbara and Lawrence Fleischman, 96.AA.103; Incense burner shaped as a comic actor seated on an altar, Roman, A.D. 1–50. *Thymiaterion* made of bronze and silver. 87.AC.143; Vessels for scented oil, pentagonal designs, Gallo-Roman, A.D. 70–100. *Aryballos* made of bronze and enamel. Gift of Barbara and Lawrence Fleischman, 96.AC.190; Wall fragment with Cupids and Psyche making perfume, Roman, A.D. 50–75. Fresco made of plaster and pigment, 72.AG.81