Aromatherapy

But thanks be to God,

who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession,

and through us spreads in every place

the fragrance that comes from knowing him.

*(2 Corinthians 2:14)*

**How the Nose Knows: Above our nasal cavity is the area responsible for smell – the olfactory epithelium. No bigger than a postage stamp, it contains millions of receptor cells that end in cilia swimming in a layer of mucus. Much about these cells’ function is unknown, and the process through which we perceive and recognize odors is a mystery. *(Louise Kiernan, in Reader’s Digest)***

**Nose Muzak: Scents are starting to seep into all corners of our lives. In recent years the concept of aromatherapy has blossomed, with everyone from beauty salons and spas to cosmetics giants getting into the act. Based on the idea that the essential oils of plants have specific healing properties, aromatherapy dates back to ancient Egypt and India. The term is confusing because the oils don’t have to be directly inhaled: they can be diffused through a room, massaged into the body or added to a hot bath. Rose oil is supposed to fight viral infections, calm the nerves and stimulate sexual desire. Tea-tree oil from Australia is said to heal wounds and open the respiratory passages. Fennel may tone mature skin. Science is trying to sort through the lore. But businesses have long used scents to entice us to buy – fanning the aroma of fresh-baked cookies through a bakery or spraying “new car” smell in old clunkers. What’s known as “environmental fragrancing” is more sophisticated. In its infancy here, this approach is big in Japan. There companies commonly use scent-distribution systems to increase worker productivity and relieve stress: citrus scents are used to energize, peppermint to increase alertness and lavender to relax. Still, experts say the American workplace is unlikely to be taken over by nose Muzak. “I just don’t see it being put through buildings where people don’t have any choice,” says Annette Green, president of the Olfactory Research Fund, Ltd., in New York City. *(Louise Kiernan, in Reader’s Digest)***

**Cleopatra seduced Mark Antony amid heaps of rose petals, legend says. Ever since, people have perfumed themselves to attract – or at least to avoid offending -- others. This year Americans will spend billions on scents to soothe, revitalize, provoke and excite. *(Louise Kiernan, in Reader’s Digest)***

**Bees that can sniff for mines: Land mines have killed more than 300 people in Croatia – including 66 working to deactivate them – since the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s ended. Now Croatian researchers are developing a new tool to locate the estimated 250,000 mines still buried in formerly wartorn regions across former Yugoslavia: trained honeybees. Unlike people – or dogs and rats, which have been employed to sniff out land mines – honeybees are too light to trigger the devices, and their excellent sense of smell lets them pick up a scent up to three miles away. To train bees to hunt for TNT, researchers from Zagreb University corral numerous hives inside a tent with pots containing different-smelling solutions. Only the pots that give off a whiff of TNT contain a sugar-water reward, training the bees to associate the explosive with food. Researchers hope the bees will soon be ready to fly over fields that have already been checked for mines to find those that may have been missed. “There are never zero mines on a de-mined field,” bee expert Nikola Kezic tells the Associated Press, “and that’s where bees could come in.” *(The Week magazine, June 7, 2013)***

**Contrary to popular myth, if humans handle an egg or baby bird and put it back in the nest, its mother will never know. Most birds have a very poor sense of smell. *(Don Voorhees, in The Perfectly Useless Book of Useless Information, p. 160)***

**Bad week for: Body wash, with a new Virginia Tech University study’s finding that certain “flowery, fruity” soaps make humans more attractive to mosquitoes. These scents make us “smell like a flower and a person at the same time,” a researcher said. *(The Week magazine, May 26, 2023)***

**Certain aromas can lower your blood pressure, if those medical specialists known as “aromatherapists” are to be believed. They insist aromas also can relieve pain. Which aromas do what to whom they won’t publicize. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**Perfume shop: "We have no common scents." *(Harold Helfer, in Catholic Digest)***

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**A German firm says it’s doing brisk business selling the odor of cow flatulence sealed in a can. Designer Daniela Dorrer says the product, which retails for $8, is aimed mainly at city dwellers who now pine for the aromas of their childhood. “We are planning other smells such as horse, straw, pigs, and manure,” said Dorrer. “But most people miss the smell of cows in the country – not really surprising as much of the smell is from cows.” *(The Week magazine, March 18, 2011)***

**Doesn’t hurt us to remember when near barnyards, if ever, that cows smell us before we smell them. Presumably. It has been proven cattle are far more sensitive than people, nostrilly speaking. *(L. M. Boyd)***

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**Good week for: Sniffing out a partner, after a New York matchmaking service launched "Smell Dating," which allows users to find potential mates by sniffing swatches of their unwashed t-shirts. "You either really like the smell of someone or you don't," said founder Tega Brain. *(The Week magazine, April 8, 2016)***

**My sister-in-law and her husband returned from a trip to the Virgin Islands and brought me some delightful cologne for my birthday. They presented it to me at a family gathering and, since everyone wanted to smell the cologne, I passed it around. When one of the recently married males in the family had his turn to smell it, his eyes popped wide open. "Wow!" he exclaimed. "I've dated that!" *(Bonnie Smith, in Reader's Digest)***

**Smells detonate softly in our memory like poignant land mines hidden under the weedy mass of years. *(Diane Ackerman, in A Natural Histyory of the Senses)***

**Long dismissed as the basest of the five senses, smell may be the most powerful. Suddenly what Helen Keller called the “fallen angel” of the senses is the object of serious attention. In pinpointing how smell affects our minds and bodies, researchers are discovering it exerts more influence over us than previously thought. *(Louise Kiernan, in Reader’s Digest)***

**Dogs have about one billion olfactory (smell) receptors. People only have 40 million. *(Don Voorhees, in The Perfectly Useless Book of Useless Information, p. 164)***

**Dennis says to his Mom: “I’m sure glad I don’t need perfume to smell like a boy.” *(Hank Ketcham, in Dennis the Menace comic strip)***

**Febreze air fresheners: for people who are like, "Cover a smell instead of cleaning it? Yes, I'm OK with that." *(Erin Whitehead)***

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**We are so conditioned to associating fragrance with pretty flowers that we automatically think they're all sweet-smelling. Wrong. A survey showed that out of 4,000 species of flowers, only 400 gave off a pleasant smell. The same survey showed the flowers with white or cream-colored petals gave off the most perfume. (Bernie Smith, in The Joy of Trivia, p. 223)**

**Flowers are to the tropics what fish are to the sea, and they breed in that warm, moist earth without restriction or inhibition. Soon after sunrise the flowers, both wild and cultivated, are discharging at peak strength, and their massed scents disperse like nerve gas on the cool morning air. Last year I visited Fiji, and outside my hotel room stood a mature frangipani tree in full bloom. The smell of those hundreds of white and gold flowers assaulted the senses likke trumpets. The girl who brought breakfast wore perfume out of a bottle and it struck a discordant note, like a snatch of heavy metal in the middle of Mozart. (Alexander Frater, in High Life, England)**

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**The fragrance always stays in the hand that gives the rose. (Hada Bejar)**

**Fish and visitors stink in three days. (Benjamin Franklin)**

**Friends smell alike: There may be a biological reason why certain people become besties – they smell the same. In a small study, researchers at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel used an “electronic nose” to sniff T-shirts worn by 20 pairs of non-romantic, same-sex friends who said they had clicked when they first met. The nose found that each person smelled more like his or her chum than like the other members of the group. The researchers then recruited 17 strangers, analyzed their body odors with the electronic nose, and had them play a nonverbal game together. Sure enough, the pairs that smelled more alike were more likely to say they had an instant connection. The findings make sense, says study co-author Inbal Ravreby, as we tend to befriend people of a similar age, ethnicity, education, and so on. “This is not to say that we act like goats or shrews – humans likely rely on other, far more dominant cues in their social decision making, she tells ScienceDaily.com. “Nevertheless, our study’s results do suggest that our nose plays a bigger role than previously thought in our choice of friends.” *(The Week magazine, July 22, 2022)***

**The smell revolution certainly will continue. And in the future, scents could wake us up, make us alert at the office, help us eat less and set the mood for romance. If we can leave behind those aggressive department-store perfume demonstrators and annoying scent strips in magazines, it may not be so bad. As long as we’re breathing, we can’t help smelling anyhow. So go on, Smell. *(Louise Kiernan, in Reader’s Digest)***

**One of every 15 people who suffer serious head injuries lose their sense of smell. So they no longer can associate memories with odors. Some sufferers say they feel as though they’d lost part of the past. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**The odor of a home has a huge impact on a buyer’s decision. According to a poll done by Royal LePage, a Canadian real estate company, 53 percent of buyers said strong odors such and pet and cigarette smells had a stronger impact on their impression of a home than overall tidiness and cleanliness, strong wall colors or an outdated façade and landscaping. *(Nancy Graham)***

**While humans can distinguish an estimated 10,000 different scents, compared with the olfactory abilities of dogs we are watching black-and-white sets in a color-television world. Bloodhounds, it is believed, track humans from traces of odor in the sweat that seeps through our shoes and in the tiny flakes of dead skin we leave behind us. *(Louise Kiernan, in Reader’s Digest)***

With imagination, you can change your mind's remembrance of sights and sounds, but not of odors. The smell of a rose or sawdust or tar remains as was, in memory. You can't modify it with imagination. *(L. M. Boyd)*

**There is an invisible universe at the tips of our noses,” says Alan Hirsch, a Chicago neurologist and founder of the Smell & Taste Treatment and Research Foundation, Ltd. The self-described “Magellan of the nasal passages” conducts some of the country’s most curious and controversial olfactory research. Among his findings: the scent of green apples may reduce the pain of migraines; barbecue smoke makes spaces seem smaller; mixed floral scents may spur people to buy tennis shoes and finish a maze faster; and sniffing banana, green apple or peppermint could help people lose weight. *(Louise Kiernan, in Reader’s Digest)***

**Gary K. Keauchamp, director of the Monell Center, suggests a simple test: eat some gourmet jelly beans while holding your nose. They’ll all taste alike. If food seems to lose its flavor when you have a cold, it’s because you’ve temporarily lost your sense of smell. Among the reasons: mucus or swollen nasal membranes block the narrow entrance to the top of the nasal cavity. *(Louise Kiernan, in Reader’s Digest)***

**Helen Keller, blind and deaf from an early age, developed her sense of smell so finely that she could identify friends by their personal odors. *(Isaac Asimov’s Book of Facts, p. 418)***

**Bad week for: Ambience, with KFC's launch of a limited-edition gravy-scented candle. The "artisanal" candle supposedly replicates the "familiar and evocative" aroma of KFC's signature gravy, a scent the company described as "staggeringly nose-stimulating." *(The Week magazine, February 1, 2019)***

**Fall was the smell of cherry pies baking in the oven of the wood stove, the smell of hams hanging in the smokehouse, the dry smell of fodder in the fields, and the pungent smell of apples. Fall was for boiling and jarring and waxing and sealing and filling the cupboards and pantries. *(Charles Kuralt, in The Bob Timberlake Collection)***

**The sense of smell is doubtless the least understood and the least appreciated of all of our blessings. Yet the sense of smell influences just about everything we do, although we’re not aware of it until we catch a cold and lose sensation in the sniffer. Dinner wouldn’t be the same without it. Neither would a flower garden or a walk along the seashore. The advertising world is working on it. One of these days soon we’ll be assaulted with a barrage of appealing commercials exploiting the smell of a product, as well as the taste, sight, and price. *(Bernie Smith, in The Joy of Trivia, p. 22)***

**In surveys asking people what sense they’d choose to live without, most pick smell. Yet the loss of this sense, anosmia, can create unforeseen dangers. According to one estimate, at least 2.5 million Americans are anosmic. The condition is commonly caused by head trauma. In October 1995 Willie Smith, Jr., fell from the third floor of his apartment building. Doctors believe his olfactory nerve was severed in the fall. Now he cannot smell the smoke of a fire, spoiled milk or gas leaking from his stove. Which smells does he miss most? “Cooking,” he says, “and women’s perfume. The outdoors, it smells so fresh.” *(Louise Kiernan, in Reader’s Digest)***

**The malaria parasite’s secret: The parasites that cause malaria are fiendishly clever. Once they infect a human host, they apparently change the way the person smells, to make him more attractive to mosquitoes. That way, the infected person’s blood is taken into a new mosquito, and the parasites can hitch a ride to a new host. Malaria, caused by a single-celled organism called plasmodium, spreads very rapidly in areas of the world where it is found, infecting as many as 500 million people a year. To find out how the parasite gets around so fast, researchers in Kenya exposed infected mosquitoes to three groups of children – some in the transmissible stage of malaria, some in the non-transmissible stage, and others who were unaffected. Twice as many mosquitoes swarmed around the children in the transmissible stage than the other two groups. Just to be sure, researchers brought the contagious children back after they were cured – and the mosquitoes then found them less attractive. The children’s body temperature had not changed, so researchers concluded that the parasite was releasing chemicals that somehow altered the scent of its host. “The attractiveness was coming from the parasite, not something intrinsic in the children,” professor Jacob Koella tells New Scientist. If scientists can isolate the scent that makes malaria-infected people attractive to mosquitoes, it could lead to new repellents, or new lures to attract and trap them. That, in turn, could become an effective weapon against the spread of malaria. *(The Week magazine, August 26, 2005)***

**A man who works hard stinks only to the ones that have nothing to do but smell. *(Laura Ingalls Wilder)***

Smell is directly wired to the limbic system – one of the oldest parts of the brain in the evolutionary sense, and the part that loves, lusts, rages and remembers. Because of that, a whiff of a scent from the past can bring forth a flood of feelings and memories. In neurons and synapses lie the truth of Rudyard Kipling’s words: “Smells are surer than sounds or sights to make your heartstrings crack.” *(Louise Kiernan, in Reader’s Digest)*

**To have an odor, a substance must be volatile enough to give off its molecules. We can’t smell marble and glass, for example. We can smell blue cheese. Odor molecules waft into the nostrils on air currents. During normal breathing, only a fraction of air reaches the top of the nasal cavity.l That’s why when we’re trying to smell something, we sniff, which sets off mini-tornadoes in the nose, whisking more odor molecules past the receptor cells. These delicate fronds of the brain then fire messages that arrive in other parts of the brain. *(Louise Kiernan, in Reader’s Digest)***

**So far, research suggests odors do influence moods. In a story at Manhattan’s Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, doctors found that a vanilla-like scent reduced anxiety in patients undergoing MRI scans. But was it the vanilla itself or its associations with baking and other comforting, homey images? *(Louise Kiernan, in Reader’s Digest)***

**The secret allure of moss: Though it lacks the aromatic flowers of flashier plants, moss manages to emit subtle, enticing scents that help it spread its seed. Botanists have long thought that moss relied solely on wind and water to transport sperm from male plants to female ones. So they “were extremely surprised” to discover that female mosses give off “an amazing array of scents” that draw in tiny arthropods such as mites and springtails, which act “like pollinators,” biologist Sarah Eppley of Oregon’s Portland State University tells Phys.org. The ancestors of both mosses and arthropods date back some 450 million years, making them among the first life forms on Earth to establish themselves on land. The new evidence that they may have developed in concert with one another will likely “expand ideas about how plants evolved” and could help explain the existence of flowers and bees and other pollinating insects, Eppley says. Researchers next hope to learn what benefits, if any, the arthropods glean from their efforts. *(The Week magazine, August 10, 2012)***

**There's a new and expensive perfume called "Evening in Arabia" -- it smells just like gasoline. *(Tiger Lyons, in Reader's Digest)***

**Outside a gourmet cooking class: "Remember -- aroma wasn't built in a day." *(Don Maclean)***

**Saleswoman at perfume counter to customer: "If this stuff really worked, would I be standing here eight hours a day?" *(Reamer Keller, in The American Legion Magazine)***

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**The scent of sexuality: Straight and gay men have dramatically different responses to odors believed to govern sexual arousal, a new study finds. Using brain scans to detect excitement, Swedish researchers found that homosexual men had no reaction to pheromones -- olfactory sexual signals -- contained in women's sweat. These men were, however, aroused by pheromones distilled from men's sweat. Straight men were sexually aroused by female pheromones, but were turned off by male pheromones. "This shows that reactions to these pheromones are not linked to gender but to sexual preference," says researcher Per Lindstroem of the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm. Sandra Witelson, an expert on brain anatomy and sexual orientation, says the findings strengthen, but do not prove, the theory that homosexuality is inborn. "It is one more piece of evidence showing that sexual orientation is not learned," she said. *(The Week magazine, May 27, 2005)***

**Hirsch’s coup d’ odeur was a study where he exposed 31 men to 46 different scents to determine which excited them sexually. The winner: a mix of pumpkin pie and lavender that increased penile blood flow by 40 percent. Musk, the scent of the ‘70s, garnered only a seven-percent increase. The biggest loser, cranberry, at two percent. (The Thanksgiving side dish, it appears, isn’t sexy, though Thanksgiving dessert is.) *(Louise Kiernan, in Reader’s Digest)***

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**Man: “Do you ever take the time to smell the roses, Axel?” Axel: Is that what that is? I thought it was your socks.” *(J. C. Duffy, in The Fusco Brothers comic strip)***

**The young father took a seat on the crowded bus next to an elderly man and plopped his one-year-old on his lap just as the little boy began to cry and fidget. “That child is spoiled, isn’t he?” the old man remarked. “No,” said the dad. “They all smell this way.” *(Bestlifeonline.com)***

**Zookeepers have found that tigers and other big cats are fascinated with the smell of Obsession for Men by Calvin Klein. They spray it on logs to keep the animals amused. The felines are also quite taken with the aroma of rhino urine, which is much cheaper. *(Don Voorhees, in The Super Book of Useless Information, p. 1)***

**Scientists in Sweden have found a new treatment for social anxiety: sniffing other people’s body odor. Researchers at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm who used mindfulness exercises to treat women’s social anxiety found that women who were exposed to the smell of armpit sweat collected from volunteers responded better to the therapy. Researcher Elisa Vigna said her team was “a little surprised” at the result, which may indicate that sweat contains “chemo-signals” that affect emotions. *(The Week magazine, April 14, 2023)***

**A sniff of vanilla tends to calm you, evidently. At least, that’s reportedly what doctors at Sloan-Kettering in New York give some patients who have to lie still for long periods during diagnostic exams. Vanilla aroma is said to relax them. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**Good week for: Virtual pheromones, with news that scientists at Malaysia’s Imagineering Institute are working on “digital smell technology” that could soon allow the users of online dating services to send odors to one another. *(The Week magazine, December 14, 2018)***

**Few activities require more precise work of the human nose than wine-tasting, which might more accurately be called wine-smelling. Like “noses” in the perfume industry, great wine-tasters are prodigies of olfaction. French vintner Georges Duboeuf, for instance, can identify 11 different vineyards within a stone’s throw of each other with only a sniff. “Flavors are really just in-mouth scents,” says Robert Bansberg, a Chicago wine steward. We taste only sweet, sour, salty and bitter on our tongues. Everything else we consider taste is actually smell, and most food aromas reach the nasal cavity from the back of the throat in a process called retronasal olfaction. *(Louise Kiernan, in Reader’s Digest)***

**Scent may snare us well before birth. Research at Philadelphia’s Monell Chemical Senses Center suggests we could be influenced by odors in utero, through scents absorbed by our mothers. Exposure to odorous compounds in the womb may make us more likely to find those scents attractive later on in life. Garlic lovers, thus, might be made, then born. *(Louise Kiernan, in Reader’s Digest)***

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