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Birch

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Behind the Sourcing of Birch

Over a decade ago, dōTERRA sourced a small amount of Birch essential oil from a New York supplier. There wasn't enough to sell as a permanent product, but the dōTERRA® family loved receiving it in convention kits and during other special occasions. However, dōTERRA soon outgrew this supplier's production, and Birch became a thing of the past. wood aromatically in the evening for a tranquil aroma.

A Place for Birch

Royce Novosel-Johnson and his family owns land in rural Kane County, Pennsylvania, which is abundant with birch trees. To most local landowners, birch is a nuisance. It grows aggressively and often competes with other native species.

Harvesters must go through birch to collect more valuable lumber species like cherry, oak, or maple, so during the harvesting process birch is cut down along with the desired trees. Birch (and other unwanted trees) isn't wasted, being used to make paper or mulch.

However, while creating harvest plans for his family's land, Royce felt that there had to be a greater purpose for Birch. In 2016, Royce reached out to dōTERRA. One month later, our Sourcing team was on the ground.

Little did we know how long and intensive the process would be to develop a sustainable, long-term supply of Birch essential oil.

Pushing for Purity

Generations ago, birch oil was commonly produced in the Northeastern United States. Traditionally, those with birch trees on their property would build a small distillation facility out of wood. They would harvest birch trees in the winter and distill them for supplementary income. Usually, the birch oil was bought up by brokers or larger companies, who would use it in their products.





Eventually, a process for creating synthetic birch oil was developed, which was much cheaper than purchasing it from local cottage businesses. Distilling pure birch is a labor-intensive process with low yields (about 1%), which significantly adds to the cost.

As brokers and companies moved toward the cheaper synthetic option, many families stopped producing birch oil. It wasn't worth producing without reliable buyers.

Like pure wintergreen, birch essential oil is over 96% methyl salicylate, meaning it's easy to fabricate and difficult to detect adulteration. For years now, dōTERRA chemists have been researching how to detect the differences between true wintergreen, true birch, and synthetic methyl salicylate. They've published peer-reviewed research on how to identify and detect pure birch essential oil biomarkers.

In testing over 50 birch oil samples from 17 companies over multiple years, our scientists found all samples contained wintergreen or synthetic methyl salicylate. *None of them* contained any birch essential oil.

Birch vs Wintergreen

While both wintergreen and birch are high in methyl salicylate, there are some differences between these oils. Birch has more phenol compounds in it, and phenols have skin-cleansing benefits.

Wintergreen comes from the leaf of the wintergreen plant, which means it contains a higher terpene content. Terpenes give essential oils their distinct aromas, which can create a relaxing or uplifting atmosphere. They also contribute to a soothing massage, especially when recovering from a strenuous workout.

From Generation to Generation

Though some artisanal knowledge of birch distillation has been lost to time, it's not all gone. Skip Cavanaugh of Wellsboro, Pennsylvania, is a great example of someone who has helped preserve the history of birch production. Skip has sought out and maintained records of his family's birch-distillation methods and procedures. These records have been invaluable during the years-long effort to develop ways to sustainably produce pure Birch essential oil on a commercial scale.

Tim Valentiner, dōTERRA vice president of global strategic sourcing, says, "There's a reason no one's already producing birch oil on a commercial scale. It's really, really difficult. It's low yielding and therefore expensive.

"But there's also something special about the heritage of birch oil being produced by mountain men and fur trappers and being traded on the American frontier for a

long time. The way we're using it today is the same way they used it back then. While it's been produced on a small, artisanal scale, now we're trying to scale up and offer it globally.

"dōTERRA is the first to offer truly pure Birch essential oil. And we're giving back to the community and forest where we're sourcing the raw materials. That's what people want and expect from a dōTERRA product: purity and ethical sourcing."

Added Value

Birch trees now have added value for property owners. dōTERRA has partnered with local sawmills to separate birch trees from premium lumber. Workers strip the bark off the trunks, which is distilled for essential oil. The naked logs are returned to the lumber yard, where they're chipped to make paper products.

"We're not taking anything away from the lumber supply chain," says AJ McGarity, dōTERRA strategic sourcing special initiatives manager. "All we're doing is babysitting the bark."

Using birch bark to produce birch essential oil adds value and profitability for local birch tree owners and demonstrates greater appreciation for the earth's beautiful resources. We never want to waste the gifts nature has given us. dōTERRA also recently opened Woodside Oils, the first commercial-scale birch distillery, adding jobs in the Kane County community.

Environmental Stewardship

AJ McGarity continues, "We started this project almost seven years ago. We've made leaps in progress compared to where we started, and we're excited about the future. We're proud to work primarily with Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)–certified companies to source our birch bark. We're proud to make wise use of the forest's resources, add incredible value for the forest, and deliver pure Birch essential oil to the world."

The FSC stipulates specific forest management and harvesting requirements that companies must follow to earn their certification. They protect against overharvesting, require the registration and tracking of every tree coming out of the forest, and hold annual audits to ensure FSC-certified companies meet their requirements.

In 2023, dōTERRA won a SEAL award for Birch essential oil sourcing and production. It's the second time dōTERRA has been recognized for sustainability efforts by SEAL Awards, which celebrates companies who make measurable contributions to sustainability, environmental achievement, and leadership.



"We go to great lengths to make sure the products we're offering are exactly what we promise across the board. Birch is a classic study on how we do that."—Ben Platt, dōTERRA Director of Strategic Sourcing

How to Use Birch

dōTERRA® Birch comes from the bark of the *Betula lenta* tree—also called black birch, cherry birch, and sweet birch. Birch essential oil can be used both aromatically and topically.

Aromatic Use

The aroma of Birch is crisp, energizing, and minty. Its refreshingly sharp scent can promote a stimulating, uplifting environment. You only need a drop or two of Birch to experience its potency.

The powerful aroma of Birch can mask odors. Put a few drops on a cotton ball and place it in your gym bag, shoes, and other spots that tend to accumulate less-than-pleasant smells.



Topical Use

Birch essential oil provides a cooling sensation topically, making it especially effective for massage. Try rubbing it into your back and legs before or after exercise.

Birch can also promote healthy-looking skin. Gently apply it to help reduce the appearance of blemishes. Birch is a sensitive essential oil, so make sure to dilute it with a carrier oil or lotion beforehand.

Do It Yourself with Birch

Fractionated Coconut Oil Birch Lotion

As highlighted previously, dōTERRA® Birch essential oil can provide a soothing sensation when applied topically. Its cooling, comforting effect makes it a great addition to this DIY lotion. Try massaging this convenient, prediluted lotion into your muscles or specifically your feet for targeted soothing. *

Ingredients:

- ½ cup distilled water
- ½ cup pure aloe vera gel
- ½ cup beeswax
- ½ cup Fractionated Coconut Oil
- 1 teaspoon vitamin E oil
- 10–15 drops Birch essential oil

Instructions:

1. Combine the water and aloe vera gel in a heat-proof bowl that fits over the top of your double boiler pan and traps the steam. Set aside.
 2. Place the beeswax and Fractionated Coconut Oil in a double boiler over medium heat until melted.
 3. Remove the top boiler insert and pour the beeswax mixture into a blender.
 4. Place the water and aloe vera mixture on the already-boiling double boiler base, bringing it to the same temperature as the beeswax mixture.
- Note: Complete this step quickly to prevent the beeswax mixture from hardening in the blender. You can also microwave the water and aloe vera mixture while the beeswax and Fractionated Coconut Oil melt to speed up the heating process. The two liquids must be a similar temperature for the ingredients to emulsify.*
5. Turn on the blender at medium speed. Slowly pour the water and aloe vera mixture into the blender, continuing to slowly pour as the mixture starts emulsifying. Stop occasionally to scrape the sides of the blender.

6. Continue blending and pouring for up to 15 minutes or until you're happy with the consistency of the lotion.
7. Add the vitamin E oil and essential oils. Mix well.
8. Place the finished lotion in a container of your choice (12 ounces or fewer) and use within three months.

Tip: If you don't have a double boiler, use a taller saucepan and find two heat-proof bowls that fit snugly over the saucepan.

Birch Essential Neck Wrap

A warming neck wrap can help soothe muscles and enhance relaxation. Adding Birch essential oil takes the experience to a whole new level.

Here are three tutorials (divided by skill level) that teach you how to make your own neck wrap. Even if you don't consider yourself to be crafty, you'll be surprised at how easy it is!

Advanced Level

Items Needed:

- ½ yard flannel or cotton cut into two 8 x 20-inch pieces
- 6 cups flaxseed or rice
- Sewing machine
- 2 drops Birch essential oil

Instructions:

- Cut the fabric into two 8 x 20-inch pieces.
- Place the patterned (pretty) sides together and pin along the edges.
- With the patterned sides together, sew a ¼-inch seam all the way around the fabric, leaving a three-inch opening on the short end. Turn right-side out.
- Divide the length of the fabric into four equal sections and mark with a fabric marker.
- Loosely fill the first quarter with two cups of flaxseed or rice.
- Sew on the marked line. Repeat until all four sections are filled.
- Sew the opening closed.
- To use, microwave for two to three minutes and add two drops of Birch essential oil on the outer fabric.

Intermediate Level

Items Needed:

- Kitchen towel
- 6 cups flaxseed or rice
- Sewing machine
- 2 drops Birch essential oil

Instructions:

1. Fold the towel in half longways (hotdog-style).
2. Sew around the edges, leaving a three-inch opening. Turn right-side out.
3. Divide the length of the towel into four equal sections and mark with a fabric marker.
4. Loosely fill the first quarter with two cups of flaxseed or rice.
5. Sew on the marked line. Repeat until all four sections are filled.
6. Sew the opening closed.
7. To use, microwave for two to three minutes and add two drops of Birch essential oil on the outer fabric.

Beginner Level

Items Needed:

- Tube sock or dress sock
- 3 cups flaxseed or rice
- 2 drops Birch essential oil

Instructions:

1. Pour the flaxseed or rice into the sock.
2. Tie a knot in the top of the sock.
3. To use, microwave for two minutes and add two drops of Birch essential oil.

Tip: Use any leftover fabric to make hand warmers.

Note: If you don't have a microwave, heat your pad by putting it in an oven-safe dish and warming it at 170°F for 10 minutes. Remember to set a timer and frequently check your heating pad to make sure it doesn't get too hot and become a fire hazard.

Cautions: The heating pad will be hot and can burn you if you heat it for too long. Start by microwaving your heating pad for one minute and then increase by 30-second increments until you've achieved the desired temperature. If you smell burning while microwaving the heating pad, you're warming it for too long. If you accidentally heat it for too long, let it rest until it cools. You might also place a washcloth or towel against your skin for a barrier to ensure you don't get burned in case you heat the pad more than intended.

