

The Power of Perfume and the Aromatic Plants of Provence, the Alps and Côte d'Azur

Highlights from the 30th Essential Oil Days (Journées des Huiles Essentielles [APPAM]) and International Congress of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (Congrès International Plantes Aromatiques et Médicinales [PAM])

Jean-J. Etienne; speaker photographs by Patrick Pellerin, chairman, APPAM scientific committee

Beyond its consumer product status, perfume is by its nature and effect at the crossroads of science and art, explained A. le Guerer (University of Burgundy) in remarks delivered during the joint 30th Essential Oil Days (Journées des Huiles Essentielles) and International Congress of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (Congrès International Plantes Aromatiques et Médicinales [PAM]) co-organized by APPAM and Pole PASS (competitive cluster for perfume, aroma, smell and flavors) and recently held in Digne-les-Bains, France (additional highlights on **Page 38**). First, it is necessary to recall that smell was for centuries considered a minor sense by philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant and Hegel. It was only at the beginning of the 20th century that some writers, including Huysmans, recognized that perfume is a language in which nature and chemistry provide the words.

Beyond literature and philosophy, the history of perfume and science are intertwined. For example, the development of distillation by Arabs for the preparation of rose water led to the availability of a fragrance in a medium other than the oily/greasy preparations of Egypt, Greece and Rome. Later came violet water and lavender water, followed by extraction with alcohol, which was developed in Salerno, Italy and Montpellier, France. The most famous example is the 1370 scent based on a wine spirit and rosemary called the *Queen of Hungary's Water*, or *Eau de Toilette de la Reine de Hongrie*. Meanwhile,



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the extraction activities developed in Salerno and Montpellier led to those cities becoming centers of education in medicine and pharmacy, including the discovery and understanding of the therapeutic effects of perfumes. It was believed that odors bore the energy of matter—unpleasant scents brought illness, while pleasant and aromatic scents soothed diseases. It is interesting to see that this interdependency still finds contemporaneous expressions:

- The development of sophisticated analytical methods such as headspace allows researchers to discover the smell of living flowers.



Le Guerer (University of Burgundy) discussed perfume's relationship to art, nature and science.



Cassan (Chamber of Agriculture, Alpes-de-Haute-Provence) discussed the aromatic and medicinal plants of France.

- Positive effects of fragrances in therapy are used in olfactotherapy at institutions such as Garches Hospital in France.
- Ongoing clinical interest in pheromones, the existence of which and impact on the human behavior remain controversial subjects.

Aromatic and Medicinal Plants in Provence, the Alps and Côte d'Azur (PACA)

PACA remains the largest producing area for medicinal and aromatic plants in France, said B. Cassan (Chamber of Agriculture, Alpes-de-Haute-Provence). The region's production comprises 20,200 ha of cultivation, primarily lavandin, lavender and clary sage.

Lavandin production comprises 15,000 ha among 1,500 producers, netting 1,000–1,200 t of essential oil per year. The leading competitor for the region is Spain, which comprises 1,000 ha and produces 50 t of essential oil per year.

Lavender cultivation in PACA covers 3,500 ha and produced 32 t of essential oil in 2010 versus 85 t in 2005. Competitors in essential oil production include Bulgaria (30 t) and the Ukraine (15–20 t).

Clary sage production in PACA covers 800 ha.

Organic production includes 2,750 ha of lavandin, 1,400 ha of lavandin, 1,100 ha of lavender and 200 ha of clary sage. These totals represent 10% of total lavandin production, 30% of lavender production and 25% of clary sage production.

The production/business channel for lavender and lavandin is well organized globally, noted Cassan. This must now become the case for the organic channel. The risk for lavandin growing stands in the attraction for competition from grain cultivation due to a strong increase in the value of such crops. Lavender, meanwhile, faces the growth of phytoplasma, an ailment that is difficult to fight.

The detailed Congress presentations are available at www.appam.online.fr.

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