

An Exciting Line of Healing Products for Pets: Essential Oils

Dr. Melissa Shelton is a holistic veterinarian whose special area of expertise is essential oils for animals. Dr. Shelton discusses the body-mind healing properties of her essential oil blends created especially for pets.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Essential oils produce a physiological healing response, and are also beneficial for emotional health, which is a significant advantage over other types of medicine and remedies
- The plants that produce essential oils are constantly evolving, making them able to fight ever-changing bacterial strains, including antibiotic-resistant bacteria
- Dr. Melissa Shelton is a holistic/integrative veterinarian whose special interest is the use of essential oils for animals. She has developed a line of oil blends specifically for use with cats, that can also be used with other animals
- Dr. Shelton's essential oil products can be applied topically in most cases, and the diluted versions work especially well for sensitive animals

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published February 22, 2015.

Dr. Melissa Shelton is a holistic and integrative veterinarian in Minnesota whose special area of expertise is essential oils.

Like so many holistic practitioners, Dr. Shelton grew frustrated that her traditional veterinary medicine training had little to offer animals with difficult-to-treat health problems. As her caseload of those patients grew, she began looking for ways to help them using holistic therapies. And like many others, a certain holistic modality — in Dr. Shelton's case, essential oils — really resonated with her the first time she was exposed to it. She immediately felt a connection with it. Using essential oils to treat her patients made sense to her, and she knew instinctively she would get results.

Holistic and Integrative Vets Are 'Perpetual Learners'

Dr. Shelton is a perpetual learner, a personality trait seen consistently in holistic and integrative veterinarians. Integrative vets are always questioning, challenging, and learning new things, which isn't necessarily true of everyone in the profession.

Like most newly graduated vet students, Dr. Shelton started her career in a traditional practice. The other DVMs in the clinic tried to tell her how to practice, but she questioned their guidance. The joke became that Dr. Shelton didn't "play nice" with others.

She would receive an instruction like, “You have to give an antibiotic injection to that animal before it leaves the hospital.” And she would question those types of directives, because they didn’t make sense to her. Apparently, antibiotic injections were something given to every patient, whether the animal needed it or not.

Ultimately, Dr. Shelton left the group before her contract was up to start her own practice. It wasn’t that she didn’t work well with others — she simply wanted sensible answers to her questions. She has an inquisitive nature, and in her view, “just because” isn’t a good reason to give an animal a drug.

Essential Oils Can Help Heal Both Body and Mind

Dr. Shelton’s interest in essential oils actually originated with her children, who are very sensitive to chemicals, dyes, and many other substances. She and her husband were searching for answers for their own family, and that’s how she came to learn about essential oils.

She also began hearing from people who were using essential oils with their animals. But she soon realized there was a lot of controversy around the subject, even in the veterinary research. For example, lots of people thought and still think essential oils are deadly for cats, but Dr. Shelton was hearing from people who said things like, “My cat is alive because of this essential oil.”

Fortunately, her curious nature took her past all the naysayers and drove her to learn for herself what types of conditions and animals might benefit from the use of essential oils. The really cool thing about oils is they prompt a physiological healing response, and also help with emotional health and feelings of well-being. This isn’t something we see with, for example, herbal remedies or other types of medicine.

Dr. Shelton’s experience with oils is that they tend to help the pet owner as well as the pet. “That’s part of their magic,” she says. There’s a lot we still don’t know about how essential oils work, but they definitely seem to work on a holistic level, affecting the giver (the pet guardian), the receiver (the pet), and even the environment.

Helping Pet Guardians Overcome Their Fear of Essential Oils

Dr. Shelton’s affinity for essential oils has led her to create her own blends. Most of the oils on the market are for human use, and they aren’t a perfect fit for animals. Rather than continue to try to make oils intended for humans work for pets, Dr. Shelton decided to create her own blends, using the right oils in amounts that animals best respond to.

Because of the controversy surrounding the use of essential oils for pets, while Dr. Shelton feels her blends are safe, even after 20 years of experience, she still keeps an open mind to the possibility that an oil or oil blend might cause problems for an animal.

Like almost all holistic therapies, there isn’t much research on essential oils, especially for animals. It’s somewhat similar to the situation with raw diets for pets — there’s a negative stigma attached that creates fear in pet owners and also veterinarians. Raw food can be deadly if handled incorrectly — so can essential oils. And so can lots of things. It’s important to help people overcome their fears by recognizing the risks involved, and moving ahead with appropriate caution.

One of the reasons Dr. Shelton created her oil blends was to give people the confidence to try them. Pet owners are too nervous to get a human essential oil and try to give it correctly to their dog or cat. Having access to products created by a veterinarian was what many of them needed to give essential oil therapy a try.

Plants That Produce Essential Oils Constantly Change and Evolve

Dr. Shelton's line of essential oils is called AnimalEO. She currently has 28 blends, and is always in the process of creating new blends. For example, right now she's looking into creating a hoof blend for horses. She develops blends to target specific health problems, and in response to health issues people ask about frequently.

Dr. Shelton also gave her thoughts on how to treat MRSA (Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus) and other bacteria that are proving resistant to traditional antibiotics. Some pets have been on one antibiotic after another, and nothing is working.

She explained that every time essential oils are harvested, they're a little bit different because they are constantly changing. Their ability to function as antibiotics evolves just as bacteria evolve, because otherwise, the oils would become extinct. They must evolve in order to fight off evolving bacteria.

Man-made drugs can't do that. Once they're created in a laboratory and patented, they remain the same forever. So essential oils are amazing in that they continually evolve.

Dr. Shelton likes oils from other countries as well, for example, Australia. Essential oils possess a constituent profile based on where they are grown, so they carry a lot of different properties, for example, anti-inflammatory properties, antibacterial properties, antifungal, immune supporting, and also emotional support properties.

So an essential oil used to treat MRSA, for example, also boosts the immune system. Because the plants change every year, every harvest, and every season, they continue to develop.

Creating Effective Essential Oils for Topical Application

Dr. Shelton doesn't use oils orally as much as people may think (since most people are accustomed to swallowing medicine). Essential oils can be absorbed systemically, and can also be inhaled. She usually recommends an easy administration route, for example, topical massage. When the animal grooms, she ingests some of the oil as well.

Dr. Shelton's essential oil blends were designed for cats. Any animal can use them, but they are ideally suited for and most effective in kitties. Every batch of oil she orders for her blends is first used on animals before it goes to market. Dr. Shelton uses them herself, her family uses them, and she uses them with her own pets. She even spritzes her little lovebird with oils. She also conducts bloodwork studies.

The oils come in two types of spray. Some are used undiluted with larger animals, and some must be diluted. Dr. Shelton is finding that the diluted blends seem to be especially effective, based on a similar principle, perhaps, to the way homeopathic remedies work.

Someone approached her to use one of her oils in their product, but they needed it to be very inexpensive. Dr. Shelton replied, "Well, the only way I can make it really cheap is to dilute it." As she continued diluting the essential oil, it seemed patients were responding better. It was actually more effective after dilution, and what Dr. Shelton eventually

found was that full strength oils tended to be overwhelming for many animals. She had clients say, "I open the bottle and my pet leaves the room." Or, "My pet can smell it before I even open the bottle."

So Dr. Shelton diluted the blends even more, to the point where animals wanted to lick them from her hand. Pet guardians began reporting, "They actually come over to the bottle now instead of running away from it." So there are times when using a full-strength blend makes sense, but it's also important to consider dilution for more sensitive pets.

Dr. Shelton has typically used coconut oil as the carrier oil for diluted blends. But she attended a lecture by Dr. Jeffrey Yuen to gain the traditional Chinese medicine perspective on different carrier oils, and she's now planning to create some blends with different carrier oils targeted to specific body systems or conditions.

Many Thanks to Dr. Melissa Shelton!

Dr. Shelton is doing wonderful things with her essential oil products. The blends are new on the market, but it's exciting to see the future potential application for zoo animals, wildlife, birds, and animals living in shelters. Dr. Shelton actually created a beautiful blend for Lou Ann Forbes and her Sniff-it product, which is helping to control emotional anxiety in shelter dogs (including dogs who've found homes) with great results.
