

## The Botanical Fragrance Categories

I've tried my hand at organizing groups of scents based on how I perceive the way flowers and leaves smell. Here are the dozen categories I've arrived at for my encyclopedia of fragrant plants, along with a vocabulary of associations that should help the reader form a sensory picture of each one. As most plants offer blends, I've picked what I perceive as the primary scent of each plant as my organizing principle.

**ANIMALIC:** skunky-sulfurous, putrid like rotting flesh, fishy, feline urine, bodily odors including sweat and musk, vomit, yeasty

**BALSAMIC/RESINOUS:** maple syrup, coconut, coffee, smoke, camphorous, masculine, leather, sticky, caramel, burned sugar, wood, almond extract, vanilla

**FLORAL/SWEET:** light, butter, candy, lily of the valley, honeysuckle, daylily, primrose, mock orange

**FOREST:** moss, pine, turpentine, balsam fir and cedar, wood, oakmoss, patchouli, woodland floor, earth, soil, mushrooms, fungi

**FRUITY:** tart, aromatic, apricot, lemon, citronella, berry, fig, plum, banana, bergamot, grape soda, cherry, lime, pineapple, strawberry

**HEAVY:** Oriental lily, winter jasmine, orange blossom, perfume, lush, intense, creamy, forceful scents that are rich, deep, and unforgettable—too much for some people but thrilling to others

**HERBAL/GREEN:** anise, licorice, green tea, crisp, oregano, thyme, light mint, the smell of an herbaceous stem breaking,

leafy herbs, green peas, freshly cut grass, new-mown hay—  
lively and uplifting

**HONEY:** thick, rich, syrupy, flowery, meadow, nutty, aged cheese,  
and when it goes too far, cloying—sickly sweet, fishy, bleachy

**INDOLIC:** mothballs, hot garbage, overripe fruit, dusty,  
excrement, moldy, a scent that usually hides in the  
background of heavy fragrances and may just seem sweet

**MEDICINAL:** acrid, antiseptic, biting, menthol, metallic,  
peppermint, plastic, pungent, chrysanthemum, wintergreen,  
oily sage, motor oil, burning leaves, eucalyptus, artemisia  
leaves

**ROSE:** baby powder, apple, anise, myrrh, clove, musk, feminine  
(old rose), black tea, fruit, plum, peach, berry, spice (modern  
rose)

**SPICE:** sharp, geranium, curry, clove, cinnamon, pepper, tart,  
nutmeg, ginger, turmeric, allspice, cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg,  
coriander

Many, even most, plants combine elements of these groups, but I  
hope to have classified each by its primary aroma. Under each  
category heading, I have featured favorite plants to learn about  
and consider when next you encounter them (or shop).