

Preparation of a Scent Aid

By Arend van den Bos

There are a variety of methods that could be used for the making of a Scent Aid (a.k.a Target Odour) and your Scent Work.

Your instructor may present a different method. However, for those of you who are not under any formal

instruction, or simply wish to make your own Scent Aid, the following is one method you may wish to employ.

Preparing a Scent Aid is not a particularly difficult task. However, it is important to do it correctly. Otherwise, subsequent training of your dog or their ability to detect a target odour at Scent Work Trials may become compromised.

Equipment required:

- Essential Oil.

Cotton Buds (with paper or wooden stems) cut in half.

- 250ml glass jar (capable of being made airtight).
- Dedicated (i.e., used only for preparing a Scent Aid) metal tweezers.
- Sealable medical plastic or metal container of no greater than 50ml capacity, having 5 pin size holes or a singular 5mm hole in its top.
- Nitrile Gloves

Essential Oils:

Different International Kennel Councils/Associations/Clubs and their various member organization use a wide range of differing Essential Oils for Scent Work/Nose Work. Likewise, Dogs NZ, while respecting the choices of organizations Internationally and within New Zealand, and without intent to be either critical or induce universal conformity, have endorsed their own range of Essential Oils to be used for Dogs NZ Qualifying Scent Work Trials. These are:

- * Cedarwood Atlas
- * Lemon Grass
- * Bergamot, Calabrian
- * Clary Sage

Sources for these Essential Oils is listed on the Dogs NZ website (Scent Works > Links).

Eye Dropper/Pipette:

On most occasions, the bottles of oil allow you to release a couple of drops at a time. If this is not possible, then to transfer the Essential Oil from its container into the Glass storage jar, you may require a Glass Eye Dropper or Pipette.

Eye Droppers are readily available from pharmacies, but when purchasing, ensure that they ARE Glass and not Plastic. From personal experience (and subsequent horror), I have found that simply asking for an Eye Dropper does not always result in a Glass Eye Dropper being provided. Make sure it DOES SAY "Glass" on the packet.

Instead of purchasing several Eye Droppers (which come singularly), and to cater for a variety of Essential Oils, a more financially economic way of purchasing the equipment required for transferring Essential Oils is ordering a set of small Pipettes. Again however, make sure these are Glass (even though, as most Eye Droppers) have rubber tops.

Cotton Buds (a.k.a. Q-Tips):

Ensure that they have paper or wooden (bamboo) stems. Essential oils love dissolving plastic which, if you have plastic stemmed cotton buds, would create a variant of the odour you are wanting.

Cut the Cotton Buds about midway through the stem so that you end up with two single ended cotton tipped buds.

Tweezers:

For each Essential Oil you are preparing Scent Aids for, you will need separately dedicated metal tweezers. This is done to avoid the potential of cross contamination of scents and thereby creating variant odours (often called "cocktails").

Remember, Essential Oils love to "eat" plastic, so make certain your tweezers (which can be purchased very inexpensively from Budget stores) ARE metal.

Scent Aid (a.k.a Target Odour) Container (a.k.a. Scent Aid):

If making Scent Aids for each level of Dogs NZ Scent Work, you require a minimum of four containers of no greater than 50ml capacity.

Having stressed that contact between plastic items and Essential Oils should be avoided, this is not the case when medical grade plastic is used. Target Odour containers can therefore be either of Medical grade or Metal construction. Never use glass (for safety purposes).

Metal containers is the most common and popular option, and while sometimes elusive to find, they can often be purchased either online or from your instructor.

Aside from being of no greater than 50ml capacity, they should also be resealable and have either 5 pin sized holes or a singular 5mm hole (to allow scent odour to escape).

Nitrile Gloves:

Why Nitrile gloves and not your woollen mittens?

Nitrile gloves are:

- * Chemical resistant.
- * Disposable.

While readily available in hardware stores, a far less expensive option is to purchase these on-line from a medical supplier. What is important however is that you ensure they are powder free. You do not want to add another chemical ingredient into your Scent Aid preparation.

Creating A Scent Aid:

- Put on your gloves! Whenever you are handling or preparing and handling your scent aid, you should first have your gloves on. This precaution ensures that whatever else you touch (other than your Essential Oil and Scent Aid), does not become an accidental Target source. Of course, this means removing your gloves AFTER the Scent Aid has been constructed and placed where you want it to be. Remember though to glove up again when you remove the Scent Aid from its location at the end of training.
- Place TWO drops of your Essential Oil down the inside of a 250ml jar and rotate the jar to get a greater surface spread.
Each Essential Oil should have its own specific preparation jar, and they should never be used for any purpose other than that Essential Oil. Even if they are later washed. So, if you are preparing Scent Aids for all four Essential Oils, you will need four jars (clearly labelled to avoid cross contamination).
- Into the jar, place thirty Cotton Bud halves and seal the jar.
- At this point, you can take your gloves off and DISPOSE them RESPONSIBLY. Remember, wherever your gloves go, they become a potential Target Odour themselves.
- Vigorously shake the jar containing the cotton bud halves for two full minutes, then place in a cool dark place for 48 hours.

When you wish to create or replace a Scent Aid, "GLOVE UP".

- Using the tweezers dedicated for the Essential Oil being used, remove one or two Cotton Buds from the jar and transfer to the Target Odour container.

Congratulations, you now have a Scent Aid.

Storage of Equipment

Between training periods with your dog, you can store your Scent Aid containing the Cotton Buds providing it is contained in its own separate airtight container. How frequently you replace the cotton buds in the scent aid container is a matter of personal preference. My own personal recommendation is each third- or fourth day during training. If required less often, it would be best to dispose of the cotton buds in the scent aid container and replace these on an as required basis with those from your storage jar.

As supply of cotton buds in the storage jar begins to diminish, a resupply can be effected by adding a two more drops of the Essential Oil into the jar along with another thirty cotton bud ends.

While it has been documented cotton buds stored this way remain effective for three months, I personally suggest a complete replacement of all oil infused cotton bud stock monthly.

All equipment required to prepare your Scent Aid can be stored together (but independently) in a single airtight container. That is, each item (Essential Oil; Eye Droppers/Pipettes; Cotton Buds; Glass jar (which may still contain prepared cotton buds); Tweezers; and Scent Aid container should all be separated from one another within a larger airtight container.

Note that the Nitrile Gloves are stored elsewhere independently.

Each specific Essential Oil MUST have their own specific airtight container, and ALL should be stored well away from any of your other Scent Work Trials (or Training) equipment.

Make certain also that they are placed out of reach from your dog who might otherwise decide that "Hide 'n' Seek" is a great way to expect rewards for accidental finds.

Responsible Practice:

Handling Essential Oils

As surface water continues to evaporate until completely gone, Essential Oil also evaporates, giving of an odour until it completely dries out. Unlike water, evaporation of an oil takes an exceedingly longer time. When using Essential Oils therefore, exceptional care needs to be taken in how you handle them.

Handling your Essential Oils should be treated in the same manner as you would handle a highly infectious friend.

Remember that whenever you are handling your Essential Oil, you should ALWAYS be wearing Nitrile Gloves. However, should accidental contact be made between the Essential Oil and an exposed part of yourself, try NOT to allow the contaminated area touch anything else since otherwise such contact would immediately transfer the Essential Oil odour to yet another area. This secondary contact then establishes an additional Target Odour. Not a particularly appealing situation when this occurs in your own home.

If an accidental physical contact is made with an Essential Oil, immediately thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water.

If an Essential Oil is accidentally spilt on your clothing, then you may experience some difficulty in removing it. Initially follow the manufacturers instructions on how to remove oil stains from the garment or you may have to resign yourself to a replacement garment.

Remember, any contaminated garment now becomes an additional Target Odour. Placing it back in the wardrobe or dresser is going to potentially pique your dog's interest in these areas.

Disposal of Target Odours

When disposing of cotton buds (or any other Essential Oil contaminated material), place in a large airtight glass container until being readied to be disposed of.

When disposal becomes eminent, place all the contents of the glass container into a zip lock bag which is then placed into a landfill rubbish container.

Remember, not only does the Essential Oil interact with plastic, but its odour also seeps through. So, placing in a landfill rubbish container should be done as immediately prior to its disposal as possible. Otherwise, your dog (or those of the neighbourhood) may just find themselves becoming excited over discovering yet another new scent source.