

Chapter 6: Plants

Smells

Ratings

MESS  DANGER  DIFFICULTY 

Theme

Ephesians 5:2: Christ a fragrant offering; detecting using experience

Equipment needed

Smelly things such as: crushed garlic, cardamom pods, freesia flowers (but be warned that 4–10% of people cannot smell these), pine needles, an old sock, grated chocolate, tea, ground coffee, squashed lemon, sliced cheese, onion, etc.; opaque jars (old jamjars covered in paper); lids for the jars so that the room is not filled with EVERY smell; cheesecloth or similar netting material to cover the openings to stop people looking in once the lid is removed

Before you begin

Ideally you want around six to eight jars with different smells. Feel free to get creative!

How do we detect what's in the jars? How easy is it? Our nose can detect many smells but can get confused very easily, especially if the smells are similar. Trained noses like those of perfumiers or deodorant testers (yes, really...) can detect with some accuracy the scents of hundreds of substances. So can people identify the substance(s) inside the jar without looking?

Experimental method

Make up jars of single substances. You could also make up some 'expert' jars in which you put two or three things: coffee, chocolate and garlic; or tea, mint and cardamom (see photos online). Be creative and have fun! You could create an answer sheet for people to write on if this is easier, or just have them guess out loud.

Keep secret what's in the jars, although you might like to label them A, B, C, etc. and have a 'cheat sheet' for yourself to confirm the people's answers.

Big thinking

We can only identify what's in the jars if we have already had some regular experience of the thing. Different receptor cells in the nose are triggered by differently shaped molecules, sending electrical signals to the brain. This then cleverly takes the signals pattern and sees if it matches known patterns in your memory. We are indeed 'fearfully and wonderfully made'...

Big questions

People may have had to guess the smells, especially in the expert jars. Sometimes in life, we have to make decisions based on experience, and sometimes we have to have a guess. When we make decisions, how can we make good decisions, ones that are fragrant to others, rather than bad ones which would be a stench?