



## Drop of Inspiration: Seed to Seal: Bergamot

**Deidrene Joyce:** Welcome to Drop of Inspiration. I'm your host, Deidrene Joyce.

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Thanks for joining us for another one of our Seed to Seal episodes. I'm really excited to share this story with you since it's about one of my favorite oils, and one of my favorite places we visited so far on the podcast. Today, our story begins in the 14th century.

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In the early 1300s, the plague made its way through Asia and into Europe, where it killed millions. Those remaining were desperate to find a way to prevent and cure the disease. This led to some pretty unfortunate ideas that included: Ingesting arsenic, emeralds, mercury, burning down buildings, and even living in the sewers. How the plague was spread was also a mystery at the time, and in the early 1600s, about 300 years after the first major outbreak, the plague came back, and so did the superstitions surrounding it. [00:01:15] In the royal courts of France, King Louis XIV and many of French nobility came to believe that the plague and other illnesses were all spread through water. They developed a fear of water to the point that they just stopped bathing. And, as you can imagine, the nobles of King Louis' court did not smell great. In addition to some of the more extreme remedies being tried out during this time, there were many Europeans using their knowledge of plants to create herbal tinctures that might offer relief. [00:01:44] And though they weren't a cure to the plague, they were a cure to King Louis' royal stench. Pharmacies around Europe began distilling fragrant plants and mixing them with alcohol. These aromatic solutions became all the rage, and King Louis and his unbathed cohorts were obsessed with them. They could smell nice without having to bathe. I'm sure we all know some modern-day toddlers who might be able to relate. [00:02:09] The perfume industry boomed. Many different concoctions made their way into royal courts, but one in particular created more buzz than the rest. In 1708, Giovanni Maria Farina, an Italian living in Cologne, Germany, wrote to his brother, Jean Baptiste, "I have found a fragrance that reminds me of an Italian spring morning, of mountain daffodils and orange blossoms after the rain. It gives me great refreshment, strengthens my senses, and imagination." [00:02:37] That fragrance was Eau de Cologne. This new elixir was a successor to an original formula called Aqua Admirabilis, created by Farina's mentor, Gian-Paolo Feminis. This recipe had been handed down for generations, and is still popular today. And, as you might have guessed, it's also the origin of the word "cologne." Eau de Cologne's unique and refreshing fragrance included classic aromatics like rosemary and lavender. [00:03:06]



But what really set it apart, and drove people like Napoleon Bonaparte to burn through gallons and gallons of the stuff was a rare, Mediterranean citrus known as bergamot.

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The name bergamot is speculated to derive from the Turkish words "bergamotto" which means "the prince's pear." A fittingly majestic title for what is considered to be the finest of citrus notes. Bergamot is one of the most prominent foundational materials for perfumes enjoyed all over the world. And while variations of bergamot are grown in small quantities around the world, the bergamot that we know and love can only be found on a small, 100-kilometer strip along Italy's southern coast. [00:04:00] On the toe of Italy's boot is Reggio di Calabria, a beautiful place known for its citrus orchards and specifically, where the one citrus that the locals revere so much, it's become one of the symbols for the region. When we visited the city in January, we stopped at a gelato shop next to our hotel. And while we were staring at all the flavors, the man behind the counter handed us a sample and said, "This is the one you want, it's the prized lemon of Calabria." [00:04:27] He was right, it was bergamot flavored, and I can't imagine a more fitting, or more delicious introduction to this Italian region. But we didn't go all the way to Italy for gelato, although now that I'm thinking about it, a gelato tour of Italy might be something for my bucket list. We were in Reggio di Calabria to learn about bergamot from Giorgio La Face, an expert in scent, with a nose for citrus, and a scientist's knowledge of essential oils.

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**Giorgio La Face:** My name is Giorgio La Face. I grow principal, the bergamot. Bergamot is a citrus. It's a fruit. It's a hybrid, of course. It's a mix between a bitter orange, lemon. So the idea is like lemon, a little bit greenish, and with different of course, different aroma. [00:05:25] Because the bergamot aroma is much more rich than the other citrus. Just to give an idea, the essential oils of the bergamot have more than a hundred components. Just to say that the oil is really very rich.

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**Deidrene Joyce:** Giorgio is a third-generation bergamot farmer, and the head of the Bella Vista partner farm. If the La Face family tree were a real-live tree growing out of the ground, it would no doubt be bergamot.

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**Giorgio La Face:** The farm is here from 1930. They start the farm, my grandfather, Francesco La Face. After the follow, my father, Domenico La Face, and myself, I join my father 20 years ago.

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**Deidrene Joyce:** The farm sits on a hill in Condofuri, right near the coast. You can see and smell acres and acres of citrus plants, the Mediterranean Sea, and even the island of Sicily. It's hard to imagine a more picturesque setting. It's a quiet farming village, and with a beach and bright blue ocean nearby, it's like walking right into a postcard from Italy. It would be easy to imagine a gorgeous place like this overrun by tourists. But it's been amazingly well-preserved over the years, and for good reason.

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**Giorgio La Face:** Bergamot grows only in the Ionian Coast, I mean from Reggio Calabria, the main town, and Locri. It's a hundred kilometers from Reggio. 50 miles, to give an idea. It's a special microclimate that gave the possibility to grow the bergamot. Because in the past, they tried to plant bergamot in the north of Reggio, and the climate is more or less the same, but obviously it's not the same. [00:07:42] And also, in Sicily, just in front, 25 miles from Condofuri, where we are now, you have the Sicily, the same coast. It doesn't grow for that reason is bergamot needs special climate that there is only in this part of coast. They tried in some place, and they plant the small, the baby bergamot, and they don't grow. They remain very small. [00:08:19] In other areas it grows. But for example, we check some fruits coming from Sicily. Acireale area, that is very good area for lemon, for example. But, it grows regularly. But the fruits doesn't have any aroma. It's nice fruit, good juice, but no aroma. We can't know why. It's very, very special product and I think we don't know whole about bergamot.

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**Deidrene Joyce:** A hundred kilometers is roughly 62 miles. You could drive the length of the bergamot belt in less than an hour, which is impressive considering that almost all of the bergamot used across the globe is grown right here. It's truly a special place, and the stewards of bergamot protect it quite fiercely. To say that Reggio di Calabria is unique would probably be a bit of an understatement. [00:09:28] This exceptional little corner of the earth contains a surprising amount of mystery. No one really knows where bergamot came from, or when it got to Italy, or why it grows best in this region. But there's a lot that is known about bergamot. And for that story, we'll jump backwards again, this time, about a hundred years ago.

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**Giorgio La Face:** I think the first using perfume was the Eau de Cologne. It's a famous Eau de Cologne that was made not in the place, but was made in Germany. The first of Eau de Cologne that contain bergamot. After that, they start using in the all famous perfumes, not just for men, but also for lady. Because if we check the formulas of the



very old and famous perfumes we found bergamot oil. [00:10:27] Because it's a good, it's a product that the aroma goes in a good direction with the woodnotes, but also with the other notes. It's perfect with all aromas in perfume. I say that not because I'm a perfumer, but because I spoke in the past, and I continue to speak with the perfumers, and they say that the essential oil of bergamot is one of the most important oils for creation.

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**Deidrene Joyce:** In the 1920s and '30s, there was another boom in the perfume industry. Demand in the U.S. caused commercially produced perfume to take off globally, and Reggio di Calabria was the one place in the world that could provide the quality of bergamot that is a foundational ingredient for many popular blends. Giorgio's grandfather, Francesco La Face was a clever man who realized that this bergamot stuff was pretty special. And so he took a keen interest in it. [00:11:39] Francesco was a chemist and pharmacist living in Reggio when the demand for bergamot reached an all-time high. In those days, being a pharmacist meant something a little different than it means today.

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**Giorgio La Face:** The family of my grandfather were in the pharmacy because my grand-grandfather were pharmacist. My grand-grand-grandfather were pharmacist. For that reason, and they had two pharmacies in Reggio. And in the past, the pharmacy was completely different from now because they made medicine with the herbs, with the oils. [00:12:24] And for that reason my grandfather, they learn, was pharmacist too, but they learn from his father how to make the medicine. And I remember that my father told me that a lot of people goes in the pharmacy to have the special medicine made from my grandfather. For that reason, I think it was the first step for that, why my grandfather, after the pharmacy, goes in the essential oils world. [00:13:04] Because to have a good product, to be sure that the product is good, and is pure, I think we must start from the back, from the growing of the plants and control all steps.

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**Deidrene Joyce:** The La Face's purchased their plot of land in 1930, and went straight to work. With a background in chemistry, Francesco did things a little differently than most farmers at the time. He was dedicated to precision and detail. Francesco was constantly working at improvements, to get the absolute best of his small plantation. [00:13:44] His clever mind did not go unnoticed and he became a valuable asset to others in the citrus and essential oils industry.

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**Giorgio La Face:** To improve the quality and also to improve the yield in essential oil, we started distillation of course, but other kind of new system of extraction. Because for example, for extraction of bergamot, the first extraction was with a small machine with





calibrated machine. After we went penetration. And we develop new system of extraction.

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**Deidrene Joyce:** Francesco wanted to learn everything about bergamot. He paid close attention to his plants, from the moment they burst from the ground, to the moment that the scent burst from the perfume bottle. He studied with perfumers around Europe, with citrus growers in the U.S., and he went to essential oil conventions. He took everything he was learning and married it with his background in chemistry. He ran tests and did extensive research on bergamot and its byproducts.

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**Giorgio La Face:** Because you know, in the past, today, we have the chromatography. For that reason, to see it much easier. But in the past, we need to have a lot of experience, knows experience, and also analytical experience to know if the essential oil was unadulterated or not. If it was pure or not. And I think the work was much more tough in the past than now. [00:15:40] Now you put as much as two grams in a machine, and they check all with the columns, they check all contents. In the past, no, it was only the nose and the knowledge of the product. That's it.

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**Deidrene Joyce:** There's a small office building on the farm. And on the top floor is a conference room. The walls of the room are covered with accolades, certifications, and awards that show just how influential the La Face family has been in the world of essential oils. There's even a picture of Giorgio's grandfather with the Pope for good measure.

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**Giorgio La Face:** My grandfather with his knowledge, and his experience, they traveled all the world, especially in the United States, especially in Florida, in the place where it was also growing citrus oils to help the cultivation, to help the farmers, to educate the farmers, to improve the citrus fruits, and to try to help or to improve, so the quality of essential oils.

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**Deidrene Joyce:** Francesco became so well versed in this knowledge, that the Italian government appointed him as an official researcher of essential oils and his work was published in various articles and books you can still read today.

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**Giorgio La Face:** Continue to speak about my grandfather, Francesco La Face. In 1967, he received a prize, Bergamot D'ori, is a gold bergamot, for his contribution in citrus essential oils. My grandfather was a chemist, and he was a director of the (Speaking in Italian) in Reggio, where it was a government laboratory to study essential oils. [00:17:57] And to develop new essential oils that was possible to make in Calabria. For that reason, we made a lot of studies of essential oils, especially in bergamot. And this kind of studies you can check also in the books. Like Guenther, I think is the number one book for essential oils.

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**Deidrene Joyce:** Francesco La Face was clearly brilliant and influential and his son, Domenico, was very much the same. Domenico followed in his father's footsteps, and was educated in chemistry. He continued to improve upon systems and work with essential oil experts all over the world. There was now two generations of wisdom to be handed down to the man who runs the farm now. And I'm sure it won't stop there.

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**Giorgio La Face:** I think that the knowledge that my grandfather and my father gave to me is something really unique. Because you can't learn this kind of education, this kind of knowledge. Me, I am very happy. I am really a lucky man because I received that from my family. Me, I remember when I was really a child, and I came with my brother to the factory. [00:19:44] And I had I think four, five years old. And my grandfather, we went to the factory, and was close to the machine. They go down, they take some oil, they put it on my skin, and the skin of my brother. And they tried to explain what kind of product, what kind of smell. And now I remember. I remember this thing. I think it's fabulous, absolutely fabulous.

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**Deidrene Joyce:** Perhaps inspired by moments like this, Giorgio eventually went to Switzerland to study the art and science of smell.

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**Giorgio La Face:** Me, I started in Reggio. I finished my school. After I start doing university. I study economics. But in the meantime, at university, I made some train in perfumery school in Switzerland. And I start the first section. I spend only during the summer holiday, just to learn all the products, to learn to smell. [00:21:18] Because it's so important to smell the essential oils. And after my university I decided to spend two years in the same school to make a better training, to learn all products, especially naturals, and to try to make some compound. [00:21:44] After that I come back to



Reggio, and I joined my father. And I think the best school is the experience with the person that knows that big knowledge. And then I start really to do everything with my father, to join in everything, in cultivation of the fields. But also they start to learn the distillation and the extraction of the oil from the fruits.

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**Deidrene Joyce:** To me and my untrained nose, the only language I have to describe bergamot are words like "fresh", and "citrus." Maybe "invigorating," or "refreshing." An expert like Giorgio would describe it quite differently.

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**Giorgio La Face:** The smell, it's very rich. (*Deep breath*) It's fresh in top note, but we can also smell the background note, the whole sesquiterpenes. (Speaking in Italian) The gamma terpinine. Oh, it's really very, very beautiful, and very rich. I am sure that fruits like that, we obtain a top-quality essential oil.

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**Deidrene Joyce:** Even after his studies in Switzerland, Giorgio credits his father and grandfather for being his greatest teachers.

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**Giorgio La Face:** This work for me is my life. Every day I say thanks to my grandfather, to my father. It's a beautiful world.

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**Deidrene Joyce:** Giorgio isn't the only one who should thank his family. Earlier in the episode, Giorgio was going through some of the work his grandfather had done. At one point, he mentions the Guenther Series, a six-volume series simply titled, *The Essential Oils*. Published in the 1940s, this series was one of the earliest attempts to compile scientific research from the world's experts on essential oils. [00:24:08] And, at the time, there was no better expert on bergamot oil than our very own Francesco La Face. Here is Giorgio reading some of his grandfather's contributions to the series.

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**Giorgio La Face:** Concerning the studies that my grandfather made, we can see in the books, we can see many studies about all essential oils. For example, in this article, in this book, there is all description of essential oils, all properties, all good condition where it can grow the bergamot, climatic and soil conditions, speak about everything. The harvesting, expression of the oil.



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**Deidrene Joyce:** The Guenther Series is still one of the most well known resources on educating the world on essential oils to this day. I couldn't help but wonder if these books had any influence on the founder of Young Living. So I sent one of my co-workers, John Wenton, to find out. Here is Mary Young.

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**Mary Young:** One day, we were talking in the office and John said, "Mary, are you familiar with an essential oil set of books kind of like an encyclopedia?" And I said, "Oh, you're talking about the Guenther books." And he kind of stepped back and he was surprised that I knew all about it. Well, this is one of the first. And we've had a set in our home as long as I can remember. And many, many times I would go upstairs or I would find Gary at his desk with a Guenther book open, studying, looking, trying to find more information. [00:26:06] But what was fascinating is Guenther was not actually the one out there doing it. He was the one writing about it. He was writing about what other people did. And it's a fabulous, it's a fabulous encyclopedia. There's even one here, it says, "Detection of foreign oils." Oh, my goodness, how exciting to read all of the different things that are in this book. [00:26:37] Gary even underlined the things that were important to him. He prized these books. He never wanted to let anybody borrow them because they're very hard to find.

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**Deidrene Joyce:** Inside every bottle of bergamot, and in fact, every bottle of essential oils Young Living and their partner farms produce, there is an unmeasurable amount of passion distilled within. All of our partner farms have really rich and unique stories. But something they have in common is a deeply rooted passion for the environment that provides these amazing plants, the products that come from them, and the people who benefit from the whole thing. [00:27:19] From Asia to Europe, to Australia, wherever our partner farms may be, or whatever culture they may come from, it's this commitment to the Earth that really connects them all.

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**Giorgio La Face:** It's very important to have a partner like Young Living for me, principal, but for my company. Because we go in the same direction. I mean, the most important thing is the product. The quality, the purity of the product. And me, I can do the best product in the world, but I need also some support. [00:28:06] And I found in Young Living, a very good partner for that because they appreciate a lot my product. They want pure product, and they can also pay the product. And for me it's very important because I can do very well in my job, to control, to manage everything, and at the final, give a good product, 100 percent pure, but not only that, good aroma, and everything.





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**Deidrene Joyce:** When someone dedicates their life to something like this, when their father and their father's father gave all their efforts and passion to perfecting a single endeavor, it's almost reprehensible to think that work like this would be exploited or altered, just so someone could get something this precious for a lower quality or a cheaper price. [00:29:07] When it comes to bergamot from our Bella Vista partner farm, it's not just about selling a product, it's about sharing this family's history with people all over the world. It may take extra effort, and it's certainly not easy. But we keep finding people and organizations who are matching Young Living's Seed to Seal standards. [00:29:27] People who would never think to bring anything but their best to the table. People who are just as passionate about essential oils as we are, and who want to give people the best of the best. Dedicated farmers like Giorgio and his family put a lot of care into sharing their best work with people like our Young Living members, who respect every effort that's put into the purity, quality, and sustainability of the oils that we use. [00:29:55] Every time we do an episode about one of our essential oils, I'll diffuse that oil at my desk. It's one of the ways to remind myself that our Seed to Seal standards have important and unique people at every part of the process, who are making that possible. So, I hope the next time that you use bergamot you'll remember that in every small drop there's a much bigger story.

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Thanks to Giorgio, and the La Face family, and thank you for listening.

**[END FILE]**