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Definition of Natural

By the IFRA Natural Complex Substance Task Force (NCS TF)

There is a common perception that “natural” holds particular significance, prompting the fragrance industry to address the need for a clear definition of what constitutes a natural fragrance ingredient.

In the dictionary, the term “natural” is defined as existing in or derived by nature. It is important to stress that within the fragrance industry, there is no official definition and that “natural” can be defined in different ways depending, for instance, upon the geographical area.

Each consumer product manufacturer is ultimately responsible for the way in which the consumer product is described or promoted. In cases where the manufacturer does not give clear instructions and guidelines to its fragrance supplier, the fragrance supplier can use the following definition and positions supported by the International Fragrance Association (IFRA):

1. Only aromatic raw materials matching with the terms and definitions laid down in the ISO 9235¹ can be used in fragrance mixtures claimed as “natural”.

Note: this can include raw materials further sub-categorized (e.g., 2.1.2 Absolute x-less) and supplementary categories added based on expert review (e.g., 2.54 Solvent extraction of distillation water). The complete list of terms is available on the [IFRA website](#).

2. Examples of raw materials that cannot be used in fragrance mixtures claimed as “natural” are synthetic molecules, reconstituted essential oils involving the addition of synthetic molecules, and chemically modified natural raw materials (e.g., acetylated vetiver oil).

¹ The ISO 9235 is the only international standard specifying the terms and definitions relating to aromatic natural raw materials. This standard defines “natural raw material” as material of vegetal, animal or microbiological origin, as such, obtained by physical, enzymatic or microbiological processes or by traditional preparation processes. Traditional preparation processes include, for example, extraction, distillation, heating, torrefaction, fermentation.

There is also the ISO 16128-1 providing guidelines on definitions for natural and organic cosmetic ingredients. However, this standard is not generally applicable to natural fragrance ingredients.





3. The production method of certain natural ingredients and the stability of such ingredients may require the addition of synthetic ingredients (e.g., solvents). This is further defined by IFRA, so that the consumer product manufacturer may determine if the naturalness criteria are met:
- Small quantities of antioxidants or preservatives may be added to protect aromatic natural raw materials (as defined in the ISO 9235) from degradation.
 - In cases where synthetic solvents are used for production process reasons, they should be removed to the greatest possible extent per GMP requirements.
 - In cases where dilution solvents are used in the fragrance mixture claimed as "natural", it is required to use dilution solvents coming exclusively from biological sources (bio-sourced ingredients and not petrochemical sources).

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