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Perfume affects your mood, people's perception of you

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COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — Smells say so much. The right perfume can stir you up or calm you down. The wrong one can leave you in a cloud of stink that torments anyone who gets too close.

"It's not just buying a set of tires for your car," says Alexander Bende, owner of Beauty & Scents, a cosmetics and perfume company in La Jolla, Calif. "It's something that really influences your moods, and how people think about you."

Finding that perfect signature scent, however, can be tricky — especially when they can change with diet, hormones, medication and the weather. Even synthetic perfumes, which tend to smell similar on everyone, differ slightly from one skin to the next.

"Every person is so individual," said Rebecca Pribble, manager of Veda Salon & Spa in Colorado Springs. "They really need to wear a fragrance to see if it agrees with them."

But department store perfume counters can be overwhelming — not only are you trying to decipher which scent you like, you're surrounded by women doing the same thing. Plus, you've got to fight the temptation to buy the bottle just because it's pretty.

So how can you find your scent without too much hassle?

—Don't smell more than three perfumes in a row.

Your nose loses the ability to decipher smells when you sprint from one spritzer to the next. Walk away for a while, or smell coffee beans (which are usually provided to help clear your senses). For a quick clearing, smell your shirt.

—Put the perfume on your skin.

Scents smell differently in the bottle than they do on your skin. Let the perfume sit for at least 10 minutes. Fragrances are made of three notes — top, middle and bottom. The top notes are light, and can be smelled in the first few minutes of application. Middle notes begin 10 to 15 minutes after application and last an hour. Bottom notes, the heaviest ingredients, last for several hours. To get the full effect, wear the perfume all day.

Perfume is personal, so finding the right scent depends on what you like. To get started, consider the following trends that Pribble has pegged:

—Younger women tend to prefer light scents, and are often influenced by the brand name, bottle shape or celebrity endorsement.

—Businesswomen and brunettes tend to prefer warmer tones, such as cinnamon or vanilla.

—Blondes typically prefer florals.

—Athletic women tend to like citrus-based or clean-smelling perfumes.

Scents may also be chosen for the emotion they evoke — for example, lavender is said to bring a sense of calm; peppermint and citrus are invigorating. Combinations of vanilla, sandalwood, patchouli, ylang ylang and jasmine can create a sensual concoction.

"You shouldn't buy it because you smelled it on somebody else," said Rochelle Bloom, president of the Fragrance Foundation, a New York-based nonprofit. "A fragrance is a personal thing. It's how you feel about it — how it makes you feel."

If you can't find something on the shelf, consider a custom blend. Through a series of questions and smell tests, salons such as Veda Salon & Spa can blend essential oils into perfumes.

How to apply:

—To keep a scent lasting strong, skin needs to be prepped. Before applying perfume, clean skin with a mild soap, preferably not antibacterial. Antibacterial soaps kill fragrances.

—Apply scented body lotion that matches your perfume or is designed to work with your perfume.

—Apply perfume to pulse points — wrists, behind the ears, in the elbow — which keep scents warm and radiating off the body.

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