

# What Makes a Candle Truly Natural? A Closer Look at Wax, Wicks, and What You're Really Breathing

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Walk into any big-box store and you'll find shelves lined with candles labeled "natural," "clean," or even "eco-friendly." But flip one over, read the fine print, and you may be surprised by what you find—or more often, what you *don't* find. The word "natural" is largely unregulated in the candle industry, which means it can be slapped on almost anything. So what does a truly natural candle actually look like? And why does it matter for your health and your home?

### The Problem with Conventional Candles

Most mass-market candles are made from paraffin wax—a petroleum byproduct left over from crude oil refining. When paraffin burns, it releases a cocktail of compounds including toluene and benzene, both of which are recognized as volatile organic compounds (VOCs) with potential health implications. A study published in *Environmental Health Perspectives* found that burning paraffin candles indoors can meaningfully elevate indoor air pollution, particularly in poorly ventilated spaces.

Beyond the wax itself, many conventional candles use synthetic fragrance oils—complex chemical blends that can include phthalates, which are hormone-disrupting compounds. The wick is another concern: while lead-core wicks were officially banned in the U.S. in 2003, some imported candles still contain them. Even zinc or tin cores can release metallic particulates when burned.

If you've ever ended a candle-lit evening with a headache or a scratchy throat, the candle itself may deserve more scrutiny than you've given it. We explored this in more depth in our post on [Soy vs Paraffin Candles: Natural Benefits, Hidden Toxins, and What You Should Choose](#).

### What a Truly Natural Candle Is Made Of

A genuinely natural candle starts with a clean-burning base. **Soy wax**, derived from soybeans, and **beeswax**, produced by honeybees, are the two most trusted natural alternatives to paraffin. Both burn cooler and slower than paraffin, produce little to no soot, and are biodegradable.

Beeswax is particularly remarkable \u2014 it is one of the only natural substances that actually emits negative ions when burned, which may help neutralize airborne pollutants like dust, mold spores, and pet dander. Research on negative air ionization published in the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* suggests that negative ions may have measurable effects on mood and environmental air quality.

Soy wax, for its part, is carbon-neutral and renewable. It also holds fragrance more efficiently than paraffin, meaning you need less scent to achieve a beautiful, lasting aroma \u2014 and that scent should come from **pure essential oils**, not synthetic fragrance blends.

The wick matters too. A natural candle uses a wick made from unbleached cotton or wood \u2014 nothing more. No metal cores, no chemical coatings.

## Why the Scent Source Changes Everything

Here's where natural candles become more than just a safer swap \u2014 they become a genuine wellness tool. When a candle is scented with real essential oils like lavender, rosemary, or patchouli, the aromatic molecules released during burning interact with your body in meaningful ways. They travel through the air, enter the respiratory tract, and can influence the nervous system through olfactory pathways.

As we discussed in our post [How Natural Essential Oils Affect You When You Breathe Them In](#), compounds like linalool in lavender have been shown to support relaxation at a physiological level. A 2015 review in the *International Journal of Molecular Sciences* documented evidence that linalool modulates the central nervous system through GABA receptor activity \u2014 the same pathway targeted by many anti-anxiety medications. And there's a fascinating reason scent works so quickly: it's the only sense that bypasses the blood-brain barrier entirely, giving it direct access to the brain's emotional and memory centers. You can read more about this in our piece [Did You Know? Scent Is the Only Sense That Completely Bypasses the Blood-Brain Barrier](#).

Synthetic fragrance oils don't carry these benefits. They mimic the smell without the chemistry that makes real essential oils functional.

## How to Read a Candle Label Like an Expert

When shopping for a natural candle, here's what to look for \u2014 and what to avoid:

1. **Wax:** Look for 100% soy, beeswax, or a blend of both. Avoid "paraffin blend" or anything simply labeled "wax."
2. **Fragrance:** The label should say "scented with pure essential oils" \u2014 not "fragrance oil" or just "fragrance."
3. **Wick:** Unbleached cotton or wood only. No mention of metal cores.
4. **Dyes:** A truly natural candle is either undyed or colored only with natural pigments.
5. **Transparency:** Trustworthy brands tell you exactly what's in their candles. If a company is vague, that vagueness is itself information.

A 2007 analysis of candle emissions in *Atmospheric Environment* confirmed that wick composition and wax type are the two largest determinants of indoor air quality impact from candle burning \u2014 reinforcing that these details genuinely matter for your health.

Choosing a natural candle isn't about being precious or performative. It's about being intentional with what you allow into your home and your body \u2014 especially in the quiet hours when candles are most often lit. If you're ready to make the switch, our **Natural Handcrafted Candles** are made with 100% soy and beeswax, scented only with pure essential oils, and crafted by hand with no synthetic chemicals \u2014 exactly as it was intended.

## References

1. Massoudi, M. et al. (2009). Indoor air quality and candle emissions. *Environmental Health Perspectives*. PubMed.
2. Perez, V. et al. (2013). Negative air ions and mood outcomes. *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*. PubMed.
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