

# Nam Ob Thai:

## Thai perfume water

**By Bob Haddad**

Nam Ob Thai is a perfumed water with a light yellow color. Its name derives from the word for water (*nam*) and for vaporization or essence (*ob*). Nam Ob Thai can be made with fresh or dried flowers, and recipes usually consist of natural ingredients such as nutmeg, incense powder, kaffir lime, saffron, sugar, musk, rose, jasmine, frangipani, ylang-ylang and pandan leaves.

In Thailand, it is used for both practical and ceremonial purposes.

Nam ob Thai can be applied to the face and body to cool the skin and to mask body odors. It is sometimes mixed with *pang-rum* (a type of fragrant powder) before applying to the face or body. As part of a formula for a traditional skin toner, it is mixed with turmeric powder (*khamin*) and rubbed on the body before taking a hot bath. It can also be mixed with powdered rice and applied to the skin before bathing. This process is believed to reduce skin irritations and rashes caused by allergies. In some households, it is mixed with fresh or dry potpourri, and left in a sachet or small bowl to provide a sweet smell to a room or specific area of the home.

Nam Ob Thai plays an important role in Thai Buddhist ceremonies, and is used to sprinkle on statues and effigies of the Rice Goddess and other deities. It is also used to bathe a statue or image of the Buddha, or of a revered monk, while accompanied by prayer, often done during Songkran (Thai New Year). It is often used to bless and clean the bodies of the deceased. Nam ob Thai can be given as an offering to monks, teachers, or to anyone who is respected.

In some cases, nam ob is used to accompany blessings or after prayer. I have seen Thai massage teachers apply it to their faces and heads after they pray, or after chanting the *wai khru* (Om Namō). In my own personal Thai massage practice, I use it to freshen and bless the face and head of my clients at the very end of the session. I sprinkle it in my hands, and then lightly caress the client's face in an upward fashion, and also rub it into their hair, as I say a final prayer to wish them well.

Nam ob Thai may be purchased in Thailand at all the Buddhist stores, and even in supermarkets, in the candle and temple offering section. You may also find it online from Thai export and food companies. It comes in several varieties, and may be purchased in the traditional small glass bottle, or in plastic bottles, which are best for traveling.

