

Choosing Your Strain: Why Terpene Profiles Matter More Than THC Content

Forget judging weed by the THC percentage alone. The highest I've ever been was off a strain with "just" 13% THC.—Reggie Stanfield, CEO, JustinCredible Cultivation.

How do you choose your weed?

Whether you're "window" shopping online or you're in your local dispensary, you can expect there to be specific pieces of information about the strain you intend on buying. Most dispensary menus will tell you the name of the strain, whether it is an indica, sativa or hybrid, and the percentage of THC contained in the flower. Some may divulge the terpene profile while others haven't figured out why this is useful information to share. If you are physically in the dispensary, budtenders will usually let you visually inspect the buds and take a quick whiff before deciding, but that's about all. Like many cannabis consumers, you likely make your choice based on the available information, along with the THC content, but I'm about to explain why this isn't the best way to evaluate your plant medicine.

Cannabis is a nuanced plant with many variables, and just like our own endocannabinoid system (yes, we have an endocannabinoid system too), each plant's profile and potential effects are as unique as a fingerprint. Further complicating things is that no two plants are the same, [even in the same strain](#). In fact, the exact same plant harvested at different times in the growth cycle can have different properties, which can alter the body and head high you experience when you consume it.

Right now, we are still living with the repercussions of prohibition, as well as the limited research into the plant's medicinal benefits—especially in comparison with the dearth of research into Big Pharma's remedies. As such, we are only just beginning to understand how cannabis interacts with our bodies to produce the desired effects. In other words, it's up to us consumers to experiment to find the strains that address our issues. However, there are some things we do know to make these guesses a bit more educated and help steer us toward the best possible outcomes from our cannabis consumption.

Terpenes and Their Known Effects

If you've ever looked closely at a bud or a nug, you have probably noticed the tiny little crystals that cover it. These crystals are called, trichomes and their purpose is to protect the cannabis plants from predators. One of the ways trichomes achieve this is by producing terpenes which give the plants their rich aromas, thus making them unpalatable to invasive insects—at least that's the goal. All cultivators will tell you that it doesn't always work.

Lucky for people who consume, these [terpenes](#) also stimulate your endocannabinoid system to produce an almost unlimited number of desired effects. What effects? It varies from terpene to terpene. There are an estimated 55,000 terpenes that occur in nature, with more than 100 that have been identified in cannabis. The chart below contains a few of the most common ones found in buds, the scents they produce and the conditions they are known to affect:

Terpene	Scent	Conditions it Helps
Limonene	Citrus, Peppermint, Juniper	Antifungal, Depression, Anxiety, Gastrointestinal Reflux, Cancer, Weight Loss
Linalool	Floral, Spice, Citrus	Insomnia, Stress, Pain, Depression, Anxiety, Anticonvulsant
Myrcene	Cloves, Herbal, Woody, Musk, Citrus	Inflammation, Antiseptic, Antibacterial, Antifungal
Caryophyllene	Peppery, Spicy, Woody, Cloves, Hops, Basil, Oregano	Muscle Spasms, Pain, Antioxidant, Insomnia, Muscle Spasms
Pinene	Pine, Sweet	Anxiety, Pain, Inflammation, Bronchodilator, Memory Impairment
Humulene	Earthy, Woody	Pain, Inflammation, Antibacterial
Ocimene	Sweet, Woody, Herbal	Decongestant, Expectorant, Antifungal, Antiviral
Terpinolene	Herbal, Floral, Pine	Pain, Antioxidant, Antibacterial, Antifungal, Cancer, Sedative

Of course, the above list is by no means exhaustive and may change as more studies are conducted, but it can give you a starting place on your journey to find what works best for you.

The Unique and Mysterious Endocannabinoid System

Little is still known about the precise mechanisms of the endocannabinoid system. What *is* known is that no two people respond to a specific cannabinoid profile in a cannabis plant the same way, leaving researchers to believe that each person's endocannabinoid system is unique and different. Interesting as that information is, it complicates the dosing of medical cannabis, leaving each patient to experiment for themselves. With that in mind, the best way to discover what works for you is to know the chemical profile of what you are consuming and track its effects. And as the expression goes, "start low and go slow(ly)." New consumers don't have the same tolerance as experienced consumers. If you need help, ask one a friend who's more experienced how they started consuming. Did they roller thinner joints and work up to blunts? Did they start with a 2.5-mg edible before moving up to 5 mg, 10 mg and higher?

How to Find Cannabinoid and Terpene Profiles

Of course, without specifically testing every plant, there is no way to know the exact concentrations of the various cannabinoids in the weed you're buying, at least not in our current buying environment. However, there are websites where you can look for general information on a strain if no testing is available.

For example, patients with a lot of pain and inflammation report that strains that combined the terpenes Linalool and Myrcene and that are high in CBD and low in THC work well. Many

patients who suffer with frequent migraines tend to recommend strains high in CBG (not CBD) to relieve them quickly. It helps that most states legal for recreational and medicinal use require cannabinoid profile testing. For instance, in Massachusetts, all batches of cannabis must be tested for, among other things, their cannabinoid profile.

Finding Your Go-To Strains

Just as you shouldn't choose your bud because it looks pretty in its container, you shouldn't look solely at the THC percent as a deciding factor in buying it. It's essential to remember that the known effects of consuming cannabis extend beyond the purported THC level of the plant. In addition to the plant's two most known cannabinoids, THC and CBD, there are other cannabinoids like [CBC, CBG, CBN and many others](#). Combined with terpene profile, they have also shown evidence of medicinal benefits. For example, if you're dealing with pain and inflammation, you wouldn't necessarily buy a strain good for epilepsy, migraines, insomnia, PTSD/PTSD, anxiety, cancer, glaucoma or any of the [qualifying conditions cannabis is approved for in Massachusetts](#).

The cannabis industry is in the midst of a revolution, and revolutions can be complicated and confusing, making your ability to access the information you need challenging at times. In the future, we may gain a complete understanding of the endocannabinoid system and how various terpenes affect it. We may even someday be able to map our specific endocannabinoid receptors and find plants tailored to our particular ailments, but that day is far into the future.

What can today's consumers do to find the best cannabis to optimize their health and wellness? The bottom line is that we each need to experiment to find what works best. Designing an intelligent experiment starts by using the information we can access to make educated guesses about what we need. Do your research and make educated changes until you find something that works for you. You'll likely find that your optimal strain isn't too far out of reach. And lastly, part of what should influence your decision to buy from one dispensary over another is the knowledge the budtenders have. They're there to answer your questions. If they push THC, THC, THC without actually listening to your complaints/symptoms, find a dispensary whose budtenders know the answers or who are willing to learn.

There are many people with years of experience behind that strain you're considering buying or that you just bought. From the growers at [JustinCredible Cultivation](#) to the budtenders at the dispensaries, count on our experience and expertise to address your needs. While there are times and places for strains whose sole purpose is to get you high, when it comes to addressing physical ailments, trust in people who know what they're doing.