

GEL AIR FRESHENER AND METHOD OF MAKING THE SAME

BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates generally to a gel composition suitable for use as an air freshener, and particularly a decorative transparent gel composition having one or more solid articles suspended therein.

Compositions which release fragrant volatile components into the air have long been used as air fresheners. Traditionally, such compositions have been valued for their utilitarian ability to impart a desired scent into the air and mask stale or unpleasant odors. Within the household, they have found their greatest use in areas where stale or unpleasant odors are most likely to occur, such as bathrooms and kitchens. The containers or dispensers used to disperse these compositions into the air have tended to be more functional than attractive, despite efforts to the contrary.

More recently, scent-releasing compositions have come to be used to extend a room's decor or theme into an additional sensory dimension or to evoke a particular feeling or mood. For example, the scent of aromatic woods may be used to bring the feeling of the outdoors into the home, or a spicy apple scent may be used to induce nostalgic recollections of home-baked pies. The scents used in these compositions typically are more complex and sophisticated than the heavily perfumed, disinfectant-type scents commonly used in traditional air freshening compositions.

The trend toward the use of scented compositions to enhance home decor and ambiance has resulted in increased use of these scented compositions in areas of the household, such as bedrooms and living rooms, where traditional air fresheners are less frequently used. Persons who wish to use scented compositions in these areas of the home, however, may be reluctant to place an unattractive, functional container in these areas of the home. Thus, a need exists for a scented composition that may be packaged in an aesthetically pleasing container that harmonizes with, or even enhances, household decor.

Air fresheners have been prepared in the form of pastes or gels to control spills or leaks. These pastes and gels generally have had a nonuniform appearance, with breaks or discontinuities in their structure or texture that detract from the appearance of these compositions. These discontinuities are particularly noticeable when the compositions are packaged in transparent containers. In addition, these air freshening pastes and gels have tended to have a cloudy or opaque appearance resulting from the phase separation of the aqueous base components and the oil-based fragrance components. The cloudy appearance of these compositions makes them undesirable for decorative use, particularly when they are packaged in transparent containers. The phase separation problem becomes increasingly difficult to solve when a relatively high fragrance concentration is used in the gel composition. It is sometimes possible to increase the surfactant level in the composition to reduce or eliminate the phase separation. However, this approach often is ineffective because the higher surfactant level adversely affects the fragrance-dispersing capability of the composition.

Because scented compositions are finding greater use in living areas of the home where their appearance is important, it may be desirable to place solids within the body of a transparent gel, and particularly within a specific region of the gel, to achieve a decorative effect. However, these solids generally will tend to float or sink depending on their

specific gravity, resulting in an unattractive clumping of the solids at the top or bottom of the gel. This problem is compounded when the gel is intended to be displayed for decorative purposes in a transparent container, because the suspension of the solids in a specific region of the gel must be accomplished without fracturing or otherwise disrupting the desired smooth and uniform appearance of the gel.

In keeping with the increased emphasis on the natural environment and nostalgic themes, the solids desired to be dispersed throughout the gel may be botanical specimens, such as berries, slices of fruit, leaves, seeds, flowers, herbaceous sprigs, small branchlets and the like. These natural substances may be adversely affected by the moisture or other substances present in the gel. Swelling from absorption of water, bleeding of color into the gel, leakage of fluids from the botanicals into the gel and other types of unsightly deterioration have been observed in botanicals that have been immersed in a transparent gel. These adverse effects may limit the use of botanicals in decorative gel air fresheners.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In light of the disadvantages of the prior art, a composition is needed that will provide a strong, transparent, shiny gel including a volatile component that will evaporate over a predetermined period of time to impart a desired fragrance to the surrounding environment. The volatile constituents of the gel may evaporate, under typical household conditions, over a period from about two weeks to about three months, and particularly from about twenty to about forty-five days, with the most desired period being about thirty days. When the fragrance has been depleted, the user may replace it with another gel having the same scent select a differently-scented gel to mark the change of seasons, a holiday or other event, or set a different mood. Preferably, the fragrance is distributed substantially uniformly within the gel composition to assist in dispersion of the fragrance into the air at the desired rate. More importantly, the fragrance constituents are selected to that the perceived fragrance dispersed into the air remains consistent during the desired period of use, without any untoward diminution of the perceived strength or quality of the fragrance over time.

The gel must possess a uniform and pleasing appearance when packaged in a transparent container. Thus, the gel must be transparent and free from particles or inhomogeneities, such as oil droplets, that are apparent upon visual inspection. It also must possess a uniform texture and a continuous structure. The ideal gel will have a shiny, elegant appearance. The gel may be colored, if desired, with any of a variety of nontoxic coloring agents to enhance its decorative effect.

Further, the gel composition must possess low toxicity and flammability such that it is suitable for household use. A preservative or microbicide may be added to the gel composition to discourage growth of microorganisms that can adversely affect the appearance or fragrance of the gel. An averse agent also may be present to discourage accidental ingestion of the gel.

The gel may be capable of suspending a variety of solids therein to create a decorative effect. When the solids to be suspended are botanicals, the botanicals must retain their natural appearance even after immersion in the gel preparation.

Accordingly, it is an object of the present invention to provide a gel composition, and a method of preparing the same, suitable for use as a decorative household fragrance