

Making Herbal Oils

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Why Herbal Oils?

- ~Herbal oils are versatile, they can be used as is or hardened with beeswax to make a salve or lip balm or combined with other ingredients to make a lotion
- ~Great use for “food as medicine”
- ~Great method for applying oils topically to treat inflammation, aching muscles, spasming muscles and skin afflictions
- ~Can increase the healing properties of a massage oil

Herbs That Work Well With Oils

Herbs are best infused in oils after they are dried. If you have fresh herbs, it's best to wilt them in the shade for 6 - 12 hours before infusing. Some exceptions are plants that are dry to begin with, ie. they don't have a high water content to begin with such as St. John's Wort flowers, Plantain, Cottonwood buds and Mullein flowers. If you do use fresh herbs, be extra careful when straining them off to make sure all water content is removed from the bottom of the oil. Add a pinch of powdered Slippery Elm root to reduce the chance of rancidity.

Any herb you want to make into a salve should be made into an oil first (you can't have a salve without an oil). Some herbs that make great salve are:

Black Walnut hulls (*Juglans nigra*) - Antifungal. Use on athlete's foot, ringworm and other forms of fungi. Combines well with Peppermint and Calendula for this purpose.

Calendula flowers (*Calendula officinalis*) - Great all purpose herb, suitable for sensitive skin and for babies. It helps clear complexions, heal cuts, scrapes, insect bites, diaper rash, and inflammations. Antifungal, antibacterial, wound healing, has an affinity for the skin. Has antibacterial powers and is great combined with Comfrey, Chickweed, Plantain for this reason or alone.

Cannabis buds or dry trim from flower buds (*Cannabis sativa*) - great for pain relief, often used for relieving back pain and other spasmodic injuries. Needs to be heated to extract the properties.

Chickweed aerial parts (*Stellaria spp.*)- great all purpose for skin, including tough skin problems such as psoriasis and eczema. Combines well with Comfrey, Plantain, Calendula and other skin healing herbs.

Comfrey leaf or root (*Symphytum officinale*) - leaf for cuts and bruises, should be combined with an antibacterial herb such as Calendula; roots for scars. Proliferates skin cells.

Garlic (*Allium sativum*) - Antibiotic, antibacterial, antifungal, lowers blood pressure and cholesterol

Goldenrod flowering tops (*Solidago spp.*)- Works great for muscles. A combination with St. John's Wort and Skullcap make a great all purpose ouchy, achy rub.

Plantain leaves (*Plantago spp.*)- Good for bleeding, cuts, insect stings and skin problems. For skin irritations, combine with Chickweed, Prunella, Comfrey or Calendula.

Prunella flowering tops (*Prunella vulgaris*) - bumps, bruises, cuts, scrapes, fever blisters, etc. Great with other all purpose herbs such as Calendula, Plantain, Chickweed.

St. John's Wort flowers (*Hypericum perforatum*)- Has sunscreen capabilities when applied before exposure to sun or sunburn treatment afterwards. Great for all types of burns. Treats many nerve related problems including nerve damage and sciatica pain. Helps to regenerate severed nerves (often from surgery). A combination with St. John's Wort and Skullcap make a great all purpose ouchy, achy rub.

Skullcap flowering tops (*Scutellaria laterifolia and other S. spp.*) - Good for bone related aches as an oil and/or salve. A combination with St. John's Wort and Goldenrod make a great all purpose ouchy, achy rub.

Violet leaves (*Viola spp.*) - great for breast massage, for painful sore breasts before monthly cycle, good for dissolving lumps. Combines well with Red Clover blossoms and Poke root.

Oils (and Fats) That Work Well With Herbs

All kinds of oils can be used for making herbal oils. It's best to pair the oils with the end result. This is a list of my favorites but is not all the oils that can be used.

Almond oil - Great for skin uses. Can be a bit 'heavy' so is best combined as a salve.

Animal fats - Lard, Tallow, Butter, Ghee, Lanolin, Schmaltz (chicken fat), etc. make the best oils for infusing herbs as they readily absorb the actions of the herbs. Great for cooking or making a salve in. Can be a bit smelly if used as is depending on the oil.

Apricot Kernel oil - makes a great massage oil, very light.

Coconut oil - great for oils used in cooking, also great for oils used for skin. Great for making a cold weather salve (melts over 76 degrees).

Olive oil - great for an oil that will be used for food, such as a salad dressing base, a dipping oil or a finishing oil

Sunflower oil - light oil, high heat tolerance, has sunscreen properties. Great used with St. John's Wort flowers to make sunscreen (usually combined with Shea butter which has sunscreen properties as well).

How to Make Herbal Oils - Three Methods

Cold Method:

Fill a jar about 1/2 full of dried plant material in a jar and fill to the top with oil. Stir with a chopstick to get air bubbles out and put on the lid. Set jar on the kitchen counter and steep for a few hours to a few days. This method works really well for Garlic.

Stovetop Method:

To make an oil, place a handful of oil in the top of a double boiler. Pour enough oil to cover, bring the water below to a boil then turn down and gently heat for 2-3 hours. Turn off the heat and strain out the herbs from the oil by pouring it through a strainer lined with cheesecloth. Squeeze the cloth to get the final bits of oil out of the plants.

Pour your oil into a jar and cap it. After 48 hours, check to see if anything has settled to the bottom. Usually when using dried material, there will not be anything settling but when your plants are fresh, water can sometimes mix with the oil during the infusion process and will settle to the bottom. If this happens, you will want to strain off the oil from the sediment at the bottom as the sediment will cause the oil to go rancid.

Sun Method:

Fill a jar about 1/2 full of dried plant material in a jar and fill to the top with oil. Stir with a chopstick to get air bubbles out and put on the lid. Set jar outside in the sun for about 2 weeks. Bring inside and follow instructions for straining and settling.

Crock Pot Method:

If you are making a larger quantity of oil, you can heat it in a crock pot. Place the desired amount of herb and oil into the pot, set on low and let heat overnight. Follow instructions for straining and settling.

After completion of any of the above methods, place a pinch of powdered Slippery Elm root to reduce chance of rancidity. Vitamin E oil can also be added to help preserve the oil. For best results, always store your oils in the fridge and they will last longer.

How to Use Herbal Oils

- ~Use as a base for salad dressing
- ~Makes a great dipping oil for bread
- ~Like mayonnaise? Use as a base for homemade mayonnaise
- ~Drizzle over freshly steamed vegetables
- ~Massage oil
- ~Ear oil for ear infections
- ~Sunscreen

- ~Sunburn relief
- ~Wound healer
- ~For a liniment to treat sprained and strained ankles
- ~Rub for aching muscles, bones, etc.
- ~Topical application for sciatica pain, nerve damage, neuropathy
- ~To treat inflammation

Recommended Herbal Books (*indicates available through library loan system):

- ~Making Plant Medicine by Richo Cech
- ~The Herbal Medicine Maker's Handbook: A Home Manual by James Green*
- ~Rosemary Gladstar's Medicinal Herbs: A Beginner's Guide*
- ~Healing Wise by Susun S. Weed*
- ~Practical Herbs by Henriette Kress
- ~Herbal Medicine From the Heart of the Earth by Sharol Tilgner, N.D.

Online Resources

Article by Susun Weed:

http://www.susunweed.com/herbal_ezine/July09/breasthealth.htm

Mountain Rose Herbs article on making solar infused oils:

<http://mountainroseblog.com/making-herbal-infused-oils/>

Herbal Ally Challenge by me:

<http://lunaherbco.com/2011/02/herbal-ally-challenge-7-oil-infusions-part-1/>

Pindari Herb Farm detailed oil making instructions:

<http://www.pindariherbfarm.com/educate/infusion.htm>