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Guidelines For Using Essential Oils And Herbs

© Kathi Keville, Mindy Green

Safety Precautions

Because essential oils are concentrated, highly potent substances, a working knowledge of how to use them safely is vital to the success of your efforts. The potential hazards of an essential oil depend on the compounds in the oil, the dosage and frequency used, and the method of application. Here are a few guidelines to ensure safe and effective use of essential oils:

- Don't use undiluted essential oils on the skin. They can cause burning, skin irritation and photosensitivity. There are a few exceptions to this rule: it is acceptable to use the nonirritating oils lavender or tea tree undiluted on burns, insect bites, pimples and other skin eruptions-as long as you don't have extremely sensitive skin. If you find an essential oil irritating but would like to use it, and have determined that the irritation is not due to an allergy, try massaging the diluted blend into the soles of your feet. The oil will not irritate the skin, and will still enter the body.
- Use only pure essential oils from plants.
- Test for sensitivities. Most people with sensitivities to synthetic fragrances are not sensitive to high-quality essential oils. Also people who are allergic to, say, chamomile tea will not necessarily be allergic to the essential oil. If you are uncertain about an oil,

do a patch test of a 2-percent dilution in the crook of the arm or on the back of the neck at the hairline. Twelve hours is ample time for a reaction to occur. If redness or itching develops, you may want to try a less potent dilution, or choose an appropriate substitute for the irritating oil.

- Use with caution those essential oils that result in photosensitivity. Citrus oils can irritate skin, and some of them will cause uneven pigmentation of the skin upon exposure to sun lamps or sunlight. This is especially true of bergamot, which contains bergaptene, a powerful photosensitizer that will cause allergic reactions in some individuals. (Bergaptene-free oil is available.) Of the citrus oils, bergamot is the most photosensitizing, followed by cold-pressed lime, bitter orange, and to some degree, lemon and grapefruit. Of the lemon oils, California oil is the least photosensitizing. If you are using photosensitizing oils on your skin, do so at night, stay indoors, or wait at least four hours before exposing your skin to ultraviolet light.
- Use with caution those essential oils that are irritating to mucous membrane (the lining of the digestive, respiratory and genito-urinary tracts) and skin. Keep all essential oils away from the eyes.
- Keep all essential oils out of the reach of young children; older children can be taught to respect and properly use essential oils, but they should nevertheless be supervised. In general, when treating children with essential oils use one-third to one-half the adult dosage and select only nontoxic oils. Among the best and safest essential oils for children are lavender, tangerine, mandarin, neroli, frankincense, petitgrain and Roman chamomile.
- Vary the essential oils you use. Using the same facial oil blend for a long period of time is acceptable because it covers a very small part of the body, but daily application of the same blend of oils over your entire body for more than two weeks is not recommended. It is wise to alternate with a blend of different oils containing different chemical constituents at least every two weeks. Uninterrupted use of some oils exposes your liver and kidneys to chemical constituents that may be harmful over time. Rotating the oils gives your body time to process them and allows each oil to work on different levels in its own unique way.
- Don't take essential oils orally for therapeutic purposes. Safe ingestion of oils requires a great deal of training and is therefore not recommended for beginners. The exception is when we suggest using essential oils to flavor foods (see Chapter 10: Essential Oils in the Kitchen). The dosages per serving in these recipes are minimal and harmless.
- Use essential oils cautiously with those who are elderly, convalescing, or have serious health problems such as asthma, epilepsy or heart disease.
- Be cautious about using essential oils during pregnancy, especially during the first trimester. Even oils that are generally safe during this time may be too stimulating for women who are prone to miscarriage. Because so many oils are best avoided in pregnancy, it is easier to list the safe ones: gentle floral oils such as rose, neroli, lavender, ylang-ylang, chamomile and jasmine absolute, as well as the citruses, geranium, sandalwood, spearmint and frankincense.

- Overexposure to an essential oil, either through the skin or through inhalation, may result in nausea, headache, skin irritation, emotional unease or a "spaced-out" feeling. Getting some fresh air will help overcome these symptoms. If you ever experience skin irritation or accidentally get essential oils in the eyes, dilute with straight vegetable oil, not water.
- The following information is adapted from The Essential Oil Safety Data Manual by Robert Tisserand. We recommend this book to anyone interested in a thorough study of toxic oils.

Photosensitizing Essential Oils	
angelica	lime
bergamot	opoponax
bitter orange	rue
cumin	verbena
lemon	

Mucous-Membrane Irritants	
allspice	savory
cinnamon	spearmint
clove	thyme (except linalol)
oregano	

Skin Irritants	
cinnamon	pimento
clove	savory
dwarf pine	thyme (except linalol)
oregano	wintergreen

Potentially Toxic Oils

Some of the oils in the following list have limited use externally; others are used for perfumery. We have included Latin names to avoid any confusion.

almond, bitter (*Prunus amygdalus* var. *amara*)
 inula (*Inula graveolens*)
 khella (*Ammi visnaga*)
 mugwort (*Artemesia vulgaris*)
 pennyroyal (*Mentha pelugium*)
 sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*)

thuja (*Thuja occidentalis*)
wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*)

Very Toxic Essential Oils

We recommend not using the following oils at all.

ajowan (*Ptychotis ajowan*, *Carum ajowan*)
arnica (*Arnica montana*)
boldo (*Peumus boldus*)
buchu (*Barosma betulina*)
calamus (*Acorus calamus*)
cascarilla (*Croton eluteria*)
chervil (*Anthriscus cerefolium*)
camphor, brown and yellow (*Cinnamomun camphora*)
deer tongue (*Carphephorus odoratissimus*)
horseradish (*Cochlearia armoracia*, *Armoracia rusticana*)
jaborandi (*Pilocarpus jaborandi*)
mustard (*Brassica nigra*)
narcissus (*Narcissus poeticus*)
nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans*)
parsley (*Petroselinum sativum*, *Carum sativum*)
rue (*Ruta graveolens*)
santolina (*Santolina chamaecyparissus*)
Spanish broom (*Spartium junceum*)
tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*)
tonka (*Dipteryx odorata*)
turmeric (*Curcuma longa*)
wormseed (*Chenopodium ambrosioides*, *C. anthelminticum*)
wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*)

Methods of Application

Dilutions

The most effective way to dilute essential oils is in a carrier oil. A carrier can be any high-quality vegetable oil, such as almond, apricot, hazelnut, olive, grapeseed or sesame.

A safe and effective dilution for most aromatherapy applications is 2 percent, which translates to 2 drops of essential oil per 100 drops of carrier oil. There is no need to go beyond a 3-percent dilution for any purpose. In aromatherapy, more is not better; in fact, "more" may cause adverse reactions. Some oils, such as lavender, are sedating in low dilutions and stimulating in high dilutions. A 1-percent dilution should be used on children, pregnant women, the elderly and those with health concerns.

You can create a safe and effective remedy with just one, two or three oils. When combining essential oils in a therapeutic blend, it is best for beginners to keep it simple, using no more than five oils at a time. Using more than five may lead to unpredictable results because of the complex chemistry created by the combination of all the oils.

- 1% dilution: 5-6 drops essential oil per ounce of carrier oil
- 2% dilution: 10-12 drops essential oil per ounce of carrier oil
- 3% dilution: 15-18 drops essential oil per ounce of carrier oil

We are often asked, "How big is a drop?" This is a very good question, because the size of a drop varies depending on the size of the dropper opening, as well as on the temperature and the viscosity (thickness) of the essential oil. A drugstore dropper will probably be accurate enough for your purposes.

Some people find it easier to use drops; others prefer measuring their essential oils by the teaspoon. Teaspoons are usually more convenient when preparing large quantities. Whatever your preference, use the chart on the following page as a general guideline. We've rounded off the measurements for your convenience. The ratios of drops to teaspoon were calculated using water, which has a medium viscosity compared with the range of viscosities found in essential oils.

Storage and Shelf Life

Store essential oils away from heat and light to preserve their freshness and potency. When stored properly, they have a shelf life of several years. The citrus oils have the shortest shelf life of all essential oils and are best used within one year. The longest-lasting oils, which improve as they age, tend to be the thick resins such as frankincense and myrrh, woods such as sandalwood, roots like vetiver, as well as other oils, including spikenard and patchouli.

Measurement Conversion Chart				
10 drops	1/10 tsp.	1/96 oz.	1/8 dram	about 1 ml.
12.5 drops	1/8 tsp.	1/48 oz.	1/6 dram	about 5/8 ml.
25 drops	1/4 tsp.	1/24 oz.	1/3 dram	about 1 1/4 ml.
50 drops	1/2 tsp.	1/12 oz.	2/3 dram	about 2 1/2 ml.
100 drops	1 tsp.	1/6 oz.	1 1/3 drams	about 5 ml.
150 drops	1 1/2 tsp.	1/4 oz.	2 drams	about 13.5 ml
300 drops	3 tsp.	1/2 oz.	4 drams	about 15 ml.
600 drops	6 tsp.	1 oz.	8 drams	about 30 ml.
24 teaspoons	(8 tablespoons)	4 oz.	1/2 cup	
48 teaspoons	(16 tablespoons)	8 oz.	1 cup	1/2 pint
96 teaspoons	(32 tablespoons)	16 oz.	2 cups	1 pint

Suggested Dilutions for Various Methods of Application

Massage/Body Oil

- 2 - 3% dilution (10 - 12 drops per ounce of vegetable oil)
- 1% for pregnant women, people with health concerns and children (5 drops per ounce of vegetable oil)

Bath

3 - 15 drops per tub, depending on the oil

Compress

5 drops per cup of water

Inhalant

3 - 5 drops in a bowl of hot water

Caution: never do an inhalation during an asthma attack

Douche

3 - 5 drops per quart of warm water

Caution: Choose nonirritant oils only (e.g., lavender or tea tree).

Foot or Hand Bath

5 - 10 drops per quart of water

Sitz Bath

5 - 10 drops per sitz bath

Fragrant Body Water

5 - 10 drops per 4 ounces of water

Room Spray

20 drops per 4 ounces of water

Gargle or Mouthwash

1 - 2 drops per 1/4 cup of water

Liniment

3% dilution

Carrier oils should be stored away from heat and light to ensure their freshness. The addition of jojoba oil as 10 percent of your carrier oil will help extend the shelf life of your blend by slowing down oxidation that leads to rancidity. Vitamin E oil is an excellent antioxidant; adding it to any aromatherapy blend will help extend the life of most vegetable oils. One or two capsules (200-400 IU) per two-ounce bottle of carrier oil is enough. It is recommended that you make only enough of a blend to last a few months. A refrigerated blend may keep six months or more. Refrigeration of all vegetable oils is highly recommended.

Methods of Application at a Glance

Essential oils are versatile and effective in treating many common problems. The following guidelines are suitable for a single essential oil or a combination of oils. Many problems are best treated by a combination of methods. For example, a cold may be treated with an inhalant, a bath, a chest rub and a compress. Details on specific applications are presented throughout this book in the chapters on Facial Care, Massage and Therapeutics.

Carrier Oils

Vegetable oils high in vitamins A, E and F-soothing, skin-softening, nourishing and rich

in nutrients that enrich the skin-are among the best carriers of essential oils. They are called fixed oils because their large molecules stay in the plant instead of being easily released, as are the essential oils. This means that they are often extracted with heat or solvent-extracted (a process that also uses heat to extract the solvent). The one exception is olive oil, which can be cold-pressed, although less oil is obtained with this method, resulting in a more expensive product. Whenever possible, choose vegetable oils that are expeller-pressed or cold-pressed, which means they have not been exposed to temperatures over 110 degrees.

Unlike essential oils, vegetable oil molecules are large and do not easily penetrate the skin, making them an ideal medium for cosmetic products. The "saturation rate" of carrier oils measures how thick they are. The more saturated the oil, the thicker it is, the longer it stays on the skin, and the longer its shelf life. On the other hand, unsaturated oils give the illusion that they are being absorbed into the skin when they are actually evaporating. The most suitable oil depends on the application. Most body workers prefer saturated oil for massage, but many cosmetics use less saturated oils that feel less thick and sticky.

Other factors to consider are smell and color. The light smell and color of almond, hazelnut and grapeseed oils put them among the most preferred oils for cosmetics. (We've found that you need to go easy on using unrefined oils, which can leave you smelling like food).

Characteristics of Common Carrier Oils

Almond-Almond is an affordable, nourishing oil, well suited for massage. It provides just the right slip and glide, without wasting oil.

Apricot-This oil is derived from the kernel of the apricot pit. Its cost is comparable to that of almond, but it has a lighter consistency. Suitable for body oils and lotions.

Avocado-Deep green with lots of skin-nourishing vitamins, this thick oil is very rich on its own but combines nicely with other oils. It is well suited for dry-skin conditions.

Borage, Evening Primrose, Black Currant-The oils in this group are high in gamma linoleic acid (GLA), an important fatty acid that helps maintain healthy skin and repair skin damaged by the sun. Their rejuvenating effects are especially useful for treating mature skin. These oils can be used sparingly in a carrier blend (10 percent); because they are expensive, price alone will probably keep you from using too much.

Castor-Castor oil is very viscous and not normally used in aromatherapy, although it may be added in small amounts to formulas for eczema or other dry-skin conditions. Herbalists use castor oil to make compresses that break down fibrous tissue, enhance immunity and detoxify the liver. Sulfated castor oil is water-soluble and often used for aromatherapy bath oils.

Caulophyllum Inophyllum-This is a native of tropical Asia and was used in many Polynesian islands, and considered sacred. Known as kamanu or kamani in Hawaii, tamanu in the South Seas and 'fetau in Samoa (Another variety, "faraha," is from Madagascar.), it is nontoxic and nonirritating, but rather expensive and thick, so you may want to combine it with another carrier oil. Anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving properties make Caulophyllum suitable for sciatica, rheumatism and shingles. It is

antibacterial and nonirritating to mucous membranes and can be used to treat vaginitis and cervical erosion, infected wounds, eczema, psoriasis, chapped skin, cracked nipples, chemical or heat burns, and anal fissures. Historically, it was used extensively to treat leprosy.

Cocoa butter-Similar to coconut oil in consistency, cocoa butter is derived from cocoa beans and has a distinctive "chocolate" scent. It will overpower the odor of most essential oils, but may be used in small proportions as a thickener in lotions and creams. When combined with neroli, the fragrance is reminiscent of an exotic, delectable dessert.

Coconut-Highest in saturated fats, coconut oil is solid at room temperature. (It is twice as saturated as lard.) It can be used in conjunction with other oils for massage, and in body lotion or cream recipes. Although coconut oil has a long history of use in many tropical countries, it is often solvent-extracted, and if so, is not recommended for use on the face; it can cause allergic reaction in sensitive individuals.

Corn-The oil comes from our familiar table corn, mostly from the germ found in the corn's kernel. This oil is quite stable because it contains a large amount of vitamin E, which prevents oxidation. Corn-germ oil is also available, but has a strong odor.

Grapeseed-Light in texture, this odorless oil is mildly astringent and useful for acne or oily skin. Unfortunately, the seed is always solvent-extracted and is unavailable cold-pressed, causing sensitivity in some individuals.

Hazelnut-Light and mildly fragranced, this easily absorbed oil is useful in facial blends for those with a tendency toward oily skin. Hazelnut oil makes a great base for calendula infusions (see the section on herb-infused oils) and for all cosmetic purposes, including massage.

Jojoba-The carrier of choice for perfumery, jojoba is technically not an oil but a liquid wax. It does not oxidize or become rancid. A small amount (10 percent) can be used to extend the shelf life of all blends. Because jojoba is very similar to the sebum produced by our own skin, it is particularly beneficial in facial and body oils, and it is also recommended for scalp and hair treatments. It is derived from the seed of the desert shrub.

Kukui-The thinnest, lightest oil for the face, kukui provides just the right amount of lubrication without leaving a greasy feeling. The kukui nut, native to Hawaii, is high in linoleic and linolenic acids, and is rapidly absorbed into the skin. It was used by the Hawaiians for skin conditioning after sun exposure (but is not a sunscreen). Kukui-nut oil has a low toxicity level, but it is laxative and therefore should not be ingested. It has a distinct odor and is very expensive, so you may want to combine it with other oils.

Macadamia-Slightly more viscous than kukui and also from Hawaii, macadamia oil is similar to both mink oil and sebum, our skin's own natural oil. Its lightness makes it ideal as a base for facial or hair-care products, and it combines well with kukui.

Olive-This oil is a favorite for dry skin, but the odor is a little strong for some people. It may be blended with other oils and has a nice texture for massage. This is one of the best mediums for herb-infused oils intended for medicinal applications, such as in salves or rectal or vaginal suppositories. Pure olive oil has excellent stability and can

be stored without refrigeration for a year. (Greek olive oil is greener and more acidic than oil from Italy or California.)

Rice Bran-This oil is naturally high in mixed tocopherols (vitamin E) and ferulic acid, another natural antioxidant. It flows on smoothly and is moderately penetrating without being greasy or sticky. Good for massage or lotions.

Rosehip seed-Another oil high in GLA, pungent rosehip seed is the very best for regenerative skin care. It is rich and expensive, so we recommend blending it with other oils (10-20 percent rosehip-seed oil in carrier blend). Combine with infused calendula oil to treat stretch marks, burns or scars.

Safflower-This oil comes from an herb that is cultivated in California and Arizona, where it turns fields aglow with its colorful flowers. Safflower oxidizes easily, especially the natural oil. It can be used in massage blends.

Sesame Seed-This oil contains sesomoline, a natural preservative. Sesame has long been used in Ayurvedic medicinal preparations and is said to be rejuvenating. The unrefined variety has a strong scent, which is the biggest drawback to using this oil alone as a carrier. Good as a base for herb preparations.

Soybean-First introduced from the Orient to the United States, this oil was rarely used before 1950. It now accounts for more than 65 percent of all oil used commercially in the United States. Because of its low oil content (16-18 percent), it is often solvent-extracted. Soybean oil is high in linoleic acid and susceptible to oxidation. Use as a part of a massage blend.

Squalene-Vegetable sources of this oil product are olive, wheat germ and rice bran oils. Squalene can also be derived from shark liver oil. It is used as a fixative in perfumes and as a bactericide, and is very expensive; 5-10 percent in a carrier blend is sufficient. Human sebum is 25 percent squalene.

Wheat germ-Too thick and rich on its own, this oil is a useful addition to any carrier blend. It is high in vitamin B, and because it contains the antioxidant vitamins A and E, it will help extend the shelf life of your blends. Add 10 percent to your carrier-oil blend.

Vegetable Oils

The more saturated an oil, the thicker its consistency and the longer it can be stored without refrigeration. Also, the lower the iodine value, the better the oil will keep. Values can vary according to the source of the oil. Some oils also contain other ingredients that improve their preservation, such as sesame oil.

Oil	% of Saturated Fats	Iodine Value
Coconut	91	9
Cocoa Butter	50	40
Olive	20	84
Peanut	20	92
Rice	17	104
Corn	17	124

Wheat Germ	18	125
Walnut	16	138
Soy	15	130
Sesame	13	110
Almond	5 - 10	100
Apricot	5 - 10	100
Sunflower	6 - 8	130
Safflower	6	143
Castor	3	84

The values are based on information from Bailey's Industrial Oil and Fat Products, edited by Daniel Swern, and Food Oils and Their Uses, by Theodore J. Weiss, USDA research chemist.

Herbal Preparations

Never pass up the opportunity to use herbs in your aromatherapy formulations. When the essential oil of a plant is deemed too strong for a particular person or application, the herb itself in tea or tincture form is likely a safe and effective substitute. When used together, whole plants and essential oils often create a synergy with greater potential for healing than either used alone.

Herb quality is as important to herbalism as purity of essential oils is to aromatherapy. Growing your own herbs is ideal, but we realize that many of you will be buying herbs from an herb or natural-food store. The good news is that it is much easier to determine good herb quality by smelling, seeing and tasting than it is with essential oils. Dried herbs should not be brown and lifeless; they should be fragrant, colorful and, ideally, organically grown or responsibly picked in the wild. Buying direct from the grower, wildcrafter (one who picks wild herbs), or local sources such as farmers' markets, where you can inquire about growing methods, is probably the next best thing to growing your own herbs.

The following recipes provide a useful basis for making basic herbal preparations. They can be made either with individual herbs ("simples") or a combination of herbs ("compounds"). So get creative! If you need more detailed information on the specific uses of individual herbs, consult a good herb book such as Kathi's Herbs, an Illustrated Encyclopedia (Friedman/Fairfax).

Preparing Herb-Infused Oils

Oils made by macerating (steeping) herbs in vegetable oil are called infused oils. The oils can be used instead of plain carrier oils in all of your aromatherapy preparations.

Finely chop (or coarsely grind) one cup dried herbs in a blender. Place the herbs in a wide-mouth jar and add enough oil to cover. Check the mixture in a day or two; you may need to add a bit more oil. Keep the mixture in a warm place and shake daily. The ideal temperature is 70-80 degrees Fahrenheit, but fluctuations in temperature will not harm the oil. Let the mixture steep for one week; by this time, the oil should have taken on the color, aroma and healing properties of the herb.

Strain the oil through a kitchen strainer, or through cheesecloth, muslin or a thin dishcloth. Most of the oil will drain out. To get every precious drop, press with the back of a spoon or wring out as much oil as possible. Compost the herbs and store the infused oil in a cool place.

There are many variations on this preparation. Choose a vegetable oil such as olive for medicinal preparations such as salves; choose hazelnut or another light oil for cosmetic applications or massage. It is difficult to give exact measurements for each herb, because they are different in texture, weight and volume. To double the strength, you can add a new batch of dried herb to the same oil. This is called a double infusion.

Another way to make infused oils is on the stove top. Place the dried herbs in a pot and cover them with oil. Gently warm the herb mixture over low heat (about 100 degrees F) without a lid, stirring occasionally. (Be careful not to deep-fry your herbs.) After about six hours, strain, cool and bottle.

Some people like to use fresh herbs, although the water in fresh plants may cause the oil to mold and spoil. However, some oils-St. John's wort for example-must be made fresh. Wilt the plant material overnight to eliminate some of the water, then finely chop or crush them. Process as instructed above for dry herbs. Be sure that all the plant material is submerged and that there are no air bubbles.

When straining the oil, simply let the mixture drip; wringing or pressing will give you more oil, but also more water. When the water from the fresh plant has settled in the bottom of the jar, pour the oil off the top and discard the water. (Be prepared to lose a little oil.)

Don't confine yourself to making only medicinal or cosmetic oils. Experiment with creating culinary oils, too. Try a combination of basil, oregano, rosemary and garlic infused in olive oil. It's great on pasta or french bread!

Always keep a meticulous record of how you make your herbal preparations. Your notes should include ingredients and proportions, the date you started and completed the preparation, processing procedures, comments, and possible improvements to be made next time. Label finished products with the date the product was made, ingredients, and instructions for use.

Further Examples of Herb-Infused Oils

Alkanet-This is an infusion of alkanet root in vegetable oil. Because of its brilliant color, it is used as a pink coloring for cosmetic preparations.

Calendula-Very healing to the skin in all cosmetic applications, calendula is specifically recommended for burns and is also antimicrobial, making it suitable for the treatment of many types of skin infections. There is also a carbon-dioxide extract of calendula which is very concentrated and tarlike. It can be diluted in vegetable oil and added to any essential oil preparation.

Neem-Derived from a tree native to India, neem is used to treat a number of skin diseases, as an astringent, antibacterial and antiviral. It is also a preservative. The oil has a long history of use in treatment of hair loss, dandruff, excess sebum production,

brittle nails, nail fungus and gum infections. This herb is hard to find unless you have a neem tree, but pre-prepared oil can be purchased.

St. John's Wort-Excellent for bruises, inflammation and nerve damage, St. John's wort is made from fresh flowering tops of the plant to obtain the desired deep red oil, high in the healing constituent hypericin.

Yarrow-For treating the genito-urinary system (see Chapter 5: Therapeutics).

Herbal Boluses

Herbal boluses are vaginal or rectal suppositories used to treat chronic infections, nonspecific vaginitis, cysts, and hemorrhoids. See "Reproductive System."

Ingredients:

1/8 cup finely powdered herbs

1/4 cup cocoa butter

15-20 drops appropriate essential oil

Melt the cocoa butter over low heat and add the finely powdered herbs to form a thick, pliable paste. Add the essential oil. Drop the mixture by the teaspoonful onto a cold plate and form into a suppository shape about the size of your little finger (or you can mold it into a long, thin roll). Refrigerate until firm. Remove the hardened mixture and cut it with a warm knife into 1 1/2-inch lengths. Date and store boluses in glass or plastic in the refrigerator.

For treatment, insert one bolus each evening for seven days. Women may want to wear a panty liner and gently douche every couple of days.

Herbal Salves

Ingredients:

1 cup herb-infused oil

3/4 ounce beeswax, shaved

Warm the herb-infused oil in a pan and add the beeswax. (More beeswax will create a salve with a firmer consistency, which won't melt in hot temperatures.) You can shave the beeswax with a wide-hole cheese grater. (For a quick cleanup, heat the grater over the kitchen stove and wipe with paper towels.) Add essential oils at the end, after the salves cool a bit so that the oils do not evaporate. (You can also add the essential oils to the individual jars before pouring.)

Lip balms are made the same way as salves, but use 1 ounce beeswax.

Herb Tea: Infusions and Decoctions

For infusions, pour boiling water over fresh or dried herbs, let them steep while covered for 5-10 minutes, strain and drink. Cover steeping herbs to keep in the precious volatile oils.

Infusions are good for delicate plant parts such as leaves, blossoms and fruits, or seeds and roots that are high in volatile oils. The amount of herb varies, but the general rule is one teaspoon dried herb, or one tablespoon fresh herb, per cup of water.

For hard plant parts, such as roots, barks, twigs and some seeds, decoctions are preferable. We prefer to soak the herbs in cold water overnight, bring the water and herbs to a boil, then lower the heat and simmer, covered, for at least 15 minutes. Roots and seeds that are high in volatile oils, such as ginger and valerian roots, or fennel and anise seeds, should be infused.

To make tea with both leaves and roots, start by soaking the herbs overnight in the refrigerator, then bring to a boil, remove from the heat and steep for 15 minutes. You can also decoct the roots first, remove from heat, add the leaves to the decoction and steep.

Teas are a great addition to bath water, especially for those with highly sensitive skin. Almost any herb or essential oil, alone or in combination, will do. Refrigerator storage is acceptable for up to three days.

Herbal Tinctures

Ingredients:
dry or fresh herbs
vodka to cover

Chop or grind herbs before tincturing to expose more surface area of the plant to the vodka which contains only water and alcohol and is used to break down the plant matter and extract its qualities. Put the herbs in a jar with a tight-fitting lid and cover with menstruum. The proportion of herb to vodka is hard to specify, because the weight-to-volume of each herb varies so much. Make sure that the herb is completely covered. Check in a few days in case you need to add more vodka. Cover the jar tightly and let the herbs soak for two weeks in a cool, dark place, shaking daily, then strain. You'll be surprised to find how easy this is, and it costs much less than commercial tinctures.

Tinctures are best made with single herbs, and can then be mixed together to make compounds or formulas. This helps avoid undesirable constituent interactions that can occur when herbs are tinctured together. It also allows for more flexibility in blending tinctures into different combinations. Tinctures are taken orally, typically 15 to 30 drops three times a day, mixed in a little water or juice. One advantage herbal tinctures have over teas is that they need no refrigeration and remain potent for many years, take up little storage space, and are fast and easy to use, fitting into any busy lifestyle. They are also quickly and easily absorbed by the body.

Herbal Vinegars

Ingredients:
fresh or dried herbs
vinegar to cover

Make sure the fresh or dried herbs are covered by the vinegar. Shake daily for two weeks, strain. Add essential oils to the vinegar after straining, but remember to shake well before use—essential oils do not mix with a watery carrier. These vinegars can be used to make "Queen of Hungary's water," other facial toners, hair rinses, baths, and douches. Vinegar also can be used as a substitute for alcohol in tincturing for those who are alcohol-intolerant, but it is not a good menstruum for extracting the resinous constituents contained in certain plants.

Keville, K. (2000, December) Guidelines for Using Essential Oils and Herbs. Healthy. <https://healthy.net/2000/12/06/guidelines-for-using-essential-oils-and-herbs/>.