

## How to Make Herbal Oils

Oils infused with herbs are a great way to utilize the healing properties of plants which contain volatile oils and fats.

Plants containing volatile oils are generally those commonly used in aromatherapy but they can be used as a salad oil too. Aromatic plants such as lavender, rosemary, thyme, sage, peppermint, chamomile, rose, yarrow, juniper and pine all make great oils.

You can use a variety of different oils as the base for the infusion. Olive oil is classic for the leafy herbs, sunflower, sweet almond, jojoba, or apricot oil all make a great base for creams and salves.

### How to Infuse

- You can use dried or fresh plant material, although fresh is generally best (except calendula-dry).
- If using fresh herbs, pick them on a dry day after the sun has dried the morning dew.
- Make sure you pick clean plant matter; this is particularly important as you are not going to wash the plants. It must be as dry as possible to prevent spoilage, if there is any dirt brush it off with a soft-bristle brush or simply shake.
- If using leaves such as comfrey or plantain, it's good to let them wilt overnight to reduce some of the water content but flowers are best used fresh.
- Chop fresh leafy herbs finely and lightly fill a sterilized, dry jar with the material. It's important to cut the herb first as it exposes more of the plant to the oil, making for a better infusion. Flowers can be put in whole and dried herbs will most likely come already cut.
- Fill the jar almost to the brim with oil because an air gap will promote oxidation and spoilage.
- Stir the contents with a wooden chopstick until all air bubbles have dispersed then place lid on.
- You can leave it to infuse on a sunny windowsill or in indirect light.
- Stir every day for the first two weeks then leave to infuse for another two to four, that's four to six weeks in total. Calendula and some other oils are nice to double infuse- leave for 3 weeks, strain, then fill the jar with fresh flowers and pour the partially infused oil back on top and repeat the process.
- Don't forget to label your jars so you remember when to strain them. Strain through a sieve covered in cheesecloth or a jelly bag. If you used fresh material it is wise to let it stand for a week and check if any water has settled in the bottom of the jar. If so pour off the oil and discard the water.
- Bottle the infused oil and be sure to label it including the best before date of the oil from the original bottle.

## How to Make Herbal Vinegars

You can infuse any plant matter into vinegar to create your own funky blends! Although the preferred vinegar to use is organic apple cider you can use white or red wine vinegar too. A tip for jars is to check out second hand shops; there are some really nice bottles to be had out there!

Place several plants of your choice into the bottle. Fresh (clean and free from moisture) plant matter is best to use. You can even make an onion and garlic vinegar! Seal the bottle or jar you are using. Word of caution: if you use a mason jar do not use the metal lid plate, use plastic because the acids can corrode the lid. Let sit in a cool area (does not have to be dark) for 5 weeks; and after 2 weeks there will be flavour and you can test it. If you want it stronger let it sit longer. (I let my onion and garlic vinegar sit for 3 months before using it - wow!!)

Be sure to label your vinegar with what it is and the date you made it.

For more information or questions please email Karen: [k.stephenson@ediblewildfood.com](mailto:k.stephenson@ediblewildfood.com)

## How to Make a Tincture

Tinctures are concentrated herbal extracts that are made using alcohol and chopped herbs. The tincture is especially effective in drawing out the essential compounds of plants, especially those that are fibrous or woody, and from roots and resins. Since this method ensures that the herbs and their nutrients can be preserved for a long time, it is often mentioned in herbal books and remedies as a preferred way of using herbs.

Your tincture will not be of the same potency of the tinctures that registered herbalists make because they have access to much stronger alcohol. We use the best quality vodka possible. Although some people say you can use rum, brandy or whiskey this changes the flavour. No matter what you choose it must be 40% to prevent mildew starting on the plant material. (For those who cannot drink alcohol use quality apple cider vinegar or glycerin.)

The container for the tincture should be glass or ceramic. Never use a metallic or plastic container because these can react with the tincture or leach dangerous chemicals over time. Items such as a mason jar, a glass bottle with an attached stopper, etc., are ideal for steeping a tincture. You will need to get some small dark glass tincture bottles for storing the tincture in once it has been made; these bottles should have a tight screw-on or tight clip-on lid to prevent air intrusion during storage but to allow for ease of use. Ensure that all containers are both washed clean and sterilized prior to use.

You can prepare a tincture by measurement or by sight; it really depends on your level of comfort with simply adding herbs and judging by eye, or whether you feel more comfortable adding them by measured weight. Also, you should know whether you want to add fresh, powdered, or dried herbs to the tincture. Some suggestions for adding the herbs in the order of fresh, powdered, or dried are as follows:

- Add enough fresh chopped herbs to fill the glass container. Cover with alcohol.
- Add 113g of powdered herb with 473ml of alcohol (or vinegar/glycerin).
- Add 198g of dried herb material to 1 liter of alcohol (or vinegar/glycerin).
- Using a butter knife, stir around the edge of the glass container to ensure that all air bubbles are released.

Seal the container. Place it into a cool, dark area (in a cupboard). The container should be stored there minimum 8 days to a month.

- Shake the container twice a day.
- Be sure to label the steeping tincture so that you know what it is and the date on which it was made. Keep it out of the reach of children and pets.

Strain the tincture. Once the steeping time is finished (the specific tincture instructions you're following will inform you of this) strain the tincture as follows:

- Place cheesecloth across a sieve. Place a large bowl underneath to catch the strained liquid.
- Gently pour the steeped liquid through the lined sieve. The cheesecloth will capture the plant material.
- Press the herb material with a wooden spoon to squeeze out some more liquid, and then twist the cloth to extract any leftover liquid.
- Decant the liquid into a prepared tincture bottle. Use a small funnel for this step if you don't have a steady hand. Tighten the lid and date and label the tincture.

Store and use: a tincture can have a shelf life of up to 5 years because alcohol is a preservative. However, know the properties of the particular herbs you've used, and follow the guidance of the recipe from which you're making the tincture in terms of how long to keep the tincture for.

Follow the instructions relevant to your tincture for usage; consult a qualified, reputable herbalist or a health professional if you need more information and bear in mind that herbal treatments can be dangerous if you don't know the properties of the herb and its consequences.