

HERBAL OILS

Herbal oils are also known as infused oils, as the herb is steeped or infused in a vegetable oil. In medieval times, lard or animal fat would have been more commonly used than oil. They are used externally to treat specific skin conditions, as massage oils, etc. There are several tricks to making herbal oils which will keep your oils from becoming rancid or moldy. When making oils from fresh plants be certain the plants are harvested dry. If possible, allow the plants to wilt overnight. If your herbs are very juicy or if you need the oils immediately, use the oven method. When infusing or storing oils, use jars that are equal in size to the amount of oil you have with no air space. Air in the jar encourages the growth of mold. Store herbal oils in the refrigerator if possible.

There are several methods for making oils, the infusion method works best in warm weather and takes about a week. The oven method produces herbal oils within a few hours. As with tinctures, herbs should be ground or chopped first. Most good quality vegetable oils can be used. Olive oil is a good choice if you plan to make salves as it is very healing to the skin. Different oils have different absorption rates so you may want to use a finer oil like grape seed or avocado for massage or face oils.

THE INFUSION METHOD: Grind or chop dry or wilted herbs and put in a jar almost to the top. Fill oil to just above the level of the herbs and just below the top of the jar. Cap tightly and shake well. Set the jar in a brown paper bag outside in a sunny spot for several days. Shake and check daily for mold or weird smells. Depending on the moisture in your herbs the oil could be ready in five to seven days. It is ready when it has a deep rich color and a nice herbal fragrance. In cold weather, you can infuse oils by setting your jar in a crock pot half full of water set on low. Cap loosely. Stir with a chop stick occasionally. Leave for about two weeks, checking daily for mold. To press herbal oils, use the same muslin/cheese cloth, colander and bowl set up as with tinctures. Don't use the same muslin/cheese cloth for both tincture and oil! Be prepared, pressing oils is a messy process. Bottle the pressed oil. Vitamin E can be added to your infused oil to enhance the healing properties and act as a preservative. For best results, store in the refrigerator or a cool, dark place.

THE OVEN METHOD: Put chopped or ground herbs in a ceramic or enameled casserole dish. Cover herbs with oil. Cover dish and bake at 250 degrees for one hour. Check every 20 minutes or so by lifting herbs from the oil to check for "crispness". When herbs begin to look crisp or dry, remove the dish from the oven. Uncover and cool. Strain the herbs. Bottle and store in a cool, dark place.

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