

Fixed Oils

Infused herbal oils for external use

Fixed, or infused oils are extractions of herbs in oil. They are different from Essential, or volatile oils (which are produced by distillation and are very strong) and can easily be made at home. Infused oils are used directly on the skin, or are made into ointments and salves, creams, chapstick, soaps, you name it – if it's oil based, you can use herbal oils in it.

Infused oils are prepared in a manner similar to decoction in water: an amount of herb (usually one part herb to six parts oil) is heated for up to two hours and then strained. The oil is then strained off or pressed out and stored for later use.

Be sure to use dried herbs to make infused oils. Fresh herbs contain water which will sink to the bottom of the infused oil clouding it and making it quickly turn rancid.

Your First Herbal Oil

Comfrey oil is often mentioned when in regard to bone healing or bruising. It is very simple to make and you will know when you have made an oil of quality, as, usefully Comfrey oil is bright green.

Ingredients

50 g	Dried Comfrey (<i>Symphytum officinale</i>)
300 ml	Vegetable oil

Method

Warm the vegetable oil in a *bain marie* or double boiler. When the water in the *bain marie* starts boiling, the oil will be warm enough to add the herb material. Stir it in slowly to ensure it gets coated in the oil and there are no air bubbles.

Leave the *bain marie* to simmer for about 45 minutes. Comfrey extracts relatively quickly, other herbs may not (especially roots and woody material). Stir the infusing oil every 5 or 10 minutes.

Remove from the heat and allow to cool. Drain the oil from the herb material while it is still hand warm. You can filter it at this point through a coffee filter, or later on; but it will flow better while warm.

Ointments and Salves

The simplest skin preparations

Long before creams and lotions were popular, ointments and salves reigned supreme. They have fallen out of favour because they can have a greasy feel when applied to the skin, however they are very simple to make, are surprisingly effective, and are good at treating very dry skin conditions.

Ointments and salves would traditionally have been herbs infused in hot animal fat, salves would have been the same but slightly thinner depending on the oil used. These days, beeswax ointments are much more popular: they are easier to make, are animal-free, and the beeswax in itself has medicinal properties as a tissue healer, antiseptic/antifungal and emollient.

A good ratio of beeswax to infused oil is 1:8. This gives a rich moisturising ointment that is firm enough to keep in jars, is stable, but is thin enough to apply easily.

Ingredients

30g	Grated Beeswax
250 ml	Infused Herbal Oil
30 drops	Essential Oil

Method

Heat the infused oil in a *bain marie* until the water in the *bain marie* simmers. If you have a thermometer, you will want the infused oil to reach about 75° C. Stir in the grated beeswax and stir until it melts. Remove from the heat and allow to cool. When a skin starts forming on your ointment, stir in the essential oil and pour the ointment mixture into clean jars. It should set quickly.

That's all there is to it!