Herbal Infused Oils

What is an Infused Oil?

Infused Oils are a very simple type of herbal preparation which use fixed oils to extract the constituents from herbs. You may have seen them already in the kitchen - for example as chilli or garlic oil. Herbal infused oils can be applied to the skin to form a protective covering which also holds your herbs' medicinal properties on the skin. You can use them directly on your skin as a massage oil, stick them in the bath, or they can also be used as the base for herbal ointments, creams, balms etc. You can make an infused oil using any oil of your choice, with different oils adding their own qualities to your remedy. Some commonly used examples are:

- **Sunflower Oil:** A light, inexpensive and readily available oil that makes a good carrier for herbs. Odourless and fairly colourless. Softening and moisturising.
- **Olive Oil:** A thicker, stickier oil with more colour and odour to it which can override the odour of the herbs. Soothing, nutritive properties.
- **Sweet Almond Oil:** A very common carrier which moistens, soothes and conditions the skin. Bland odour, light in colour. Beware of using with nut allergy sufferers
- **Coconut Oil:** A deliciously fragranced, white oil which is a solid at room temperature. Coconut oil is excellent for the skin with nourishing and moisturising actions.

How to Make an Infused Oil:

There are two commonly used methods for infusing oils: the Sun Method and the Double-Boiler or 'Digestion' Method.

1) The Sun Method

Sun infusion is a very simple method which harnesses the heat from the sun to gently warm the oil and extract the constituents of the herbs over a number of weeks. The key to a good infused oil is to try and limit the amount of water that you introduce into it. Some plants have a high water content. Water may deteriorate the oil and cause it to go rancid - water and oil just don't mix! The sun method is best for fresh flowers or other delicate parts of herbs; chunky roots or thick juicy stems will introduce too much water into the oil and it may turn rancid before you have finished extracting it.

Instructions:

1. Take your chosen herb and chop it as finely as possible, or even powder it if you have a grinder. If using fresh herbs it is a good idea to minimally wilt them for 12-24 hours to lower the water content first, or to fully dry them
2. Place your herb into a clean, sterilised jar that can be capped tightly

3. Cover it with enough oil so that the herb is completely wet. Give it a stir and once it has settled add more oil so that the herb is covered by over 1cm.
4. Screw the lid back on tightly and leave on a warm windowsill. Check your mixture 24 hours later - some herbs will absorb a lot of oil and if so, add enough oil to re-establish the extra 1cm.
5. Leave on your warm windowsill for up to 6 weeks, shaking or stirring regularly. More than once a day is excellent!
6. Strain the oil out and press the remaining pulp from the herbs
7. Leave it to sit still for a few days and then decant off any sediment or water that the oil has retained - most often this will sink to the bottom, and you can simply pour off the oil and remove the sediment.
8. Finally, bottle, cap tightly, label and leave in a cool, dark place.

2) The Double Boiler '**Digestion**' **Method**

This method is particularly suited to roots or other juicy or tough parts of herbs, though you can prepare any herbal oil this way. It simply uses a water bath, or 'ban-marie' to heat the oil with herbs in it for at least one hour.

1. Finely chop or powder your herbs. Wilt fresh herbs for 12-24 hours before infusing.
2. Prepare a double boiler: place a pot on the cooker with hot water in it, and set a bowl on top so that only the base of the bowl is in the hot water, and the bowl isn't in direct contact with the heat of the cooker.
3. Place your herbs in the bowl and cover with oil as above.
4. Allow the mixture to simmer for at least one hour, then strain off the herbs, and return the oil to the bowl with a fresh batch of herbs and simmer again for another hour.
5. Remove from the heat, strain off the herbs and bottle the oil
6. Filter off any sediment, as above
7. Store as above

Preservation and Storage

Oils can remain unchanged for long periods of time if they are kept in cool, airtight containers. Exposure to air or water will encourage rancidity. Keep them in a cool place in tightly sealed bottles. Amber bottles will minimise light exposure. Fill bottles as full as possible to minimise contact with air during storage, and decant into smaller bottles that match the volume of your preparation as you use it.

Herbs Commonly Extracted Into Oil

Chickweed – soothes and cools itchiness, rashes and insect bites
Comfrey – excellent wound healer for sprains, strains, bruises, broken bones
Meadowsweet – local relief of aches and pains
Mullein - soothes ears and upper respiratory infections/blockages
Plantain - antimicrobial, relieves itching, insect bites
Rose - soothing, calming, anti-inflammatory. Lovely massage oil
St John's Wort – great local nerve pain reliever and wound healer

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