

Carrier Oils

Carrier, or base, oils are often applied in conjunction with an essential oil. These oils are made from vegetables, nuts or seeds and often have therapeutic properties of their own. The carrier oils used in therapeutic settings should be cold pressed and organically grown rather than produced by chemical methods. This is an important distinction, as some of the carrier oil will be absorbed into the body along with the essential oil. Some of the more common carrier, or base, oils are as follows: almond, grapeseed, sunflower, olive, jojoba, safflower, apricot, avocado, borage, carrot, coconut both fractionated and whole, corn, evening primrose, sunflower, wheat germ, and arnica.

Carrier oils are used for several different reasons. One major reason is because pure essential oils are often too concentrated to be applied undiluted to skin. Adding essential oils to a carrier also allows the oil to be spread over a larger application area and to be absorbed more evenly. Many essential oils are quite expensive and, because they are so highly concentrated, one or two drops may be all that you need. The use of a smaller quantity is often more beneficial than a larger quantity and is certainly less likely to cause any type of reaction.

My husband explains one of the needs for carrier oil when using essential oils in this way. Imagine putting an alcohol-based primer on hot asphalt prior to painting it. That would be almost impossible since the alcohol would evaporate almost before it touched the road. Essential oils behave in a similar manner. They are made of several different constituents, some of which evaporate at lower temperatures and faster rates than the others. Place these essential oils on the skin (90 - 95 degrees) and the higher, more volatile notes are gone before they can be absorbed. A carrier oil stabilizes the essential oil, holding onto all the constituents until they can be absorbed. The chemical composition of the oil remains intact to be delivered by the body to wherever it is needed.

Each carrier, or protein oil as they are sometimes referred to, has its own characteristics and ways of reacting to the various essential oils. For example, olive oil, jojoba oil, and avocado oil, while excellent for use in skin and beauty care because of their emollient and nourishing properties, are less easily absorbed and not usually used by themselves as carrier oils for other purposes.

Sweet almond oil is easily the most popular for many reasons. It is inexpensive and absorbs quickly, usually in 5 - 10 minutes. Almond oil has a light, non-offensive aroma.

Fractionated coconut oil is another popular choice. Like almond oil, coconut is inexpensive, absorbs quickly, has almost no aroma at all and has the added advantage of a long shelf life at room temperature without rancidity.

Grapeseed oil is another excellent choice, as is safflower oil. Safflower, however, tends to rancidity if not refrigerated. Sweet almond, grapeseed, and safflower can be used by themselves or in combination with small percentages of other oils.

Plant-based salves, like the Miracle Salve or the BHM salve marketed by Butterfly Express, llc, are also excellent mediums for applying essential oil. The essential oils should, as always, be added to small portions of the salves and always added as close to the time of use as possible.

Certain carriers should never be used by themselves. Because of their characteristics they are better as part of a blend of carrier oils with their proportions kept to less than 10%. Some of these oils are borage, carrot, evening primrose and even jojoba. Very dry skin or skin that has been severely traumatized can greatly benefit by the use of these oils as part of a carrier.

Arnica oil is an oil tincture made by soaking fresh arnica blossoms in almond oil. It is used for bruising, swelling and/or inflammation with amazing results. Arnica oil can cause swelling in exposed muscle tissue, so it is never used on open wounds or deep abrasions.

Distilled water is a great carrier for essential oils. Even bath water will give astonishing results. Water is especially effective in carrying essential oils under the nail bed when fighting a toe-nail fungus. The bath is one of the best ways to carry anti-inflammatory or pain relieving oils to the deep tissues of the body.

Yet Another Reminder

Never mix your pure essential oils into a carrier oil and then store them that way! The therapeutic properties of the oils break down rapidly and you are left with a massage oil of low quality that does not even smell as good as the original essence. Instead, place a small amount of the carrier in the palm of your hand and then add 2 - 4 drops of the essential oil. Apply to the skin. Repeat the procedure if necessary. Following this method allows your essential oils to stay vibrant for long periods of time and requires that you have only one bottle of carrier oil instead of many. It also makes your bottle of essential oil last much longer.

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