Storing Essential Oils

The common factors affecting essential oil storage:

1) Temperature
2) Air
3) Light
4) Contaminants
5) Harmonic Balance
6) Containers

1) Temperature: Most oils are not as sensitive to temperature variations as one might think. This is true especially if the container is sealed air tight. A good temperature range for long term storage for most oils is 65^{O} - $70^{O.}$ Although citrus oils are commercially stored at lower temperatures, the negative effects on the oils is more commonly from exposure to air than from temperature. Some oils like Thyme begin to separate at 65^{O}. Moldovia rose will separate as low as 80^{O}. This very beautiful oil is not commonly used because people are not willing to warm it in warm water before use. Essential oils are distilled with steam with little damage if care is used. Consistency in temperature is the more important issue.

2) Air: Air is the culprit for most oils. Those oils that are rumored to improve with age are not as sensitive to air as the rest. Examples are sandalwood, balsam, and myrrh. The problem is the oxidation and the resulting breakdown of the components. Obviously, then, if your oils are very warm, cool them down before you remove the lid.

Tests on oil storage are often done by removing the lid monthly for 1 minutes. If you are storing your oils in glass, in sizes over 1 ounce, you will need to 'burp' your oil regularly to keep the bottle from exploding. Burping is opening the lid to allow excess pressure to escape. This is not a problem if you have about 1/4 or more airspace. So then, it would be best to store your oil in a container with 1/4 airspace and leave the lid on continuously and keep the temperature below 75^{O}F.

For oil that is used regularly, put it in a small bottle with a dropper assembly. The dropper will greatly deter the air exchange and will help keep the oil fresh even with regular use.

3) Light: All containers provide some protection against light. However a closed cupboard or box is best. Keep your essential oils in the dark, as much as possible.

4) If you have pure oil and you keep it free from contaminants, it will obviously store longer. This is especially true in relation to mixing with fixed vegetable oils such as olive, grapeseed, or almond. These carrier oils will do a lot of damage in just a few short days. Do not pre-mix your essential oils and your carrier oils.

5) Harmonic balance: The citrus oils are the class of essential oils with the shortest shelf life. The individual components are not bound together very well, and the higher notes escape when the lid is off. This is much more of a problem with higher temperatures. If someome leaves your sweet orange in the hot sun, cool it down before you remove the lid. A good blend is said to be in balance. Good blends will have a better shelf life than ordinary singles. The harmonic balance seems to bind even the higher notes together.

You can often tell a poor quality blend - it changes over time. I'm still using some blends from the kitchen cabinet with Aladdin's Lamp labels. That is more than 8 years ago Oils are not reputed to keep that long - mine are working just fine.

6) Containers: Glass is the best. Some oils will store fairly well long-term in plastic, but blass is the king. Boston round - the brown one is a fair choice. They keep out a fair amount of light. The dark blue bottles are the very best at reflecting ultra violet light. They are spendy and do not work as well as a closed cupboard.

Happy oiling

Val D Westover