

Carrier Oils

Carrier or base oils are often applied in conjunction with an essential oil. The common industry term for carrier oils is fixed oils. 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 rather than produced or processed 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: almond, grapeseed, sunflower, olive, jojoba, safflower, apricot, avocado, borage, carrot, coconut (both fractionated and whole), corn, evening primrose, 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 the skin. Adding essential oils to a carrier oil 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 of essential oil is often more beneficial than a larger quantity and is certainly less likely to cause any type of reaction. It is usually more beneficial to apply an oil more frequently—every 4 hours or so—than to apply more at the same time.

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 others. Place these essential oils on the skin (90 - 95 degrees) and the higher, more volatile notes dissipate 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.

LIGHT CARRIER OILS

CAN BE USED BY THEMSELVES (100%)

SWEET ALMOND

Sweet almond oil is easily the most popular carrier oil for many reasons. Almond oil is inexpensive and absorbs into the skin quite quickly. Almond oil is rich in vitamins A, B, and E, all of which are beneficial nutrients for healthy skin. Almond oil is light enough to be used as a make-up remover. It opens the pores, ensuring that all makeup is easily removed. Almond oil, heated, can be used in place of more expensive, commercially available hot oil treatments for dry hair and scalp. This is one of my favorite uses for almond (and coconut) oil.

Almond oil contains, along with the vitamins mentioned above, heart healthy fats, potassium and folic acid. Besides using almond oil as a carrier oil when applying essential oils, perhaps replacing some of your cooking oil with almond oil might be a good idea. I use mostly solid coconut oil for cooking because I like the slight coconut flavor it provides. I use almond oil from time to time where the flavor of coconut might not be appropriate or desired.

Almond oil is such a delightfully light carrier oil that it can be used all by itself, 100%.

APRICOT KERNEL

Apricot kernel oil is light in color with a pleasant, slightly nut scented aroma. It is appropriate for all skin types, but especially effective for sensitive, inflamed, dry, or prematurely aging areas. Apricot oil is readily absorbed by the skin and leaves very little greasy residue. It is generally non-irritating, making it appropriate for children and infants. There are reports of the benefits of apricot kernel oil for treating mild sunburns.

GRAPSEED

Grapeseed oil is another excellent choice as a carrier oil. Grapeseed, like almond, is nourishing to the skin and can be used for hot oil hair treatments in the same way as almond oil. Grapeseed has astringent qualities that help to tighten and tone the skin. Grapeseed is emollient enough to be beneficial for the treatment of minor sunburns and rashes. Of course, adding an essential oil or two greatly increases the benefits.

The one drawback, as far as I am concerned, with grapeseed oil is that it absorbs quite a bit more slowly than sweet almond oil. It also has a slightly stronger aroma—not unpleasant and mild enough that it is usually well-covered by the aroma of the essential oils. Grapeseed needs no additional carrier oil added to lighten it.

SAFFLOWER

Safflower has a very nice weight and consistency for use as a carrier oil. Safflower is a good natural source of linoleic oleic acid, which rejuvenates damaged or dry skin. I rarely use it, however, because safflower oil tends to go rancid rather quickly if not refrigerated. When refrigerated or mixed with a more stable carrier oil such as fractionated coconut oil, a shelf life of about a year can be achieved. Even mixed, refrigeration is recommended. I don't generally like applying that much cold to my skin!

FRACTIONATED COCONUT

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. For those of you who like a little bit of chemistry information—this liquid form of coconut oil has had the smaller fatty acids and the long-chain triglycerides removed. Without these ingredients there is a very, very slow rate of oxidation. This is a carrier oil that does not go rancid, even in the summer months!

Other advantages of fractionated coconut oil include: odorless and colorless; absorbs readily into the skin, leaving no residue; does not stain clothing and easily washes out of clothing and bedding; although absorbing very quickly, liquid coconut oil is an excellent skin moisturizer; rarely aggravates existing skin problems such as fungal or bacterial infections; does not clog pores

Fractionated coconut oil leaves the skin feeling smooth but not greasy. I believe that fractionated coconut is one of the best carrier oil products available. I love it and the solid coconut variety!

SOLID (VIRGIN) COCONUT OIL

Non-fractionated coconut oil is solid at normal room temperatures and white in color. When you put a small amount into the palm of your hand, the heat from your hand immediately melts it to a liquefied form, making it very easy to use as a carrier oil. It absorbs a little more slowly than the fractionated variety but leaves the skin feeling silky smooth.

There are innumerable claims made for the benefits of virgin coconut oil, used both internally and externally. My personal experience bears out every one of them that I have had experience with (or had the need of). This is an amazingly healthy choice for skin care, scalp health, and as a cooking oil.

Coconut oil nourishes the skin, preventing wrinkles, sagging skin, dryness and flaking. Coconut oil complements the anti-bacterial properties of essential oils by adding its own unique properties and is healing to the skin in its own right. Coconut oil is said to prevent protein loss in hair and provide other necessary nutrients for optimal hair health.

This is a book about essential oils and this is a section about carrier oils for essential oils so I will only mention a few of the benefits of coconut oil for internal consumption. Outstanding among the benefits are: aids in digestion, helps maintain healthy bacterial cultures in the intestinal tract—including controlling candida overgrowth, helps maintain proper blood sugar levels, remarkable for pancreatitis and Alzheimer's as well as liver and kidney disorders, and strengthens the immune system.

TAMANU

Tamanu is a wonderfully effective carrier oil because it has cytophylactic properties of its own—meaning that it promotes the formation of new cell growth and the elimination of dead cells, thus accelerating wound healing. Tamanu is also known to possess anti-inflammatory, antibiotic, and antimicrobial properties. Tamanu should be considered as the carrier oil of choice when working with eczema or psoriasis, burns, acne, dry or scaly skin, diaper rash, diabetic ulcers and in relieving pain from sciatica, shingles, and arthritis.

Although tamanu oil is thick and dark in color, when applied to the skin it is readily absorbed and leaves no oily residue.

ARGAN

Argan oil is known in some cultures as “The Tree of Life.” Argan is an exquisite newcomer to the carrier oil world. Argan is most renowned for being rich in natural tocopherols (vitamin E) and because it contains rare plant sterols not often found in other carrier oils. Several sites report studies whose initial findings seem to indicate anti-cancer properties for these natural sterols. These sterols are uniquely combined in argan oil to make it anti-inflammatory. This makes it a great choice for use with essential oils for arthritic conditions, to increase circulation, and to strengthen the immune system.

The properties of this oil make it useful for skin conditions with good results being shown with stretch marks during pregnancy. This oil should be considered for use with scarring, eczema, psoriasis, acne, and scars resulting from acne. Besides possessing healing properties, this oil is reported to be extraordinarily protective of skin, hair, and nails. It protects the skin from weather and provides a disinfectant layer.

HEAVIER CARRIER OILS

USED AS A PERCENTAGE WITH THE CARRIERS LISTED PREVIOUSLY

Some carrier oils are rarely used by themselves. Their characteristics, usually oiliness and rate of absorption, make them better as part of a blend of carrier oils with their proportions kept somewhere between 10% to 20%. Some of these oils are apricot kernel, avocado, borage, carrot, evening primrose, black cumin, and jojoba. Very dry skin or skin that has been severely traumatized can greatly benefit from the use of these oils as part of a carrier.

AVACADO

Avocado oil is a rich heavy oil that penetrates deeply into the skin. It is rich in vitamins A, D, and E, all wonderful skin nourishing vitamins. Like all good carrier oils, avocado contains oleic and linoleic acids. Avocado oil is excellent for use with dry or aging skin, with eczema or psoriasis, and for sun or wind damaged skin. Avocado oil is said to have a sufficiently high sterol content to be useful as a carrier when using essential oils for joint and muscle inflammation and pain. Avocado oil is quite light and absorbs reasonably quickly so is sometimes used by itself on particularly damaged skin patches. Generally, however, it is used as a percentage in a carrier oil mixtures.

OLIVE

Olive oil has some outstanding properties when applied to the skin. One exceptional quality is that it attracts external moisture to the skin while still permitting the skin to release toxins through sweat. Olive oil is soothing to inflamed skin, encourages the shedding of dead skin cells, and releases sebum from the skin. The drawback to olive oil is that it is quite heavy and absorbs less readily into the skin. When used as a carrier oil, several minutes must be allowed to pass before clothing can be placed back on the body. Olive oil is also more difficult to remove from clothing and bedding than some of the lighter carrier oils.

BLACK CUMIN

Black cumin (*Nigella sativa*) oil is sometimes referred to as an essential oil because of the methods by which it is produced and the size of its molecules, but it is more properly classified as a carrier oil. Black cumin is variously called fennel flower, nutmeg flower, Roman coriander, black caraway, and just plain blackseed. The plant is, in fact, not a cumin at all!

Its many uses have earned it a name in Arabic which means “seed of blessing.” In Islam, it is regarded as one of the greatest of the healing medicines available and is listed as a natural drug in the “Medicine of the Prophet (Muhammad).” The Prophet Muhammad is said to have counseled someone, while traveling, to crush the seeds, add a little oil, and place the mixture in the nostrils with the comment that “This black cumin is healing for all diseases except death.”

Scientific research into the individual components of this oil indicate that it protects from histamine-induced bronchial spasms, explaining its use both internally and as a carrier oil for asthma, bronchitis, and coughing. Black cumin is used for rheumatism and related inflammatory diseases and to increase milk production in nursing mothers. Black cumin makes an excellent carrier oil for skin conditions such as eczema and boils.

INTERNAL CONSUMPTION

Black cumin, like the carrier oils referenced in this section, is too “heavy” to be used alone. It is best mixed about 1 part black cumin to 4 parts of almond, coconut or grapeseed oil.

Reported internal uses for black cumin seed oil (for your information only). Black cumin seed oil, ingested, has been used as a digestive aid (flatulence, colic, indigestion, and constipation), as a medicine for colds, asthma, bronchitis, deep coughs, headaches, toothaches, and infections. Black cumin is also used traditionally for circulatory ailments, to strengthen the urinary system and aid in the removal of toxins and excess fluids. This oil is also used as an immune stimulant, and to clear lymphatic congestion. It is listed in many texts as a nervine for the relief of nervous exhaustion, tiredness, debility, insomnia, lethargy, and migraine headaches. I have no experience with the internal consumption of black cumin oil but it is recommended by some in protocols for hepatitis.

The presence of beta-sitosterol, an anti-tumor sterol, gives credence to its traditional use in treating abscesses and tumors of the abdomen, eyes, and liver. Studies show that black cumin is effective in treating opioid dependence; researchers at the Kimmel Cancer Center in Philadelphia have used that one ingredient, thymoquinone, to block pancreatic cancer cell growth and killed the cells by enhancing the process of programmed cell death (apoptosis). These studies are in the very early stages, but are showing great promise, perhaps as a preventative for those at risk for cancer.

JOJOBA

While jojoba is traditionally categorized as a vegetable oil, it is more properly labeled as a liquid wax. Jojoba absorbs deeply and reasonably quickly into the skin. Its properties closely resemble the natural sebum within human skin and helps to balance the skin's natural moisturizers. Jojoba oil contains natural anti-inflammatory properties making it an excellent addition to carrier oils that will be used for arthritis or pain.

Jojoba is a very stable oil with a very low rancidity factor. It has the reputation of extending the shelf life of other carrier oils to which it is added. It is a bit too heavy for use by itself, except on a small patch of skin, here and there. It is wonderful when added as 10% to 15% of a carrier oil blend.

SUNFLOWER—REGULAR AND HIGH OLEIC

Sunflower carrier oil contains linoleic acid, oleic acid, lecithin, carotenoids and has a high vitamin E content. High oleic sunflower oil has at least 82% oleic acid, giving it greater emollient properties and a longer shelf life. Sunflower oil restores proper moisture balance in skin, whether the problem is dryness or excessive oiliness, while providing a protective barrier that resists infection, especially in premature infants. Sunflower oil is reported to be helpful for bruises and with leg ulcers. This oil is quite heavy and rarely used by itself; best as a small percentage of a carrier oil composite blend.

WALNUT

Walnut is very high in linoleic acid and antioxidants. It is used to repair damaged or dry skin and to prevent wrinkles. It is best used as less than 15% of a carrier oil composite blend. Walnut oil contains an anti-oxidant, ellagic acid, which research—still in early stages—is reporting and showing an ability to detoxify several compounds that have been linked to the development of certain types of cancers. High anti-oxidant concentrations have been shown to help fight the signs of aging as well.

Walnut oil, when taken internally (why not just eat walnuts?) creates an increase in the strength and resilience of blood vessels and improves circulation. It accomplishes this by preserving the function of the endothelial cells which line the walls of the blood vessels. This reduces hardening of the artery walls. Hardening of the arteries is considered a major contributor to high blood pressure and heart disease.

Walnut oil has a short shelf life and must be kept refrigerated and stored with a tight lid. Walnut oil is certainly not recommended for persons with a nut allergy of any sort without extreme care and caution.

INFUSED (SOAKED) OILS

There are many wonderfully healing medicinal plants. When these plants are soaked for a time in a basic carrier oil such as almond or grapeseed, their medicinal properties are added to those of the carrier and the essential oils being used. Creating specialty carrier oils in this way provides a wide range of healing benefits.

Generally these oils are created in lighter carrier oils, such as almond oil, and can be used 100% by themselves, just as their base oil would be used. Butterfly Express, llc carries (and usually makes) the infused oils mentioned below.

ARNICA

Arnica oil (at least the one sold by Butterfly Express, llc) is made by soaking arnica blossoms—fresh, whenever possible—in almond oil. Arnica oil is used with amazing result for injuries where bruising, swelling, and/or inflammation are present.

Arnica oil is said to cause swelling in exposed muscle tissue, so it is not used on open wounds or deep abrasions except in homeopathic form. Arnica is one of my favorite healing plants and should be in every first aid kit!

CALENDULA

Calendula is one of the best vulnerary (good for the healing of wounds) plants ever. Calendula is anti-inflammatory. It is useful for vein health and circulatory issues such as varicose veins, spider veins and bruises. Calendula is one of the best healers for skin rashes, hives, eczema and psoriasis, leg ulcers, and bed sores that are difficult to heal. Using the appropriate essential oil, coupled with the healing properties of calendula infused oil as a carrier, provide a “double whammy” of healing. Some examples would include: ^{1e}Baby Me for diaper rash or stretch marks; ^{1e}AgeLess for a facial skin conditioner; ^{1e}MelaPlus or ^{1e}Purify on insect bites; and ^{1e}Deeper for the pain of shingles. Calendula would also be good used with helichrysum on recent injuries to prevent or minimize scarring.

MULLEIN

Mullein has been used for centuries because of its outstanding medicinal properties. The herb mullein grows in dry, barren places. Following the ancient law of signatures, this would indicate that mullein is an herb for respiratory conditions, especially those where the lungs need “drying out.” Mullein also has anti-bacterial, anti-inflammatory, and anti-spasmodic properties, thus increasing its value in respiratory ailments and is certainly recommended for use as a carrier oil with these conditions.

Mullein oil is one of the ingredients in EO made by Butterfly Express, llc for use with ear aches and infections. Mullein is often added to herbal poultices to provide emollient and healing properties and to offset the astringency of some anti-infectious herbs. The infused oil can be used in much the same way.

Mullein oil, as a carrier oil, should be used when applying oils to the chest for infections, coughs, and congestion. It can be used in the ears, alone or as part of the EO recipe, to relieve the pain of ear infections and fight the bacterial involved. It can also be of benefit as a carrier oil when working with inflammation and pain. Mullein is gentle enough to be used on babies for diaper rash and for cracked nipples with nursing mothers.

ROSEHIP

The main properties sought for when using rosehip oil are the vitamins A and C and anti-oxidants. These two vitamins are cytophylactic, meaning that they aid cell regeneration and the sloughing off of old dead cells and cellular waste products. These properties make rosehip oil an excellent choice for anti-aging and for the treatment of damaged skin cells including burns and scars. The combination of anti-oxidants and vitamin C brighten the skin and reduces or removes skin discoloration. The anti-oxidants found in rosehip oil also make it a natural anti-inflammatory. Rosehip oil is excellent for dry, chapped lips.

WHEAT GERM

VIRGIN AND REFINED

Wheat germ oil is pressed from the germ of the wheat kernel. Although the germ of the wheat kernel accounts for only 3% of the weight of the actual wheat grain, the benefits of wheat germ oil stem from the fact that it contains almost 25% of the total proteins, vitamins and minerals of the whole wheat grain.

Wheat germ oil is the richest source of vitamin E that can be obtained from a vegetable oil. Wheat germ oil also contains high amounts of vitamin A and vitamin D and is rich in protein and lecithin. These constituents make wheat germ oil popular for external application for any type of skin problem. Wheat germ oil is used quite often as an ingredient in health care products for the skin.

The benefits of wheat germ oil are predominantly in skin conditions. It also works effectively as a carrier oil to help heal burns, skin ulcers, psoriasis and eczema. Wheat germ oil is beneficial for the general health of the skin as it improves the circulation of blood in the skin. It also helps the skin cells that may have been damaged due to the sun. Wheat germ oil helps with conditions like dermatitis and scarring. Wheat germ oil is known for its high level of antioxidant properties. Because of this, it helps in preventing the skin from showing the signs of aging.

Wheat germ oil, especially the virgin unrefined one, is a very sensitive oil that tends to degrade if not stored with extreme care. Wheat germ oil should be kept refrigerated and certainly not exposed to extreme temperatures. Heat can turn wheat germ oil rancid very quickly. If kept refrigerated the shelf life of wheat germ oil can be extended for a few months.

Refined wheat germ oil is lighter in color than the virgin variety. It is also less sensitive to heat and has a longer shelf life. It is the one usually preferred as a carrier oil. It should be remembered, however, that refining always removes beneficial properties.

INTERNAL CONSUMPTION

There are many benefits with wheat germ oil as a supplement. One of these is the improvement of overall heart function. Research has shown beneficial effects from a constituent called octacosanol and specifically policosanol in improving cardiovascular functions. Policosanol has been found to be effective in controlling production of cholesterol by the liver. It is believed to raise the level of 'good' cholesterol and reduce that of 'bad' cholesterol. Other benefits of wheat germ oil include its antioxidant properties and its effect in strengthening the immune system and restoring overall health.

LINIMENT INFUSED OIL

LN—Liniment infused oil—contains the herbs comfrey, arnica, St. John's wort, lobelia, calendula, angelica root, valerian root, ginger root, and cayenne. These herbs, infused in almond oil, create a carrier oil which is amazing for injuries, bruising, inflammation, and the general pain and soreness that accompany injuries.

The addition of lobelia in this infusion helps to deliver the other healing herbs to the area of concern quickly and relieves pain. The arnica works on sore, tight muscles and helps to reduce swelling of injured areas. Arnica is not usually recommended for use on open wounds but in the small percentage that exists here we have never had any problem over the course of many years. Comfrey is probably best known for its healing ability for bones and tissues, but it is also very helpful for chest congestion. Cayenne works on the blood and is very effective at improving overall circulation. With increased circulation comes better oxygenation and healing.

Using LN oil as a carrier oil topically for injuries would be especially effective when coupling it with essential oils such as ^{Le}Paine, ^{Le}Deeper, ^{Le}Patches, ^{Le}TendaCare and ^{Le}WarmDown.

LN is available from Butterfly Express, llc as a carrier oil or it is available as an herb pack from which you can make your own.

SHEA BUTTER

Shea butter is high in fatty acids which makes it a great skin moisturizer. The high lipid content nourishes the skin, penetrating through the first layer of the skin to hydrate and add to the skin's elasticity. Shea butter has been reported to have a slight ability to absorb ultra violet radiation, giving it a limited capacity as a sunscreen and as a protection from sun damage to skin. Shea butter becomes liquid and melts at body temperature, making it easy to use as a carrier oil. Shea butter is absorbed into the skin quickly and acts as a "refatting" agent, hydrating and plumping dry, wrinkled skin. Its biochemical nature allows it to bind well with water which accounts for shea butter's ability to treat dry skin.

WATER

When dealing with a fungus (foot or toe nail variety) the use of a carrier oil is not recommended. The large protein molecules may "feed" the fungus, making matters worse. Place a drop or two of oil into a bowl of water and soak the feet. The water will carry the oil up under the nail bed and make it more effective. Putting a drop or two of essential oil in the tub is an excellent way to move oils deep into the body. This is especially true of pain relieving and anti-inflammatory oils. There is no better way to relax than a bath with a favorite emotional or relaxing essential oil. Placing a few drops of essential oil into a spray bottle filled with water is an excellent way to diffuse an oil into the air.

SALVES AS CARRIERS

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. Miralce Salve is named as it is because it has proven so miraculous for the healing of burns and injuries.

CASTOR OIL

Castor oil for internal use has both strong advocates and equally strong opponents. That is likely because the castor bean contains both healing properties and properties that are strong to the point of being destructive. The benefits of castor oil can almost always be achieved by topical application and, in my opinion, it is much safer to use castor oil that way.

Some interesting studies

- ~An Indian study in 2011 found that castor leaf extract showed better antibacterial activity against both
- ~Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacteria than Gentamycin (their standard of comparison).
- ~A 2010 study found that castor oil packs were an effective means of decreasing constipation in the elderly.
- ~A 2009 study found that castor oil effectively relieves arthritis symptoms.
- ~A 1999 study found an increase in T cells over a seven hour period after the application of castor oil.
- ~Interestingly, according to the American Cancer society, "Oncologists now use castor oil as a vehicle for delivering some chemotherapy drugs to . . . metastatic breast cancer and other tumors. Unfortunately, the vehicle sometimes causes problems of its own, including allergic reactions. This has prompted a search for substitute carriers."

My own experience with castor oil, applied to the bottoms of the feet, is that it acts as a potent general cleansing agent for the body. *While I appreciate the healing benefits of castor oil, this is one I would use with caution and judgement.*

YET ANOTHER REMINDER

Never mix your pure essential oils into a carrier oil and then store them that way! The therapeutic properties of the oil break down rapidly when mixed with vegetable protein oils and you are left with a massage oil of lower 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, then add 2 to 4 drops of the essential oil and apply. Following this method allows your essential oils to stay vibrant for long periods of time. It also makes your bottle of essential oil last much longer.