

The Fixed oils (aka Carrier oils)

Here is a handy reference for those wanting information about the most commonly used carrier oils.

There are dozens of seed, nut and vegetable oils that can and are used throughout the cosmetic industry.

Many of them are quite exotic and are not necessarily needed for everyday use as there is usually a more affordable substitute available. Some folks may want to try them if they have a specific situation where one of these would be suggested.

This article is about the most common fixed oils used by aromatherapists and massage therapists.

Carrier oils are also known as fixed or base oils. They are the oily – non volatile part of the plant, typically obtained from the seed or nut. They are called 'fixed' as they have large molecules that do not evaporate like the essential oils.

Carrier oils are mixtures of unsaturated and saturated fatty acids with traces of vitamins and minerals along with a variety of other trace plant constituents.

Fixed oils are extracted usually by a process called Cold Press or Expeller pressing. Some are extracted using solvents, heat and/or steam. Cold pressing oils means that the temperature used during the extraction process is kept at or below 110 degrees. Expeller pressed oils can reach much higher temperatures but are still kept as low as possible too to preserve the oil without destroying too many constituents.

Once extracted many oils are then refined to obtain the final usable product. Refining often times means that it has been filtered many times to remove unwanted particles such as mold and fungal spores. In some cases refining will improve or remove unpleasant odors. It will also remove substances that cause rapid oxidation. When these are removed you have a more stable oil that will have a much longer shelf life. Refining is very important especially if the final product will be used for wound care. Please note for open wounds or skin sores only refined carrier oils should be used to avoid possible contamination of the wound with unwanted germs.

Different carrier oils work better for some skin types including variations due to the age of skin such as infants, teens and the elderly. Also there are carrier oils that will work better on oily, dry or combination skin. Of course massage and skin ailments will also be a factor as to the choice of fixed oil you might use.

These oils are the "bases" used to make massage oils, bath oils and can be used in bath salts and scrubs. Several of them can be added to shampoos and conditioners to make your hair feel and look better. Many of them are found in lotions and creams. All of them are used in the cosmetic industry.

As you know essential oils should not be applied directly to the skin (the term 'neat' is used when essential oils are not diluted and used on the skin). They should be diluted into a carrier. Carriers can be water based or oil based. The base you choose will depend on the final use of the intended product.

The amount of dilution will again be determined by the application. Some products are left on the skin such as massage oils, lotions and cream. Yet others are washed off i.e. shampoos, hair conditioners and shower gels. Please see our [Aromatherapy Tip 106](#) on [Measuring, Percentages and How much](#) for more information on dilutions.

Please note that if you have nut allergies you should choose the appropriate carrier oils avoiding the nut based ones and choosing those derived from seeds. Massage therapists please be sure to ask your clients too.

Almond oil, Sweet - *Prunus amygdalis var dulcis* - Sweet almond oil is a light, non greasy oil. Massage therapists like it as it has a good glide for use in over all massage reducing the need to avoid waste. In other words, a little goes a long way. It is relatively inexpensive.

It can be used for general massage on normal skin. A good choice for dry skin. It is used in many cosmetic creams and lotions as it has emollient properties that help the skin to maintain its suppleness. It is excellent for dry chapped skin. It is often used in lip balms.

Sweet Almond oils are pale yellow in color. It is wonderful for lubricating, is nourishing and revitalizing. Good for all skin types.

It has been known to help relieve itching, soreness and dryness and other forms of inflammation. It is considered a natural sunscreen in a limited way, filtering out about 25% of the harmful sun rays. Do not use alone as a sunscreen.

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When used for blending it can be used as 100% of the carrier oil. Unsuitable for long term storage when mixed into massage blends as it has a shelf life of about 12 months.

Main Constituents of Sweet Almond –

Oleic acid 60 to 86%
Linoleic acid 20-30%
Palmitic acid 3 to 9%
Stearic acid 0-4%
Palmitoleic acid 0-2%
Linolenic acid 0-2%

Aloe Vera - *Aloe barbadensis* This is really not a carrier oil but is a commonly used liquid used in aromatherapy, massage and other cosmetic applications due to its nourishing and healing properties for the skin. The liquid is squeezed from the fleshy leaves of the plant. It is used for healing and soothing burns, raw open wounds and other skin irritations. You may sometimes find Aloe Powder mixed with another carrier oil. There is no true Aloe Vera Oil as the plant does not produce usable amounts of oil.

Apricot Kernel oil - *Prunus armenica* Apricot Kernel is very much like Sweet Almond oil. It has a little bit lighter texture and feel than the Almond oil.

Apricot Kernel oil is pale yellow colored oil. It is very nourishing to the skin as it has many minerals and vitamins. Apricot Kernel oil has a lower saturated fatty acid content than many vegetable oils.

It is good for all types of skin. Used to help give relief to dry and prematurely aging skin. Apricot Kernel oil gives relief to sensitive and inflamed skin too. Wonderful to use in a facial massage as it will help dissolve hard sebum that has blocked the pores.

You can use this oil as 100% of your carrier oil but is better when used at 10-50% with other carrier oils.

Main Constituents Apricot Kernel -

Oleic acid 58-74%
Linoleic acid 20-34%
Palmitic acid 4-7%
Stearic acid 0-1%
Linolenic 0-1%

Avocado oil - *Persea gratissima or americana* Avocado oil is extracted from the pulp of the Avocado fruit.

You can use this oil as 100% of your carrier oil but most suggestions that you should use between 10-50% at most.

Depending on the skin type Avocado oil may absorb rapidly into the skin. You will need to test on individual skin types to see if it will absorb or will give you the 'slip' or glide you need if you choose to use this as a massage oil.

The nourishing value of avocado oil makes it useful for dry and dehydrated skin and is useful for damaged hair from coloring, excessive washing and sun exposure.

Avocado oil that is not refined is unusable – it will be thick and green. But once it is refined, avocado oil is beautiful, clear and golden oil. NOTE: when kept at low temperatures it will appear cloudy (called winterization) and may even solidify. Gentle warming at room temperature it will clear.

This is best used at a 10% dilution with other carrier oils

Main Constituents of Avocado Oil

Oleic acid 55 to 75%
Palmitic acid 12 to 24%
Linoleic acid 8 to 15%
Palmitoleic 2 to 7 %
Stearic acid 3.5 %
Linolenic acid 0.1 %

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Borage oil - *Borago officinalis* This oil is very nourishing and rich in Gamma linolenic acid (GLA), vitamins and minerals. This is a pale yellow colored oil, derived from borage seeds.

It is used for regenerating and stimulating the skin. Is reportedly used for psoriasis, eczema and aging skin. It is very good for all skin types. It helps reverse damage from ultraviolet rays. It penetrates the skin easily and is good for dry, dehydrated, mature or prematurely aging skin.

Unfortunately Borage oil has a very short shelf life so makes it unsuitable except for serious cases where you can get a freshly extracted product. Only use about 2-10% in your carrier oil blend. More than that is not necessary.

If you only need a little bit of Borage oil in a blend you can purchase capsules and squeeze the tiny amounts needed for your blend from the capsule. Encapsulated Borage oil because it is tightly packaged will have a longer shelf life than an open bottle.

Main Constituents of Borage Oil

Linoleic acid 30-40 %
Gamma-Linolenic acid (GLA) 18-25 %
Oleic acid 15-20 %
Palmitic acid 9-12 %
Stearic acid 3-4 %

Camellia oil - *Camellia oleifera* - Used in Japan and China for skin and hair care. This is a very nourishing oil and is used in beauty care. It helps skin from thickening and helps to prevent keloid formation during scar formation. This wonderful oil is light yellow to almost clear in color. It is great for hair care and is good to use to moisturize your skin after exposure to sun.

Apply a small amount around your eyes it is useful to reduce the signs of aging around the eyes. Add to hand creams and use around your nails. Camellia oil is used to help damaged, dry and mature skin.

Good oil for all skin types. Can be used as 100% of a carrier base but is not necessary to do so.

Main Constituents of Camellia oil

Oleic acid 80-88%
Linoleic acid 7-10%
Palmitic acid 7-9%
Stearic acid 1-2%

Castor oil - *Ricinus communis* Castor oil is expressed from the castor oil plant seed or bean. There are many grades of Castor oil produced for various industrial uses. The higher refined grades are used throughout the cosmetic industry. The higher grades are colorless and odorless.

Do not use unrefined grades of Castor oil as it may cause unwanted skin allergies. Castor oil is used to make a variety of poultices that are good for pain relief, especially helpful if the pain is caused by rheumatism or arthritis. The refined castor oil is good for dry, chapped skin. Castor oil is used in many hair and skin care products as it is used as a conditioner for dry brittle hair.

Castor oil is useful when added to other carrier oils at a 10% to 15% dilution.

Main Constituents of Castor oil

Ricinoleic acid 85-90%
Oleic acid 3-4%
Linoleic acid 3-4%

Cocoa Butter - *Theobroma cacao* This is derived from the cocoa beans. Cocoa butter is solid at room temperature and will need to be warmed slightly or mixed with another oil to keep in a liquid state. It will melt in contact with the skin.

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Cocoa butter is very strong and aromatic oil. Its smell is that of "chocolate". Although great for the skin, you must take the odor into consideration before blending with essential oils. A deodorized Cocoa butter is available but the nourishing elements may not be a good.

Cocoa butter is great at softening the skin and is helpful for most all skin types. It is often times used to make a type of 'lotion' when blended with another carrier oil. In fact Cocoa butter is virtually unusable unless mixed with another carrier oil since it is solid at room temperature. It will melt slightly on contact with the body as its melting point is around 97-98 degrees Fahrenheit.

Main Constituents Cocoa Butter

Oleic acid 34 to 36%
Stearic acid 31-35%
Palmitic acid 25-30%
Linoleic acid 3%

Coconut oils - Virgin, Expeller and Fractionated - *Cocos nucifera* Coconut oils are very nourishing to the skin and are used often for massage and as cosmetic ingredients.

Virgin coconut has a wonderful coconut smell. It is solid at room temperature so will need to be warmed or mixed with another oil before being used. Just as with cocoa butter, you will need to take into consideration the smell when making blends. Traditionally extraction methods provide the best virgin coconut oils.

Expeller Pressed Coconut oil has had the odor removed. It is solid at room temperature and will need to be warmed before using. It is still an excellent carrier oil and you won't need to worry about the smell hindering your blending of essential oils.

Fractionated Coconut oil is an excellent oil for massage. It is liquid at room temperature. It is one of the few carrier oils that wash out of fabrics more easily. Many Massage therapists prefer using this because it does laundry out more easily, saving them the expense of having to replace their sheets.

All of the Coconut oils are all excellent for dry or sensitive skin. They are considered ideal for blending essential oils for use on skin which has been damaged. And again they are wonderful for use in making products for use in the bath, skin and massage products. The Coconut oils are the best oil to use to replace mineral baby oils.

Can be used as a base as 100% or add anywhere from 10-50% in your finished product.

All coconut oils have extremely long shelf life, with fractionated having an almost indefinite shelf life.

Main Constituents of Fractionated Coconut oil MCT

Caprylic acid – 55-60%
Capric acid – 40-42%
Lauric acid < 1%

Evening Primrose oil - *Oenothera biennis* Evening primrose is very high in Gamma Linolenic Acid (GLA). It is a very important fatty acid used in repair of the skin due to damage from the sun and other types of injury. This oil is useful for mature skin.

Evening Primrose oil (EPO) is a pale yellow with only a mild odor when fresh. However, it oxidizes very fast and becomes rancid rather quickly. The Gamma Linolenic acid is destroyed easily in the presence of oxygen making EPO a poor choice for a fixed oil as it could be otherwise.

When it is fresh, it is used in cases of psoriasis, eczema and other forms of dermatitis. It is excellent for aging skin. Again, although it is an excellent nutritional supplement when fresh or in gel capsule form (air can't get to it as easily to destroy it) the actual benefits for skin use are limited unless you are able to obtain this as a fresh and refrigerated oil. This oil is very costly given its short shelf life (less than 6 months and if not properly stored it can be less than 3 months). Other fixed oils may be better suited for most applications where Evening Primrose Oils is cost prohibitive.

Unfortunately Evening Primrose oil has a very short shelf life of less than 6 months even when refrigerated. Use up to a 10% dilution with other carrier oils. Realize that the finished product you use EPO in will also have inherited the short shelf life regardless of the rest of the ingredients.

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If you only need a small amount of EPO oil in a blend you can purchase capsules and squeeze the tiny amounts needed for your blend from the capsule. Encapsulated EPO oil because it is tightly packaged in the gel cap will have a longer shelf life than EPO in an open bottle.

Main Constituents of EPO

Linoleic acid 65-80%
Gamma-Linolenic acid 8 to 14%
Oleic acid 6-11%
Palmitic acid 6-7%
Stearic acid 2%

Grapeseed oil - *Vitis vinifera* This carrier oil is virtually odorless, has a light texture and has many wonderful nourishing components. It is used very often in cosmetics. It is often times solvent extracted but care is taken to remove any solvent residues for use in the cosmetic industry.

Grapeseed oil is pale green in color. It is rich in vitamins, minerals and is nourishing to all skin types. It is especially good for acne and oily skin because of its astringent properties. It will also help to tighten and tone the skin.

Grapeseed oil is easily absorbed into the skin. It can be used as 100 percent of your base oil. This is a commonly used oil for use with premature infants. Many massage therapists like this oil when their client is allergic to nut oils.

Main Constituents of Grapeseed oil

Linoleic acid 58-78%
Oleic acid 12-28%
Palmitic acid 5-11%
Stearic acid 3-6%
Linolenic .0 -1%

Hazelnut oil - *Corylus americana* Hazelnut is a mild, nourishing carrier oil. Again, it is used whenever the skin is in need of repair. It is also an excellent oil to use on oily skin. It has a light and mild scent.

Hazel nut oil is yellow in color. It is full of vitamins and minerals and has a slight astringent action. Good for all skin types. Hazelnut is good to use for healing skin problems. It is highly penetrating and good for healing any skin.

Hazelnut oil can be used as 100 percent of your base oil or any combination you desire. Excellent when blended with Rosehip seed oil for skin wounds or surgical scars.

Main Constituents of Hazelnut oil

Oleic acid 70-85%
Linoleic acid 7-13%
Palmitic acid 4-9%
Stearic acid 1-4 %

Hemp Seed *Cannabis sativa* Hemp seed oil is extracted from the seed. This oil is a yellow green color and is good for most skin types. It is very good at helping the skin to retain moisture. It is added to many sun tanning lotions and products when the skin is exposed to extreme temperature changes.

Due to its color most formulations do not use as 100% of base. It can be used in any amount with other carrier oils.

Main Constituents Hempseed oil

Linoleic acid 57%
Linolenic acid 19%
Oleic acid 12%
Palmitic acid 6-7%
GLA – 3-4%
Stearic acid -2-3%

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Jojoba - *Simmondsia chinensis* Jojoba is not a true oil, but is a liquid wax. The best property of jojoba is that it most closely resembles our natural skin oils. Therefore it is excellent in cases of dry, abused skin.

Jojoba is a beautiful golden yellow. It is rich in protein, minerals and has similar properties to our own natural sebum and will help to keep the skin soft, moist and protected. Used for inflamed skin, psoriasis, eczema, acne, hair care and is good for all skin types. Jojoba penetrates the skin and is readily absorbed. Although helpful for most skin types, if you have pores that clog easily it is best to limit the amount of Jojoba used on your skin type.

Jojoba has a very long shelf life. Although it can be used 100% for skin care, normally all you need to use is a 10% dilution with other carrier oils. It is commonly used in lotions, creams, shampoos, conditioners and in making of bar soaps. It is very useful in making all natural perfumes.

Main Constituents of Jojoba

Gadoleic (Eicosaenoic Acid) 70-71%
Erucic 14-15%
Oleic acid 10-13%
Palmitic 3.5%

Macadamia oil - *Macadamia integrifolia* A wonderful light oil used for oily skin. It is another oil similar to our own nature sebum.

This is a very nourishing, vitamin rich oil used in many beauty care applications. It is wonderful for mature skin and is hydrating and very gentle.

Macadamia oil is fairly stable and has a longer shelf life than many other fixed oils. Should still be kept refrigerated and used within 2-3 years.

Main Constituents of Macadamia oil

Oleic acid 54-63 %
Palmitoleic acid 16-23%
Palmitic acid 7-10%
Stearic acid 2-5.5%
Arachidic acid 1.5-3%
Linoleic acid 1-3%
Eicosenoic acid 1-3%

Rosehip seed oil - *Rosa mosqueta* Coming from the Rosehip seeds, this oils is very high in GLA. This important fatty acid <http://birchhillhappenings.com/aroma4.htm> is wonderful for use in skin care as it helps to repair damage done by the sun and environment.

Rosehip seed oil is very helpful in skin that has potential to produce scars. Rosehip seed oil helps the skin regenerate and is used in many formulations for to prevent and heal stretch marks, burns, scars and is useful for mature skin too.

It is also an excellent oil for helping when patients have been treated with radiation. Rosehip seed oil is relatively expensive but because only small amounts are needed, it should always be used when dealing with the problems listed above that are helped with the use of this wonderful carrier oil.

Rosehipseed oil is best used as fresh as possible. It is one of the fixed oils that has a relatively short shelf life and should be kept refrigerated at all times. Best if used within 1 year of extraction.

Main Constituents of Rosehip seed oil

Linoleic acid 41-49%
Linolenic acid 29-36%
Oleic acid 13-16%
Palmitic acid 3-5%
Stearic acid 1-3%

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Sesame oil - *Sesamum indicum* Sesame oil can be very dark, thick and strong smelling. This oil is typically not used by itself, but is used blended with other carrier oils. Sesame oil is one of the few carrier oils that provides a small amount of protection from the sun.

Sesame oils are dark yellow in color. It is known for its thick texture. Sesame oil is rich in vitamins, minerals, lecithin and amino acids. Used for psoriasis, eczema, rheumatism, arthritis. Good for all skin types.

This is one of the fixed oils that best if refined. It helps eliminate unwanted contaminants that can contribute to skin irritations.

Use in a 10% dilution with other carrier oils.

Main Constituents of Sesame oil

Linoleic acid 39-47%
Oleic acid 37-42%
Palmitic acid 8-11%
Stearic acid 4-6%

Sunflower oil - *Helianthus annuus* A light seed based oil. Sunflower is odorless and wonderful for use in massage, bath oils and other oil applications. A good oil to use with delicate skin. Sunflower oil is the fixed oil of choice for use with those folks allergic to nut oils.

Sunflower oil is pale yellow in color. Vitamin and mineral rich. Good for all skin types. If you are allergic to nuts you should try sunflower oil for most of your carrier oil needs.

Can be used as 100% of your carrier oil base.

Main Constituents - Regular Sunflower oil

Linoleic acid 60-70%
Oleic acid 15-28%
Palmitic acid 5-7%
Stearic acid 3-4%

Main Constituents - High Oleic Sunflower oil

Oleic acid 80%
Linoleic acid 10.5%
Palmitic acid 3.75%
Stearic acid 3.4%
Linolenic 0.05%

Tamanu oil – *Calophyllum inophyllum* also known as Foraha oil A green-yellow-tan color with a sweet aromatic smell. Tamanu oil is used in the Pacific Island area of Tahiti as a treatment to help heal any number of skin sores. It is used for dry, aging or damaged skin. It is also used in hair care.

Tamanu oil is said to be analgesic, anti-inflammatory and possess antibiotic-like properties making it useful for any variety of ailments including skin ulcers, rheumatism and shingles.

Main Constituents of Tamanu oil -

Oleic acid 30-60%
Linoleic acid 11-38%
Palmitic acid 12-20%
Stearic acid 8-20%

Wheat Germ oil - *Triticum vulgare* Wheat germ oil is added to other carrier oils. It is never used full strength. It has a very strong odor and is very thick and sticky. It is very high in the vitamins A and E.

Wheat Germ oil is best used at no more than 5-10% of your carrier oil blend mainly because it has a very unpleasant odor and will alter the scent of your finished product. It has a short shelf life. Needs to be refrigerated.

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Please note: you may have read that Wheat Germ or Vitamin E oils can be used as a natural preservative. This is not true. The fact is that both Vitamin E and Wheat Germ will go rancid rather quickly.

Main Constituents of Wheat Germ oil

Linoleic acid 55-60%
Oleic acid 13-21%
Palmitic acid 13-20%
Linolenic acid 4-10%
Stearic acid 2%

Here is a list for the most commonly used carriers for different skin types.

Normal:

Sweet Almond, Apricot kernel, Grapeseed, Sunflower.

Oil you can add to improve skin: Jojoba, Borage seed, Evening primrose, Safflower.

Dry to Normal:

Sweet Almond, Apricot kernel, Avocado, Jojoba

Oil you can add to improve skin: Avocado, Borage seed, Evening primrose, Jojoba.

Oily to Normal:

Sweet Almond, Apricot kernel, Grapeseed.

Oil you can add to improve skin: Avocado, Borage, Evening primrose, Fractionated Coconut.

Mature:

Apricot kernel, Borage

Oil you can add to improve skin: Avocado, Evening primrose, Fractionated Coconut, Jojoba.

Other Carrier Oils

Other Carrier oils that can and have been used include: Black Current, Canola, Chia, Corn, Flaxseed, Kukui nut, Meadowfoam, Olive Oil, Peach kernel, Safflower and Soybean. And there are others that are even more rare.

And there are also "Infused oils". These typically are herbs or plants that are 'infused' into another carrier oil. Usually the plant is infused into Sweet Almond or Olive or the carrier of choice for the type of plant being infused.

There are other Carriers too that are really part of the "Butters" – Most notable is Shea Butter. There are others too. Most "butters" are never used alone but are added to carrier oils to make wonderful and beautiful skin care and cosmetic products.

In summary, there are many vegetable based fixed oils that are excellent for use in any variety of applications and skin types. They most notably are helpful because most all will provide the following:

- 1) Emollients - used alone or in various and numerous products to prevent the skin becoming dehydrated.
- 2) They can replace and replenish the skins natural sebum, especially when this is lacking due to age and various skin ailments or in the case where excessive cleansing has been necessary. They are excellent at replenishing natural hair oils.
- 3) Fixed oils are able to condition dry skin to keep it resilient and supple.
- 4) The large variety of fixed oils is very important due to the different skin types encountered during massage: male-female-hairless-hairy-oily-dry, etc. Massage can be made more pleasant for the therapist and the client when the 'carrier oil' is well matched for the skin type involved.

Remember to purchase small amounts of Carrier oils as most do not have a long shelf life. It is better to purchase quantities you can use up quickly than to risk using rancid or old oil. Always use as fresh as possible oils when you are treating wounds or irritated skin. As a general rule: if a carrier oil was purchased more than a year ago – toss it out and buy new. The only exceptions to this rule are the Coconut oils and Jojoba which have been documented to be shelf stable for more than 5 years.

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