

What is the Shelf Life for Essential oils, Carrier Oils, etc?

How long should you be keeping your essential oils? We are asked this very often and there is a couple of answers that will work for you and your oils!

Most essential oils have a shelf life of 2 to 5 years and several have a shelf life of well over 5 years, but then there are those that are under 2 years. Thankfully there are just a handful of those.

No essential oil though has to be tossed out even if you know it is past its effective shelf life. You can always use them for cleaning and freshening / scenting.

In Therapeutic Aromatherapy, essential oils used to treat any ailment or condition should be the freshest oils you can purchase. Or they should definitely fall within the 2-5 years since being purchased if that is their shelf life. There are other factors that can determine if your oils are still in the therapeutic ranges.

Citrus and Pine essential oils have the shortest life span and should be replaced every 12 months if you are using them for any health ailment. Citrus oils that are used for uplifting and alertness need to be fresh. Pine oils used for congestion and upper respiratory ailments need to be fresh too.

Do not use old Citrus or Pine oils on the skin as they age because some of the constituents become strong skin sensitizers and could cause unwanted rashes or other problems. They can still be used for scenting. They can still be used in mop buckets too, but may not have the disinfecting properties as when they are under a year of age.

The majority of essential oils fall in the 2-5 year shelf life. But there are many factors that can shorten the shelf life. And they have to do with storage and use. Number 1 and 2 – Keep them in the dark and keep them cool!

If you buy a larger bottle of essential oils you should not leave the cap off while you are blending. Keep it shut except when measuring it out. Also, as your essential oils become less in each bottle – transfer them into smaller bottles to reduce the headspace so less air and oxygen is in the bottle. Too much headspace can further deteriorate your oils. Oxidation will destroy most essential oils and each time your bottle is opened new oxygen enters it. Combine that with light and heat and your oils will deteriorate very quickly.

As for essential oils that have long shelf lives – they are the thick ones – Cedarwood, Sandalwood, Patchouli, Vetiver and a few others. Exception to this thick oil quality will be the essential oil of Rose Otto. Rose gets better too with age – BUT only if it is kept in a cool, dark place with little headspace. If not, it too will lose many of its wonderful properties.

As for Carrier oils, the majority have a shelf life of less than 2 years. They will start to go rancid even earlier if not kept in a dark cool place also. Some carrier oils such as Borage and Evening Primrose are around 6-8 months and only if kept refrigerated.

The EXCEPTIONS to carrier oils are for Jojoba (which is really a liquid wax) and the Coconut oils – Virgin, Expeller pressed or Fractionated. The latest research shows each of those oils have well over 5 years shelf life.

So our suggestions are the following:

If you have essential oils older than 2 years sitting on your shelf and are using them for THERAPEUTIC aromatherapy set them aside and buy fresh for your therapeutic needs. Use the OLDER oils for cleaning and scenting realizing they may not possess all the properties as fresher oil would.

If you use carrier oils for massage and they are not Jojoba or a Coconut oil then you should throw them away after 1 year of blending. The carrier oils may have gone rancid and even though the essential oils added to them may have a longer shelf life, the essential oils will not extend the life of the carrier oil. Contrary to common practices by many folks, adding Wheat Germ oil or Vitamin E as a preservative WILL NOT work. Neither, Wheat germ oil or Vitamin E are effective preservative for carrier oils as both will go rancid very quickly and also due to their odor will alter the finished products!

Best Advice: Buy smaller quantities of Fresh Essential oils and Carrier oils that can be used up each year!

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