

What are Hydrosols, Floral waters and Hydrolats?

by Penny Keay

Hydrosols, True Floral Waters and hydrolats are simply the left over waters from the steam distillation processing of essential oils.

These are by-products of the distillation of plants. They can contain not only small amounts of essential oils but also the water-based constituents that can only be obtained during the steam distillation processing of the plants.

Some hydrosols do not have a pleasant smell, because they contain the water based constituents and minute amounts of essential oils. You may smell more plant scents than essential oils. Or worse yet they can be contaminated.

Are Hydrosols going to give you the same result as using an essential oil when mixed with just plain distilled water? Not necessarily.

Hydrosols may be better on certain types of skin conditions if they are fresh and provided they are not contaminated with bacteria and mold. Many folks like to use them as a gentle toner after cleaning their face but then again, remember the mold and bacteria factor.

Bacteria and mold free hydrosols could be used in making lotions and creams, in cooking or for use around cats and birds. Remember cats and many birds cannot tolerate pure essential oils and so true hydrosols are the better alternative.

Instead of using hydrosols, you can make a “type of floral water” by using pure essential oils mixed with an emulsifier then add to purified or distilled water.

Typically, it is only 3-6 drops of essential oils to 8 ounces of distilled water. If no emulsifier is used you will need to shake this often. Ideally mixing in a glass bottle – like a 2 oz with spray top will give you plenty to use and is easy to store in your refrigerator. Again, use up within a few weeks.

Just like the real thing – home-made floral waters can easily become contaminated with bacteria and mold. They should be kept refrigerated OR make smaller amounts, as suggested above, so they can be used up quickly.

Do not use home-made floral waters around cats and some birds as again, they can't tolerate the essential oils in mix.

When asked if we have them available we unfortunately do not. There are several reasons we do not carry them and we'll explain.

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Number 1 is they have a very short shelf life of about a year from date of distillation if kept refrigerated, unless they have had added preservatives to them. If preservatives have been added you need to know if the preservative is as safe for the intended use of the hydrosol. Since we don't have a lot of extra refrigeration space we have decided not to carry them as they do need to be kept refrigerated.

Number 2 is they can too easily become contaminated – right from the start by the distillers and all along the way from the distiller to you. Often times the distillers will place the by-product of the distillation in old barrels. Here if the barrels have not been cleaned sufficiently or if they are old wooden barrels, the hydrosol will quickly become contaminated with bacteria and molds or other debris. (And then you want to use this on your face or in cooking? Not I.)

Number 3 the demand is too low, cost too high. Especially since these are quite expensive, not only to purchase from the distillers, but to ship too as water and any liquid is heavy. Also, add in any routine testing to be sure they are free of bacteria and mold and soon they are not cost effective to sell.

If you do want to purchase them, we can special order them from some of our suppliers, but realize they are not cheap and again they have a short shelf life (about 1 year from distillation, not from purchase date).

It's more fun and easy to make your own 'floral type' waters and at least you'll know they are pure! Mix them fresh, keep refrigerated and use within two weeks!

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