

What is the Shelf life of Essential oils & Carrier Oils?

By Penny Keay

What is the shelf life of essential oils and how long should you be keeping them?

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 pretty much expired when they are even less than 2 years old. 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 therapeutic effective shelf life. You can always use them for cleaning, freshening and scenting. They may not be as potent at killing germs or fungus but will still be able to disinfect to varying degrees.

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.

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 tightly capped 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 heat and your oils will deteriorate very quickly.

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.

As for essential oils that have long shelf lives usually, they are the thicker ones, such as **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. And worse yet, **Rose Otto** is so volatile it will easily evaporate out of a tightly capped bottle unless kept refrigerated.

As for **Carrier oils**, the majority have a shelf life of around 2 years when stored in the refrigerator. They will start to go rancid even earlier if not kept in a cool place also. Some carrier oils such as Borage and Evening Primrose are extremely susceptible to oxidations and after 6-8 months will need to be tossed. Keep these refrigerated and tightly capped in a bottle. If you should need to add these to a blend or skin formulation we suggest you purchase some that are in the soft gel capsules and use those in your blend. They are less likely to have gone rancid, provided they were 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

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2

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 one of the Coconut oils then you should throw them away after 1 year of sitting on your shelf. 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. Both, Wheat germ oil or Vitamin E, are ineffective preservatives 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!

Just remember as good as it is to have a large variety of essential oils and carrier oils on hand, you need to take stock of your inventory. Write dates on the bottle when you open them up and try to use them within 1 year of opening or better yet purchasing, to get the most therapeutic use of your valuable essential oils.

We offer **essential oils** & **carrier oils** in small quantities so you can always purchase 'fresh' oils that will give you the best results when used in therapeutic applications. Do not expect oil that has sat on your shelf for 3 years or more to provide the same therapeutic actions as one that is less than a year old.

And the old adage –“If in doubt, throw it out”. Applies to essential oils and carrier oils too. If you don't know how long ago you purchased the oil, you are better off getting a new bottle than having poor results from one that is too old.

See our article on **“How do I dispose of Essential oils when they are too old for therapeutic applications?”**

Be sure to visit us on line at

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