

# HERBAL OINTMENTS

## What is an Ointment?

An ointment, also called a salve or balm, is an oil based herbal mixture used externally on the skin. They soften with contact with our body temperature and provide a healing, softening, protective, nourishing or counter-irritant effect. The skin can quickly absorb the plant's medicinal constituents through the oil. Ointments come in all consistencies - from wet and oily mixtures, to hard and waxy balms. Most ointments are made from a mixture of a wax and a fixed oil. The oil enhances absorption of the herbs, and the wax give the mixture a firmness.

## How to Make an Ointment:

There are literally endless ways of making ointments! Here is a quick and easy way:  
3 basic ingredients:

- Chosen herbs
- Oil e.g. sunflower oil, olive oil, almond oil, vegetable oil, coconut oil, rosehip oil
- Beeswax

## Basic Instructions

The basic principle of ointment making, is to infuse your chosen oil with herbs, and then to add some beeswax to the hot oil to firm up the mixture.

- 1) Pour several inches of warm water in the bottom of a big pan.
- 2) Add your chosen, chopped up herbs to a sturdy glass bowl or jar and cover them liberally with oil
- 1) Put the jar in the water pan to make a double boiler/ban marie.
- 2) Allow the water to simmer gently for up to an hour and a half
- 3) Strain the spent herbs out of the oil and return oil to a clean jar
- 4) At this stage you can repeat with fresh herbs for another hour and a half if you wish
- 5) Return your infused oil after straining to the ban marie and re-warm.
- 6) Add shaved beeswax to the infused oil - one-part wax to ten parts oil e.g. 25g wax per 250ml oil
- 7) Allow the beeswax to melt into the oil, and then give it a stir
- 8) You can drop a small amount of the mixture onto a plate to judge the finished consistency
- 9) Pour the mixture into glass storage jars.
- 10) Allow to cool, and label.

## Common Problems

If your ointment is too runny or too hard, the ratio of beeswax to oil may be slightly off balance. Re-melt it and add more oil or wax if the surface of the ointment looks messy and uneven, you can remedy this by saving a small bit of mixture, melting this and pouring it over the top right once your ointment has cooled. Alternatively, use a hairdryer to melt and re-cool the top. If your ointment goes off, or becomes mouldy after a time, it may have had too high a water content. Using dried herbs will help this.

## Preservation & Storage

Ointments store well in dark coloured glass and tightly capped jars. Wide openings are useful so you can have easy access to the ointment. They will not keep as well in environments where they are subjected to continual melting and re-cooling.

## Herbs Commonly Used in Ointments



Calendula  
Antimicrobial, emollient, vulnerary.  
Good all rounder



Comfrey leaf and root  
vulnerary, knits bones, emollient,  
demulcent



Plantain  
antimicrobial, relieves itching,  
insect bites, soothes mucous  
membranes



Rose  
soothing, calming, anti-  
inflammatory. Lovely massage  
ointment



Arnica  
vulnerary, excellent for bruises and  
sprains



Cayenne  
stimulating, pain relieving,  
good for aching muscles and  
sprains



Yarrow  
wound healer, stimulates  
circulation



Lemon Balm  
antiviral, good lip balm for cold  
sores (caused by Herpes simplex  
virus)



Peppermint  
locally cooling and pain  
relieving, great for headaches  
or tired feet