

Storing Essential Oils



Small, empty amber bottles, suitable for storing essential oils

For individual use, essential oils, absolutes and CO2s are most often sold in 5ml, 10ml and 15ml (1/2 ounce) sizes. For more expensive oils, it is common to find them available in sizes starting at 2ml and 1 dram sizes.

Although essential oils do not become rancid, they do oxidize, deteriorate and lose their beneficial therapeutic properties over time. Oils such as the citrus oils will oxidize and begin to lose their aroma and therapeutic properties in as little as six months. Not all essential oils diminish in aromatic quality as time passes. The aroma of essential oils such as patchouli and sandalwood mature with age, however, Robert Tisserand explains that all essential oils oxidize and are subject to losing their therapeutic value in time. All essential oils benefit from proper storage and handling.

Storage Containers

It is best not to store essential oils in clear, glass bottles. Although clear or partially frosted glass bottles are not harmful to essential oils, light color or clear glass does not protect the oils from damaging sunlight. Since many constituents in essential oils can be light sensitive, sunlight and other types of light can quickly degrade your essential oils.



Reputable suppliers will never use clear glass for essential oils or products containing essential oils. To avoid deterioration and protect the aromatic and therapeutic properties of your essential oils, store them in amber, cobalt blue, or dark green bottles. Dark glass helps to keep out deteriorating sunlight. In comparison, you may have noticed that most bottled beer typically is packaged in amber (brown) glass bottles to help protect the contents from exposure to light. Except for certain situations that most often pertain for bulk oil purchases, avoid purchasing or storing pure essential oils in plastic bottles as the essential oil will eat at the plastic, and the essential oil will become ruined over a short period of time. Some vendors sell oils in lined aluminum bottles. It has been said that aluminum bottles are acceptable if the interior of the bottles are lined. It is still wise to transfer these oils to glass as soon as possible.



Glass amber "Boston round" bottles that essential oils are typically stored in. Other liquids used in aromatherapy (hydrosols, carrier oils, etc.) are also frequently stored in amber bottles.



Glass cobalt blue "Boston round" bottles that essential oils are sometimes stored in. Cobalt blue bottles and green bottles are usually a little more expensive than amber colored bottles.

Always use Glass when possible. Glass is the least likely to react with the chemicals in Essential Oils. When Plastic is necessary, PET is the preferred choice as it is the only plastic that is resistant to the chemicals in essential oils. Look for this label, it is often on containers made with PET.



Storing Essential Oils



Avoid purchasing pure essential oils that are stored in bottles that have a rubber dropper incorporated into its screw-top cap. Droppers with rubber bulbs should not be kept with the essential oil bottle as the highly concentrated oil can turn the rubber bulb into gum and ruin the essential oil. (*Note: Diluted oils are much less likely to damage the rubber. As such, droppers are often used with diluted oils to improve dispensing.*)

Instead of a rubber dropper top, many essential oils that are sold to consumers in sizes of 1/2 ounce (15ml) and smaller are packaged in bottles that contain an *orifice reducer*. An orifice reducer is a small, clear insert inside the bottle opening that acts as a built-in dropper. Unlike the material that rubber dropper bulbs are made of, orifice reducers are made of a material that can withstand exposure to essential oils. The name *orifice reducer* may seem a little strange at first, but it's a handy little dispensing device. You simply tip the bottle and you can dispense the oil drop by drop.

Not all essential oil suppliers provide orifice reducers. This is not necessarily a reflection on the integrity of the company or the quality of their oils. Wholesalers in particular often do not package with orifice reducers as their primary clientele are artisans and larger natural/holistic formulators that don't dispense essential oils by the drop. If this is important to you, it's best to ask vendors what type of packaging they use when bottling their oils.



1/2 ounce (15 ml) size bottle with an orifice reducer.

Store Your Essential Oils in a Cool Location or the Refrigerator

Essential oils should also be stored in a cool, dark place. Although Dark glass protects the oils from light degradation, the heat generated when dark bottles sit in direct sunlight can quickly damage oils. Avoiding direct sunlight is a must. Prominent aromatherapy expert Robert Tisserand also advocates storing essential oils in a refrigerated environment, whenever possible. If that is not possible, store them in as cool a location as is available. Avoid keeping essential oils in a location that is prone to temperature extremes. Elevated temperatures for extended periods as well as allowing oils to freeze can degrade oils.



Wooden boxes are a great way to store essential oils. Suitable boxes can be economically purchased unfinished from many craft stores and finished to suit the individual's taste.

Storing Essential Oils



How Long Do Essential Oils Last?

Even with proper storage, essential oils have a limited shelf life. Aromatherapy pioneer, essential oil expert, and Essential Oil Safety author Robert Tisserand provides an easy-to-remember rule of thumb for determining the shelf life of your essential oils. He recommends storing your essential oils in the refrigerator and bases these guidelines on proper care and cold storage (*halve these guidelines for oils not stored in a refrigerator*):

- 1-2 Years: Citrus, Neroli, Lemongrass, Frankincense, Tea Tree, Pine and Spruce Oils
(i.e. Oils that contain monoterpenes, particularly limonene, are more prone to oxidation. The more monoterpenes an oil contains, the shorter its shelf life. Most citrus peel essential oils, except Bergamot, consist of 90% or more monoterpenes, and thus are oils that have the shortest shelf life. Other oils that generally consist of over 80% monoterpenes include Angelica Root, Cypress, Frankincense, Pine and Spruce oils.)
- 2-3 Years: Most All Other Essential Oils
(i.e. Oils that contain a higher percentage of aldehydes, oxides, monoterpenols, esters, ethers, phenols or ketones.)
- 4-8 Years: Sandalwood, Vetiver, Patchouli
(i.e. Oils that contain a high percentage of sesquiterpenes and/or sesquiterpenols have the longest shelf life. Although the aromatic quality of these oils may improve over time, their therapeutic quality can still diminish. Thus for therapeutic use, it may be wise to use within the lower threshold of 4 years. Other oils that contain a significant percentage of sesquiterpenes and/or sesquiterpenols include Copaiba Balsam, Gurjun Balsam and Myrrh. Some Cedarwood distillations have higher sesquiterpene concentrations.)

Guidelines for Telling if an Essential Oil Has Deteriorated

- The aroma has drastically changed
- The essential oil has thickened
- The essential oil has become cloudy

Ultimately, if the oil looks irregular or smells irregular, it is safer not to trust it. The more you work with oils, the easier it will become to notice changes in your oils.

Tips:

Record the Date You Buy Each Essential Oil on its Cap or Label

Although you may not always know the date that an essential oil was distilled, you can still keep tabs on the age of your oils by writing down your date of purchase on the oil bottle's label. If the label is too small, simply adding a small label to your bottles can give you space to write. On the label, simply write down the date you purchase the oil and place it on the bottle. Be careful not to cover safety precautions.

Only purchase your oils in quantities that you expect to use in a timely manner

While purchasing oils in larger quantities may seem like a cost savings, it isn't if you ultimately throw it away. Always purchase your oils in quantities that you would expect to use in 1-2 years. This way, they will retain their quality, even if they had shelf time prior to your purchase.