

# Quick Guide To Carrier Oils & Butters

If you are new to the wonderful world of carrier oils or simply want to find out more, then you've come to the right place. Here is our Quick Guide to carrier oils where we answer all of your most commonly asked questions!

## What Is A Carrier Oil?

A carrier oil is a vegetable oil, wax, or fat which is pressed from the fatty part of the plant, usually the seeds, nuts or kernels. Carrier oils have very subtle scents and do not impart any aromas like essential oils do. Carrier oils are so named because they 'carry' or dilute essential oils. They are also referred to as base oils or vegetable oils, as well as facial or skin oils.

[Carrier oils](#) are each made up of different components that give distinct characteristics such as absorption speed, colour, viscosity and therapeutic properties. They also comprise fat-soluble vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, acids and other nutrients – this is what makes them so wonderful for skin.

## What Is A Butter?

A butter is a type of oil that due to its chemical nature, appears in solid form at room temperature. Butters are ideal to use in cosmetics and soaps as their consistency adds volume to the product in a way that a liquid/soft oil can not.

[Butters](#) are extracted from various parts of plants and are rich sources of vitamins, essential fatty acids, minerals and moisturising properties. They are solids and have varying degrees of hardness. They have a thick consistency that is nourishing, protecting and locks in the skin's moisture.

They can be melted down to work with and then they return to their solid form at room temperature.

## Types Of Oils

There are two main categories of carrier oils, soft oils and hard oils. Then there are a couple of subcategories which all fall into either of these.

Soft oils are the runny oils that come to mind when you think of an oil. They are liquid at room temperature.

Hard oils, also known as butters, are solid at room temperature. They add hardness and viscosity to products.

Specialty oils are carrier oils from unique or rare plants. Examples of specialty oils are: [carrot root extract](#), [Vitamin E oil](#), [pomegranate seed extract](#), [kalahari melon oil](#), among others.

Here is a compilation of some of the different types of oils and their general properties (by no means the complete list):

**Nut oils:** [almond](#), [hazelnut](#), [macadamia](#), [walnut](#), [shea butter](#)

General properties:

- Extremely emollient and soothing for sensitive, dry, inflamed and sore skin
- Efficient in face mask treatments for acne-prone skin
- Stimulates circulation
- Anti-inflammatory
- Facilitates wound healing
- Maintain skin tightness and elasticity

**Seed oils:** [baobab](#), [borage](#), broccoli, [pomegranate](#), [flaxseed](#), [grapeseed](#), [rosehip](#), [hemp](#), [red raspberry](#), [sunflower](#), the list goes on.

General properties:

- Conditions the skin to rejuvenate complexion; good for mature or prematurely aging skin
- Repairs damage caused by dryness
- Soothes itching and discomfort caused by burns
- Reduces appearance of scarring

**Fruit Oils:** [apricot](#), [avocado](#), [grapeseed](#), [olive oil](#), [red raspberry](#), [mango butter](#), etc

General properties:

- Gentle and nourishing
- Light texture that moisturizes without leaving a greasy residue
- Reduces the appearance of aging skin
- Suitable for sensitive skin
- Cleansing and softening
- Has antioxidant properties

**Oils rich in Essential Fatty Acids:** [argan](#), [calendula](#), [red raspberry](#), [flaxseed](#), [hemp](#), etc

General properties:

- Hydrates and soothes itchy, dry, inflamed, and acne-prone skin
- Anti-inflammatory, anti-bacterial, anti-fungal, antiseptic
- Balances essential fatty acid deficiency and skin's oil production
- Balances hormones
- Demonstrates reparative and astringent properties that facilitate wound healing

## What Oil Is Best For My Skin?

This is one of the most frequently asked questions on oils. There is no one size fits all answer to this and it will depend on what skin type you have, whether you are allergic to certain oils, the comedogenic rating of oils as well as a range of other factors.

What type of skin you have is the first thing you will want to consider. Is your skin dry? Is it oily, prone to acne, redness, does it break out? Is your skin very sensitive or mature? What carrier oils you choose will depend heavily on your skin type.

You can also refer to the chart above to see what properties the various types of oils give.

Here is a little guide to the most common oils for different skin types:

## Oils For Dry Skin

[rosehip](#), [evening primrose](#), [sea buckthorn](#), [avocado](#), [hemp](#), [calendula](#), [meadowfoam](#), [marula](#)

## **Oils For Oily Skin**

[Tamanu](#), [grapeseed](#), [jojoba](#), [argan](#)

## **Oils For Acne & Breakout Prone Skin**

[hemp](#), [rosehip](#), [evening\\_primrose](#), [argan](#), [pomegranate](#)

## **Oils For Normal & Combination Skin**

[sunflower](#), [coconut](#), [jojoba](#), [pomegranate](#)

## **Oils For Mature Skin**

[rosehip](#), [evening\\_primrose](#), [sea buckthorn](#), [avocado](#), [macadamia](#)

## **Skin Oils For Scars**

[rosehip](#), [almond](#), [Vitamin E oil](#), [tamanu](#), [wheatgerm](#)

## **Skin Oils For Pigmentation**

[tamanu](#), [evening\\_primrose](#), [rosehip](#)

Another factor to consider here is the comedogenic rating of oils. The comedogenic rating is how likely an oil will clog pores. Clogged pores are more likely to cause breakouts or problem skin, so if you already have problem skin then oils with a high rating may be worth avoiding. If you have drier skin you may want to go for oils with a middle comedogenic rating, in an effort to balance the oil production and moisturise your skin more.

The comedogenic scale goes from 0, with no chance to clog pores, up to 5, with a very high chance of blocking pores. You can find out what comedogenic ratings the different oils have over [here](#).

If you are allergic to any oils then obviously you will need to replace them with something else or simply leave out all together. The most common allergen oil will be the nut oils for those with nut allergies: almond, hazelnut, macadamia nut and shea butter.

## **Oil Absorbency Rates**

(not a complete list, and absorbency rates may vary from batch to batch or between suppliers/brands)

Very fast – [hazelnut](#), [rosehip](#), [abyssinian](#), [baobab](#)

Fast – [apricot](#), [grapeseed](#), [camellia](#), [meadowfoam](#), [safflower](#), [fractionated coconut oil](#), [prickly\\_pear](#), broccoli seed

Average – [hemp](#), [sesame](#), [argan](#), [jojoba](#), [red raspberry](#)

Slow – [sea buckthorn](#), [pomegranate](#), [tamanu](#), [avocado](#), [castor](#), [flaxseed](#)

Very slow – [evening primrose](#), [coconut](#), [macadamia](#), [neem](#)

## **What Is The Difference Between Essential Oils And Carrier Oils?**

Essential oils are powerful concentrated forms of chemical components of plants and have strong scents. They are distilled from leaves, seeds, bark, flowers, fruit, or roots. Carrier oils are usually scentless or have subtle aromas and are pressed from the fatty parts of plants such as the seeds or nuts.

## **Methods Of Extraction**

Cold pressing is one method of extracting carrier oils from the plant. It is rather self explanatory: the nuts, seeds or other plant parts are literally pressed until the oil is squeezed out under the extremely high pressure. Any debris and plant matter is filtered out and then that is the finished product. Cold pressing is considered as one of the best methods of carrier oil extraction.

Refining is another method of carrier oil extraction where the oil is also pressed out similarly to cold pressing but then the product is heated and refined to remove any impurities. Often the colour and scent are removed too (a good example is refined vs unrefined shea butter). Refined oils and butters are more consistent, have little colour and scent, and are commonly used in cosmetics. Dark colours, strong scents and inconsistent textures can impact the end product, so refined oils are often preferred for making cosmetics and body products.

Maceration or infusion is used for botanicals that don't have enough oil to be pressed. The dried plant matter is soaked in a base oil such as sunflower oil for a period of time until the properties of the botanical have sufficiently infused into the base oil. An example of an infused oil is arnica oil.

## **Unrefined vs Refined vs Organic**

When shopping for carrier oils you will probably come across the terms raw, unrefined, refined, organic and cold pressed. It can be confusing! Here is what these terms mean:

Raw, unrefined oils are cold pressed oils, so these terms mean the same thing and are often used interchangeably. As discussed above, cold pressed oils are highly regarded but they aren't always ideal for every purpose. Cold pressed oils can often vary slightly from batch to batch in colour, scent and texture; they have not been filtered, refined or standardised in any way.

Similarly, raw, unrefined butters will appear 'rustic'. They may have texture, scent and colour variations.

Refined oils have been filtered to remove colour, scents and textures. The therapeutic properties of the oil remain, but not all the physical, variable properties. Refined oils are often used in cosmetics because they are more consistent in their properties.

Refined butters are typically white, smooth and odourless.

Organic refers to the farming practice whereby little to no nasty chemical pesticides, herbicides and insecticides have been used. Both refined and unrefined oils and butter can come in organic or conventional forms, and whether you choose to buy organic or not is up to you. Many people do prefer organic oils for ethical reasons.

## **What Can I Do With Carrier Oils, Why Would I Need Them?**

The possibilities are almost endless!

Carrier oils are vital components of soaps, cosmetics and body products, shower and bath products, hair products, aromatherapy and massage, the list goes on. If you are going to make any of these products you will absolutely need carrier oils!

## **Can You Use A Carrier Oil Or Oil Blend In A Burner/Diffuser?**

It's best not to, as carrier oils are a lot thicker than essential oils and won't burn or give off their scent easily. Use essential oils neat for this purpose.

## **Do You Need To Preserve Oils?**

You don't need to preserve oils as they keep themselves. Only use a preservative if you are using water based ingredients along with your oils in a formula (you need to preserve

the water based ingredients).

## **Shelf Life & Storage**

Carrier oils should be stored in cool, dark places and be tightly sealed. Most carrier oils have a shelf life of 1-2 years although this may vary depending on the oil as well as storage conditions.

Oils can go rancid over time.

## **Will Heating Change The Properties?**

High temperatures can affect the properties of oils. If you are heating your oils and butters, do it gently in a water bath so as not to destroy any properties.

## **Carrier Oil Substitutions**

Light oils – generally a light oil can be substituted with another light oil eg: almond, jojoba, grapeseed, hemp, safflower, rice bran and apricot kernel will all make reasonable substitutions for one another. Look for any properties that are similar between oils.

Heavier oils – avocado, coconut, olive oil, castor oil, black cumin, among others may also be substituted but be aware of differences in properties, smell and colour as the heavier oils can be more unique.

Specialty oils – these will be hard to substitute, after all they are called specialty oils for a reason.

Butters – this depends on the product you are making. You can probably safely interchange shea butter, avocado butter and mango butter, however cocoa butter is often used specifically for it's amazing chocolate scent, and there isn't a substitute for that.

In general, stick to substituting refined oils and butters with other refined ones, and raw/unrefined with others that are also raw/unrefined.

## **Can I Be Allergic To A Carrier Oil?**

The tree nut oils can contain similar properties to nuts, so people who are allergic to nuts should not use nut oils. Not everyone who has a nut allergy will be allergic to all of the nut

oils though, so it would be wise to first do a patch test. Examples of nut oils are: peanut oil, macadamia nut oil, almond oil, hazelnut oil, argan oil, shea butter and even coconut oil.

### **Ratios For Diluting Essential Oils Into Carrier Oils**

If using 1 teaspoon of carrier oil:

1% dilution: 1 drop essential oil

2% dilution: 2 drops essential oil

5% dilution: 5 drops essential oil

If using 1 tablespoon of carrier oil:

1% dilution: 3 drops essential oil

2% dilution: 6 drops essential oil

5% dilution: 15 drops essential oil

### **Ratios For Blending Different Carrier Oils**

There are no hard and fast rules about how much of each carrier oil to use in a blend. You will be factoring in features such as what qualities and properties you want your blend to have, costs of oils, types of oils you have available to you, etc. A good place to start is simply equal amounts of each oil.

Keep in mind that adding any hard oils will affect the hardness/softness of your oil blend.

### **What Is The Usage Rate For Carrier Oils?**

Carrier oil usage rates will depend entirely on the type of product you are making; they can vary from 1% to 100%. There is no fixed usage rate for any carrier oil.

### **How to Melt Butters & Oils**

Most likely you will need to melt your butters and oils together when you work with them. To do this, gently melt oils and butters together in a hot water bath: a bowl sitting over a pot of simmering water. The heat from the steam will gently melt the oils in the bowl. You



can use a microwave but be aware that high temperatures may affect the properties of your oils so don't let them get too hot.

## **Whipping Oils & Butters**

Whipping your oils and butters gives a smooth, creamy texture. Here is how to do it: Melt the butter (add in any carrier oils now) then leave to cool to room temperature (add any essential oils now). Whip it up for a few minutes then put in the fridge to firm up. Once it is cool to the touch take out and whip again until fluffy. Done!

## **My Butter Has a Funny Texture**

Sometimes temperature changes such as heating and cooling during transport can affect the texture of butters. The slightly softer butters such as shea and avocado butter are particularly prone to this, and might feel a bit grainy. This doesn't mean there is anything wrong with your butter however and there is a quick fix.

## **How To Fix Grainy Butters:**

Grain formation occurs during transportation where temperatures can vary. Butters may melt and then cool slowly, and the fatty acids in the butter cool quicker than the butter itself, resulting in a grainy texture. Fixing this is simple: gently melt down the butter completely. It may take longer than usual to melt the grains. Once the butter has completely liquefied, pop it in the fridge or freezer to quickly cool uniformly until solid. Then store in a cool, dry place.