

FUN with SCENTS

By Debbie Coyle / Lynnette de Sandoval del Valle de los Unicornios

Here's a little fun with couple of herbal uses for your home: Potpourri for scent and color, and bath salts for the end of a long day.

Potpourri

The name translates as "rotten pot" but don't let that stop you: potpourri is a beautiful way to freshen the air or scent linens and clothes. There are 3 types of potpourri: moist (or wet), dry, and simmering.

Wet potpourri is made by layering fresh flowers and herbs, with lots of salt in a glass jar or pottery crock. The ingredients will "rot fragrantly". Keep it covered and remove the lid when you want to scent the room. The scent lasts longer and is softer than the other potpourri types — but you **MUST** use fresh, not dried, ingredients and it can be used only as a room freshener. Potpourri, Incense and Other Fragrant Concoctions by Ann Tucker Fettner has a good section on moist potpourri.

Simmering potpourri is made with large pieces of herbs and spices. It is simmered in a pan, or crockpot, of water to scent the whole house, or over a candle to scent a smaller area. The potpourri can be reused several times before discarding, refrigerate it between uses. Ginger, apple, sage, lemon, orange, cinnamon, and cloves are some of the favorite ingredients for this. Do an internet search for "simmering potpourri" and you will find tons of information and recipes!

Dry potpourri is made from dried herbs, spices and flowers mixed with oils and scent fixatives. It can be used in pomanders, sachets, drawer pillows, baskets, jars or whatever. It can last for years.

When a group of us sat down to make dry potpourri we looked through book after book finding and discarding recipes as "too complex", "too expensive", "too many ingredients", etc.

Finally we threw away the books, gathered what dried herbs, spices and flowers we had and asked, "What goes well with mint?" "How about one that smells like orange spice tea?" "Can we do something with lemon?" "What about roses?"

We started mixing test batches: some we liked, some needed work, some formed the basis for other recipes, and one was thrown out ("It SOUNDED like a good idea!").

Then we bought oils and fixatives to supplement the scents and experimented with them as well.

It was fun, less expensive, and more rewarding than using someone else's recipes!

Dry Potpourri Basics

Most of the books I've read on dry potpourri divide ingredients into 3 sections:

- **Main scent:** What you want the potpourri to smell like.
- **Blenders:** What goes well with the main scent?
- **Fixatives:** To hold the scent.

I add:

- **Color:** Potpourri is visual as well as olfactory. Add colors that show what the potpourri smells like.

The main scent and blenders can be

- **Herbs and spices:** Rosemary, mint, geranium, lemon grass, bay marjoram, anise, sage, cloves, cinnamon, vanilla, etc.
- **Flowers:** Lavender, hibiscus, black malva, orange, geranium, rose, carnation, marigold, etc.
- **Fruit peels:** Lemon, lime, oranges, grapefruit.
- **Tree bark, leaves and roots:** cedar, pine, eucalyptus, sandalwood, sassafras root, moss, etc.
- **Oil:** Individual scents or premixed blends.

Fixatives are many and varied

Cedar wood, sandalwood, orris root, calamus root, rock salt and more.

They come powdered, coarse ground, or as oil. We had the best luck with coarse ground orris and calamus roots (both have a faint violet odor). One or two tablespoons to a quart of potpourri is usually enough.

Color can be

- **Flowers from the main scent and blenders:** Roses, black malva, carnation, etc.
- **Flowers with little or no scent:** Statis, geranium, hibiscus, etc.
- **Chunks of other ingredients:** Cloves, citrus peel, cinnamon, etc.

Dry Potpourri Uses

Sachets and pillows

These are cloth bags filled with potpourri and tied or sewn shut. They can be plain, made from old bed sheets or handkerchiefs, to be tucked in drawers and chests; or ornate, made from lace, velvet, beads, etc., to be worn as a necklace or hung in your car or closet. Use finely ground ingredients and powdered fixatives, since the potpourri will not be visible; color is not a consideration here.

Pomanders

These are perforated balls filled with potpourri that hang in closets or cars or are used to scent rooms. You can buy china pomanders ready to be filled or decorate china or wire tea balls. The potpourri will not show, but powdered ingredients will sift through the holes, use coarse ground ingredients but don't worry about color or visual composition.

Displayed

Potpourri can be kept in a jar or basket or tied in a small-holed net to show off the visual effect. Powdered ingredients are a no-no they will sift through the basket or net and will cloud jars. Course ground ingredients with distinct shapes and color elements work best here. Potpourri reacts badly with the solder used in many cans; so if you want to store in cans, use tea tins or other non-soldered.

Notes About Dry Potpourri

Dry all ingredients completely or it will turn moldy.

Check for bugs or eggs on the ingredients — if you find them, or are unsure: 2 minutes in a 200 degree oven should kill them.

Make a test batch of a new recipe and let it stand covered for a couple of weeks. This gives the scents a chance to mix and gives you a truer idea of the potpourri's actual scent. Adjust the recipe if necessary and let stand another couple of weeks.

When you make a test batch of a new recipe, and as you add to it during testing, write down what you put in it because **YOU WILL NOT REMEMBER!**

When the potpourri starts to lose its scent, mix it up a little to bruise the oil cells and release more scent, or place it under a lamp, the heat will help release the oil. As the potpourri gets older a drop or two of compatible scented oil or of brandy will help revive the scent -- a good reason to keep brandy in the house!

BATH SALTS

The salt softens the water, the oils add your favorite scent and the color completes the luxury. What could be better after a hard day?

The simplest form of bath salts consists of just that

- **1/2 cup** (per bath) **of non-iodized salt** (rock salt, sea salt or Epsom salt)
- **Food coloring** (just old fashioned squeeze bottle food coloring from the baking section of the grocery store) to desired color
- **Oils** to desired intensity

Bath salts can be mixed up in a bowl or jar or I prefer heavy-duty zip-lock bags because shaking them to mix the salts is way more fun then mixing them in a bowl.

Preparation

- Add the desired amount of salt to bag. (1/2 cup works well for test batches.)
- Add a few drops of food color. Keep a record of how many drops you use.
- Seal bag without squeezing out the air; shake the bag until color is evenly distributed.
- Repeat until you find the right color.
- Decide which oil(s) go with that color and add a few drops. Keep a record of how many drops you used.
- Seal bag without squeezing out the air; shake the bag to distribute oil.
- Repeat until you are happy with the result (remember you will use 1/2 cup per bath, the scent should be fairly strong).
- If you over do the color or scent, add more salt.

Then test your batch — take a bath — if it needs more or less of something amend your formula.

If the oil you want to use has too sweet a smell, try adding a few drops of lemon oil to the salt.

If you mix the color and salt completely you will get one solid color; if not you will get a speckled appearance — both are lovely.

HERBAL BATH SALTS

The next step is Herbal Bath Salts — herbs and flowers (no spices, they generally have a stronger oil content that can cause skin rashes) are added to the salt for their medicinal and cosmetic values, as well as for their scent. The herbal bath salts are tied in a cloth bag (cheesecloth, muslin, or an old washcloth all work well) and are used as a “tea bag” for the bath.

- **1/2 cup** (per bath) **of non-iodized salt** (rock salt, sea salt or Epsom salt)
- **Herbs, flowers** as desired. Use flowers and herbs grown for consumption to avoid pesticides and chemicals – check the produce section of your grocery store
- **Oils** to desired intensity
- **Optional: Food coloring** (just old fashioned squeeze bottle food coloring from the baking section of the grocery store) to desired color

For the strongest effect — boil the bag of herbal bath salts in a small saucepan of water for 5 to 15 minutes — then add the water and the bag to your bath.

A simpler, but less intense, method is to hang the bag on the bath faucet so that the water hits it as you draw your bath and infuses the herbs into the bath water.

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