



COOKING WITH ESSENTIAL OILS



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In this article, you will learn about:

Essential Oil Ingestion Controversy

Basics of Cooking with Essential Oils

Does Cooking Damage Essential Oils?

Top 10 Essential Oils for Cooking

Combining nutritious foods with flavorful spices and herbs is a time honored tradition and a beautiful picture of God's design for the Abundant Life. The flowers and herbs that grace our gardens are also delicious sources of wellness. Extending this celebration to cooking with essential oils as well widens our appreciation for creation and all of the goodness available at our fingertips.

Learn how to use essential oils safely (and deliciously!) when cooking up nutritious concoctions in the kitchen.

Essential Oil Ingestion Controversy

Admittedly, the ingestion of essential oils is a hot topic with much controversy. What, if any, oils can be ingested and how do we do it? There are plenty of opinions out there, but past precedent alone tells us it's nothing new.

Essential oils – both real and synthetic – have been used as flavoring agents for years. It's just too easy to add a drop or two of an intensely flavored oil in place of time consuming ingredients with much more volume. (1)

In addition to flavor, essential oils are regularly tested by researchers for their potential to improve food safety. Antimicrobial oils, the theory goes, may be able to minimize food borne illness if manufacturers added it to packaging.

So the idea that we can cook with essential oils or incorporate them into our kitchen process is nothing new. The important thing is to do so safely, appreciating the differences between a whole herb or spice and its essential oil.

You'll also want to note that not every essential oil is a good choice for cooking. Sometimes the oil doesn't taste quite as yummy as the whole herb. Sometimes the oil has too much of a certain component, making it less than ideal or even unsafe in high quantities. Fennel is a good example, when a woman ate an “undisclosed amount” of fennel cakes with essential oil in them and wound up having seizures. (2)

Knowing all about the oil you'd like to use – its safety, profile, and precautions – is important. With proper use, dilution, and amounts, I believe cooking with essential oils can be both safe and fun.

Cooking Basics

Essential oils actually help to make cooking much easier and more flavorful. There's always a place for herbs and spices – we need the variety of nutrients they offer! But sometimes, it's just easier to add a drop or two instead of spending time chopping and slicing and preparing. Other times, a yummy essential oil can take the place of a recipe's artificial flavoring ingredient (think “orange extract” or “lemon flavoring” or vanilla).

For the basics of cooking with essential oils, remember to: Convert; Dilute; Delay

Convert

Remember that the essential oil is a concentrated portion of its original source. Just like cinnamon sticks take up more space than cinnamon powder, the essential oil should be used in much smaller quantities than the whole substance.

We don't quite have a hard-and-fast rule for substituting essential oils for whole herbs and spices, but a good rule of thumb is that a drop will replace a teaspoon and that you don't need more than one or two drops for a full recipe.

Dilute

Another thing to remember when cooking with essential oils is that they should still be diluted into a lipid first. This not only keeps us safe, but it helps to ensure the oil (and flavor!) gets dispersed throughout the whole dish.

For savory recipes, dilute into a bit of olive or coconut oil. Stir, then add to the recipe.

For sweet recipes, honey or a syrup works well.

Delay

Finally, for hot recipes, wait until the end of the process before adding the essential oil. These are called “volatile oils” for a reason – they are relatively fragile and will dissipate quickly in high heat!

For stovetop recipes, after the cooking is finished, stir your diluted essential oil into the dish. For baking, you'll simply expect to lose a bit of the properties in the process. Dilution throughout the recipe will help, and you'll still be able to enjoy the flavors no matter what!

Does Cooking Damage Essential Oils?

This point is worth expanding a bit more before we move on to the best essential oils for cooking. After all, it's important to understand why we're doing it and what the benefits and drawbacks may be.

The two concerns with cooking essential oils seem to be:

Alteration of chemical structure

Evaporation

Both of these concerns are valid, but that shouldn't stop us from enjoying culinary use of essential oils. Minimize exposure to high heat by adding essential oils last, and minimize evaporation by proper dilution and dispersion throughout the recipe.

While one would think boiling would eliminate the beneficial properties, but at least one study found that some properties were better retained during boiling than baking. (3) Go figure!

Because these oils are going to be ingested and some of the properties are indeed retained, it's important to get high quality, certified organic oils for the absolute best in safety and flavor.

Finally, remember that cooking with essential oils is largely to enjoy the flavors and fragrance, with a dash of potential health benefits on the side. For direct and potent health effects, other remedies or applications are ideal.

10 Essential Oils for Cooking

Use just a drop or two in recipes sweet or savory, cooked or raw, and even drinks! Fewer drops-per-recipe help to promote good safety for a wide range of oils, as well. Here are some of the best essential oils for cooking.

1. Lavender

As one of the most gentle oils, lavender essential oil is a great oil to start with as you learn to cook with essential oils. Its flavor is delicate and floral, excellent for a variety of culinary options.

Try lavender in dessert recipes like scones, simple syrups added to beverages like lemonade, and even savory dishes like fish bakes. Just a couple of drops for the whole recipe will add just a touch of that unique floral flavor to take your recipe from bland to gourmet.

Lavender essential oil properties are linked with relaxing, calming, anti-anxiety effects.

2. Peppermint

Cool and refreshing, peppermint essential oil is another easy one to start out with. A drop of peppermint essential oil added to honey turns an ordinary mug of tea into a stimulating, energizing jump start. Peppermint also blends well in lemonade, and for the adventurous – go for a lavender, peppermint, lemonade mix! It's yet another case where the big-three essential oils and flavors work together well.

Use peppermint oil in candies and chocolates for your own mint treats. And while it's not actually cooking, don't forget to use peppermint to make your own oral health treatments.

Peppermint essential oil properties are linked to energizing stimulation, relief of aches and pains, and even athletic performance.

3. Citrus

There's just no way around it – all of the citrus oils are great for cooking! Citrus oils are unique in that they are pressed directly from the peel of the fruit, so while you're getting the oddball composition of roots and leaves and bark with other oils, you are much closer to the familiar fruit in citrus.

That also means they aren't steam distilled – which means they've yet to undergo heat. This makes citrus potentially more sensitive to heat applications. Don't avoid it, really, just be aware of that when you set your expectations.

Use citrus oils in drinks, smoothies (orange-cream, anyone?), and treats. Add to stir-fries and casseroles, one-pot wonders, and even in dips. The sky's the limit with these delicious, fruity oils.

Citrus essential oils are linked to energizing, antimicrobial properties and may even contribute to weight loss efforts.

4. Bergamot

While bergamot is technically citrus, it deserves special mention. First, it's not a fruit that we eat so we don't readily relate to the flavor. And second, it is a stand-out anxiety reliever.

Bergamot's flavor is mildly citrus-like and blends well stirred into honey for tea. Try bergamot in scone recipes and treats to take advantage of its excellent pairing with mild flavors.

Bergamot essential oil is a cold-pressed citrus oil that is associated with stress relieving, anti-anxiety benefits.

5. Cinnamon

Now we're stepping into the meat and potatoes (though, I'm not sure I'd use that literally for cinnamon!). Cinnamon essential oil is strong in both flavor and effects. It's more important than ever to dilute properly to protect sensitive membranes, and to only use a drop or two for a recipe.

Cinnamon essential oil works very well in sweet dishes, particularly cinnamon bark oil to replace powdered cinnamon bark. Think cinnamon French toast, or an extra cinnamon boost in cinnamon rolls.

Cinnamon essential oil is associated with antimicrobial and antioxidant effects, as well as being a stimulating, energizing oil.

6. Cardamom

An excellent pairing with cinnamon oil, cardamom is known as a strong antioxidant with potential digestive benefits. Use cardamom and cinnamon as part of a chai flavor blend or in any spice-flavored dessert or treat.

Cardamom powder is also included in some savory recipes, adding a warm flavor touch to meat dishes and main courses. Adding cardamom essential oil in place of the powder may add digestive benefits to the recipe as well as tons of flavor.

Cardamom essential oil is associated with digestive wellness such as nausea relief, as well as potent antioxidant composition.

7. Ginger

Another digestive substance, ginger root has long been used to relieve nausea and protect the stomach. Ginger essential oil can be used in similar ways, and it is great for cooking.

Add ginger to sweet treats like ginger snaps, gingerbread, and spiced drinks, without a doubt. But also try it in sauces for savory dishes like stir fries and marinades. Fresh ginger has to be peeled and grated, so ginger essential oil can be a quick and easy addition when time is short but flavor is needed.

Ginger essential oil is linked to digestive wellness, nausea prevention, and anti-inflammatory benefits.

8. Thyme

Typically used in cleaning blends, thyme essential oil is best known for its frontline effects against the microbes that cause illness. But it's also an immune stimulant and part of a flavorful culinary herb.

As a savory flavor, add thyme to main course dishes, especially when meat is involved. The herbaceous flavor blends well into soups, stews, and bakes as well. Add to marinades to add an herbaceous touch without being limited to dry rubs. For a surprising twist, experiment with thyme in desserts and treats to offset the sweetness.

Thyme essential oil is known as an antimicrobial immune stimulant and may help to improve food safety.

9. Anise

With a licorice flavor, anise essential oil is fun to experiment with as a unique and absolutely delicious addition to nearly any kind of recipe. Anise as a whole herb is used in cookies and treats, mild biscotti, savory marinades, soups, sausages, and various ethnic recipes.

Anise is similar to fennel in flavor and digestive benefits. Replace anise in recipes with a drop or two of the essential oil. But, like fennel, it can be counterproductive and even dangerous if used in excess. Use it cautiously – not daily and not in excess – to enjoy the flavor and digestive benefits of anise essential oil.

Anise essential oil is associated with digestive benefits, as well as the risks associated with estragole content. Use appropriately.

10. Coriander/Cilantro

Coriander is the seed of the plant and cilantro is the leaf of the same – but their flavors and applications are much different. Their essential oils work in a similar way. While the benefits are somewhat similar, the flavors are different and their best uses are different.

Use cilantro essential oil where you would use cilantro, in salsas, dips, and savory cuisine. Coriander essential oil works well in sauces, vegetable dishes, pickling, and other savory recipes that use herbs.

Coriander and cilantro essential oils are associated with digestive benefits and antioxidant properties.

Resources:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25893282>

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21865126>

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26593564>

Safety & Drug Interactions

Are you sure you're using essential oils safely and effectively? Are you confused by dilutions and conversions?

Let me help you by taking out the guesswork. Download my FREE dilution chart guide [HERE!](#)

When it comes to drug interactions and contraindications, there are literally textbooks devoted to the study of essential oil safety and, as a trained researcher and doctor, I think it's important to note that there is virtually no research out there discussing how essential oils interact with drugs in long-term human clinical trials. This means that essential oil safety is still a wild frontier in the science community and no one really knows (for certain) how essential oils will interact with drugs or your body.

Nonetheless, properly diluting your essential oils is fundamental to safety and effectiveness because they are highly concentrated plant compounds. To help you along your journey, I have created an easy-to-use dilution guide that you can download for FREE to make sure that all of your topical applications are safe and effective for the entire family.