

What is needed to make perfumes

Decisions

Choosing a formulation

Perfumes are made up of a blend of different aromas that usually come from essential oils. One may find some perfume formulations in books or in the Web. Some sites that have a few of these formulas are given in the links section. Look after a description that characterizes the perfume you want (not always given) and choose one or two of them. You are now ready to buy its components.

Weight or volume

Perfume formulations can be expressed in volumetric or weight proportions of each of its components. For people who want to make perfumes at home, weight measures present a problem since the average kitchen balance does not have the required precision. Using them will lead to unpredictable and non-reproducible results. Buying a more precise balance represents an added cost which is hard to justify for the present purpose. Volume measurements are easier to perform with less expensive hardware that meet the level of accuracy needed for home made perfumes.

Which material

Appropriate hardware is required in order to measure, handle, mix and bottle the components that make up a perfume's formulation. Although it is possible to make use of improvised solutions like using kitchenware, disposable glass jelly jars and plastic spoons, one has to bear in mind that formulations are quite precise and that some materials, like plastics, may interact with essential oils and solvents. Therefore, to get good and reproducible results, some care has to be taken when selecting your hardware.

Glass

Of the basic handling materials available, glass has many advantages over metals and plastics. Glass is transparent allowing to see what is being done and the results achieved after each operation. All volumeals and plastics. Glass is transparent allowing to see what is being measurements can be performed with an acceptable degree of precision in graduated glass beakers, burettes and syringes, eliminating all need of external measuring devices.

Glass does

not interact with any components of the perfume's formulation. Glass is easily washable and dried and can withstand high temperatures and thermal shock, a

handy feature when preparing cosmetics and balms. The additional costs incurred by using graduated glass will certainly be well paid for by the ease in

operation and constant quality of the perfumes you make.

Glassware For volume measurements

To measure volumes one can use three different types of graduated glassware. Cylindrical vessels with a "lip" called beakers where the mixture of all components of the formulation will be made. When making perfumes at home, it is very unlikely that quantities will exceed 500 ml or

16.91 US fluid ounces. A graduated beaker of this capacity is appropriate. The

majority of the components of a formulation are required in smaller volumes, seldom exceeding 50 ml or 1.69 US fluid ounces. A burette, a tall graduated cylindrical vessels of this capacity is a good measuring device or this purpose.

Some of the components are required in smaller amounts. For these, it is convenient to have a small syringe of 2 ml or 0.0676 US fluid ounces.

Funnels and pipets

For transferring the perfumes to their bottles, a funnel with a long and narrow neck should be used. Again glass is the choice material since you can watch the operation and avoid waist. A long and narrow neck is

recommended because perfume bottles have narrow openings and the maximum perfume level is well below the bottle's top. For mixing one can use a glass rod of the kind used to mix cocktails.

Very often formulations prescribe the addition of drops of a certain component. Drop volumes vary for the same substance. However, the formulas assume a constant volume generally obtained with a glass pipet like the ones that come with some household remedies. Therefore, using them will provide the quantities recommended by the formulations.

Aromas

Quality

The final quality achieved when making a perfume is tied to the quality of all components that are used. Of these, aromas are the most important ones since they determine the perfume's intrinsic properties like personality and tone. It is therefore very important to buy the best essential oils that one can. One should also be aware that some dealers offer ready made mixtures that supposedly have the same aroma of a well known high quality commercial perfume. The original products are the creation of skilled perfumers that have developed and perfected very complex formulations for years before they reach the market. Most of them use rare and very expensive natural essential oils. It is easy to imagine what one gets when buying a cheap imitation of these perfumes.

Natural or synthetic

Essential oils may be natural or synthetic. The latter ones are mass produced to supply the demand of scents needed for various uses, from perfumes to home cleaning products. There is a good deal of concern about the effects of these substances in humans, mainly because natural products have been in use for centuries and their adverse effects are better known. This is a good reason to prefer natural essential oils. However, there is a long way between this choice and actually getting true natural products.

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The safest one is to find a supplier that has been in business for a long time and that will provide a certificate of origin and purity of the sold products.

Quantity

Pure natural essential oils are expensive. Before buying any, one should download a list of the usually available oils supplied by a vendor, watch the prices and select a formula taking also into account how much one is prepared to spend. Start buying small quantities (usually 25 ml bottles) and make

some experiments before ordering more. Click on the thumbnail to see a pair of high quality bottles of Verbena and Ylang Ylang essential oils.

Storing

Oils have their properties changed with time due to oxidation and the effect of light. Good quality essential oils are sold in airtight amber bottles that decrease these effects. Some of them also have an internal and practical dropper. Keep your stock in a dry and dark place.

Solvent and fixative

Alcohol and Glycerin

The most widely used solvent for the oils employed in perfume making is anhydrous pure Grain Ethanol which is a high purity Ethyl Alcohol obtained by fermentation and distillation of cereal grains. The physical properties of this substance are given at:

<http://www.distill.com/specs/US-2.html>

Note that the amount of residual non-volatile substances left after evaporation is extremely small. This small amount has little interference with the scent of the aromas that are added to the alcohol. Since it may be difficult or even impossible to get this type of alcohol in your country, the most widely alternative adopted is to employ a good quality distilled beverage obtained

from
grains, like Vodka.

Fixatives

Fixatives are used to depress the evaporation rate of essential oils, the main cause of a perfume losing its scent with time. These substances traditionally were obtained from natural sources, either vegetable or animal. Today synthetic substances are widely used. One of the most popular family of fixatives are Phthalates, substances also present in car interiors due to its use by the plastic industry. Glycerin is an alternative substance often employed.

Precautions and regulations

Phthalates are known to have carcinogenic effects and to provoke allergic reactions. Glycerin may cause allergic reactions in some people. If you intend to use

Glycerin, test your skin's reaction by depositing a very small quantity of the pure substance over your skin and watch for any effects in the next 24 hours. Considering that essential oils do not have a very fast evaporation rate at atmospheric pressure, you may, in doubt, leave fixatives out of your formulations. Further reading on the adverse effects of substances that enter in cosmetics and perfume formulas can be found at:

<http://www.ameliaww.com/fpin/fpin.htm>

Information about regulations concerning these substances can be found at:

<http://www.supernet.net/~jackibar/fda.html>.