

## Making Perfumed Oil

CAUTION: Some people are skin-sensitive to cinnamon and clove!

### Ancient Perfumes

Spices came from the East Indies to customers in Egypt, the Middle East, and the Roman Empire. These spices, along with flowers, herbs, and other plant products, went into the making of perfumed oils.

Evidence of these perfumed substances has been found by archaeologists. Near the Dead Sea in what is now Israel, archaeologists have found the remains of a perfume factory. It was owned by Cleopatra, the queen of Egypt, and was built during the first century

B.C. Recent digs have revealed stone seats where clients probably waited their turn to have perfumed ointments applied to their skin.

Researchers have tried to make some of the same perfumed ointments that ancient cultures loved so much. Studying ancient books, researchers learned that perfume recipes used olive oil pressed from unripe olives. Expensive spices from the Far East and locally-grown plants were heated in the oil for a long time until the spicy scents mixed with the oil.

Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Persians, and others used perfumed oils until the ninth century A.D. when Arabs invented the modern process of making perfumes, using alcohol.

- ◆ **Objective:** To make a “sun-cooked” perfumed oil
- ◆ **Time to Complete Activity:** 15 minutes to mix ingredients, several days for oil to “cook”
- ◆ **Materials Needed:** Canola oil, measuring cup, glass jar with lid, wooden spoon, sieve, 10 cinnamon sticks, bottle of whole cloves (We will skip the time-consuming step of making olive oil from unripe olives and use canola oil instead. Do not use peanut oil or commercial olive oil because their odors are too strong.)

### Directions:

- \_\_\_\_ Pour 1 cup of canola oil into a clean glass jar.
- \_\_\_\_ Put cinnamon sticks and cloves into the oil.
- \_\_\_\_ Mash them a bit with a wooden spoon and make sure they are covered with oil.
- \_\_\_\_ Put a lid on the jar and place it in a sunny place for about a week.
- \_\_\_\_ Mash and stir the spices a little each day, if possible.
- \_\_\_\_ At end of the week, rub a little of the oil on your skin. It will smell very faintly of spices. Even if you let your mixture “cook” for a very long time, it will never have a strong smell. Ancient perfumed oils were not long-lasting and had to be rubbed on the skin often.

### Variation:

Try other spices and herbs in making your perfumed oils. Some of the spices and herbs that were used in ancient times that you may be able to find in a grocery store or specialty store include:

- marjoram
- fenugreek
- cardamom
- saffron (very expensive!)
- nard, also called spikenard
- balsam
- myrtle leaves



Perfumed oils were stored in stone containers in ancient times.

