

## Potpourri Primer

The best potpourris have a subtle, natural scent that comes from the thoughtful melding of all natural ingredients: dried flowers, leaves, seeds, roots, barks, woods, resins, and spices. Individual ingredients contribute aroma, texture, color, and/or bulk. Some (called fixatives) help the flavors meld and last, and essential oils boost the blend. Many herbs do double—or triple—duty in a potpourri, contributing aroma as well as color and texture.

Consider the specific effects of each ingredient. A citrusy scent (like lemon or orange) or a mint (like peppermint or spearmint) will stimulate and refresh, for example, while florals (like lavender, jasmine, and rose) tend to relax. Camphors (like eucalyptus) will cool, while spices (like cardamom, cinnamon, and vanilla) will add warmth. Woods and barks (like cedar) complement other scents while adding bulk, and fruits (like rosehips and juniper and elder berries) add visual appeal. Don't feel compelled to stick with one theme; combine florals and mints, or citrus and spices, for example. But do select an array of ingredients that you feel complement each other aromatically and visually.

A fixative is an aromatic ingredient that helps meld the scents in the potpourri. Because it holds the volatile oils, it also keeps the scent from fading. Popular fixatives include orris root, calamus root, angelica root, frankincense tears, myrrh gum, benzoin gum, balsam of Peru, oak moss, and vanilla beans. It's fine to put more than one fixative to work in a potpourri; use at least 20 percent total fixative by weight.

Essential oils are used to enhance the scent of a potpourri and to refresh it when it begins to lose its oomph. Choose oils that duplicate one of your ingredients or that underline a theme. Spruce and pine would be good choices for an outdoorsy blend, for example, while jasmine or rose would enhance a sweetly floral blend.

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## Potpourri

Recipes for ...

- » Herbal Bouquet
- » Citrus Splash
- » Walk in the Woods

... and more!

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# Q&A

## What's a wet potpourri?



A wet potpourri is a mixture made from fresh aromatic materials that are matured in a crock for several weeks, during which time they ferment. Wet potpourris retain their aroma for a long time, but they're not much fun to look at. We've

explored dry potpourris here, which are made from dried aromatic ingredients.

## What else can I do with a potpourri besides set it out on the table?

Use a relaxing potpourri blend to make a sleep pillow. Or craft sachets to tuck into closets and drawers. (Include ingredients—like bay, lemongrass, chamomile, and lavender—that will repel moths and insects.) To make a gift extra special, include a sachet, or simply sprinkle a little potpourri under the tissue paper in the box.



## So many potpourri recipes call for orris root. What is it, exactly?

Orris root is the dried root of one of several species of iris. While it's thought to have some medicinal properties, it's most renowned for its use as a fixative. You can also find it in some toothpastes and in the African/Middle Eastern cooking blend Ras el hanout.

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# A Medley of Materials...

A softly scented room is a treat for the senses. It can soothe or inspire, refresh or intrigue—and it always delights. Potpourri is the perfect way to add aroma (as well as beauty) to your environment. And by making your own, you can craft a mixture that perfectly suits the occasion, season, room, or individual.

## The Process

Simply combine the dry ingredients in a mixing bowl. Add your fixative(s) and gently mix again. Lastly, add essential oil(s), drop by drop, and gently mix. Smell, then add more oil if necessary (start with a light hand!). Store the mixture in a glass jar in a cool, dry, dark place for two weeks or more to age.

## Potpourri Placement

Place your potpourris in living areas, but keep in mind that they should be where little hands can't get into them, as not all potpourri ingredients will be safe if ingested. Note that your potpourri will last longer if you avoid putting it in direct sunlight. Finally, don't overdo the potpourri in any room or even overall in your house—a little goes a long way.

Container possibilities include glass or wood bowls, baskets (use a doily or pretty napkin as a liner), shells, tins, even canning jars. Special potpourri vases—which have pierced, fitted lids—are especially nice.



## Recipes

A handful of this, a spoonful of that—no exact amounts are needed for making your own potpourri. For that matter, you don't even need a recipe. But here are a few suggestions for complementary

ingredients. (Choose from among the ingredients listed, making sure to include at least one fixative and essential oil with your dried ingredients.)

### Herbal Bouquet

This mellow blend is fresh and floral, but not overly sweet.

- \* Lavender flowers, chamomile flowers, roses, red clover blossoms, calendula flowers, and/or raspberry leaf
- \* Rosehips and/or sumac berries
- \* Fixative: orris root and/or oak moss
- \* Essential oil: rose, coriander seed, lime, sandalwood, and/or tangerine

### Citrus Splash

Use this refreshing potpourri in the office or car—or anyplace you want a pick-me-up.

- \* Lemon balm, lemongrass, lemon peel, lemon thyme leaf, bay leaf, hibiscus flowers, safflower petals, and/or uva ursi leaf
- \* Orange peel, lemon peel, and/or coriander
- \* Fixative: calamus and/or orris root
- \* Essential oil: bergamot, lemon, and/or sweet orange

### Walk in the Woods

A little sharp and very earthy, this blend has a distinctly masculine edge.

- \* Bayberry root bark, licorice root, linden flowers, lemon verbena leaf, lemon balm, woodruff herb, pine cones, feverfew flowers, sarsaparilla root, cedar shavings, and/or licorice root
- \* Lemon peel, orange peel, allspice, star anise, and/or vanilla
- \* Fixative: orris root, vanilla bean, and/or myrrh gum
- \* Essential oil: citronella, bergamot, patchouli, ylang ylang, cedarwood, sandalwood, and/or pine

