

Preparing Resins for Herbal Crafting

WORKBOOK

FROM THE NORTHWEST SCHOOL
OF AROMATIC MEDICINE'S

BOTANICAL RESINS
WORKSHOP SERIES

Plant and tree resins can sometimes be overlooked botanicals when it comes to natural healing and herbalism. They're extremely common in aromatherapy, incense and perfumery...

...but what about all of their countless healing benefits as internal and topical preparations, as well as beauty products?

They can be made into balms, salves, creams, lotions, body butters, liniments, ointments, face serums, chest rubs, tinctures, cordials, mouthwashes, *and more.*

Resins are one of our most precious botanicals, and **often have a higher concentration of medicinal and aromatic constituents** than many other types of botanicals.

Which is why they should have a place in any practice with plants or aromatics.





But, as you can imagine, there's a bit of work that needs to happen between when a resin is harvested on a tree's trunk, to a finished botanical preparation.

You need to learn how to process and break down each resin you work with in the right way, because every resin fits into a certain group that *acts uniquely* to different processing methods and different solvents (*alcohol, water, carrier oils, etc*).

If you jump in head first without knowing what you're doing, you'll likely have a sticky mess on your hands and feel like you want to give up, or your extraction process will fail and have to be composted.

Let's equip you with what you need to know to avoid disappointment, wasted materials and time.



Time is your biggest factor in crafting with resins...

Processing Resins

Resins exude from trees and plants as a sticky, honey-like substance. Over time, with exposure to oxygen, that substance begins to harden from the outside in.

When buying resins, most often they will arrive to you fully dried and hard.

This is the most ideal for processing them down.

Though some resins, like Pine, Spruce, and others, can *appear* fully hardened, that is sometimes just on the surface.

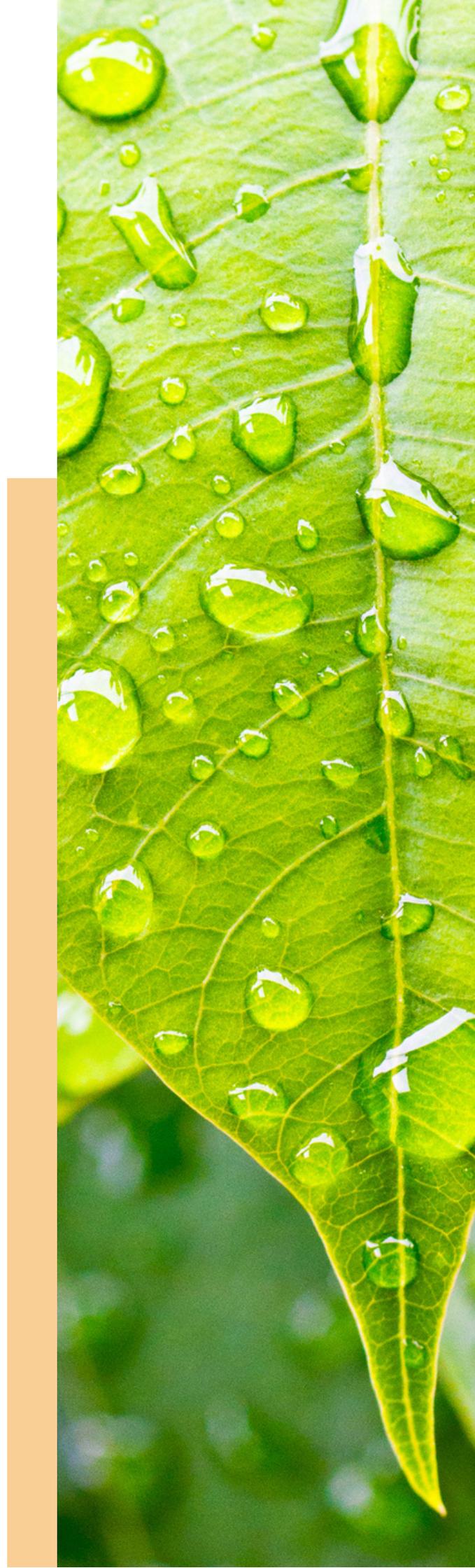
Once you start processing them, you could find they're still sticky on the inside.

Will you be harvesting your own resins in nature?

If so, you need to be aware that processing fresh, sticky resins is much more difficult than those that are completely dry and cured.

If you find that a resin you've harvested is not completely hard and dry, you can let it dry for a few weeks or months *in open air*, checking its solidity periodically, before you process or powder it.

Each species of resin will have different curing times, some take weeks, others can take 6 months or longer to fully cure.





Processing Tools

The 3 tools I use most for breaking down and powdering resins are:

Mortar & Pestle (made of stone)

Electric Coffee Grinder

Hammer

Tips:

- Be sure you use a designated coffee grinder for botanicals and resins, and not the same one as you use for coffee.
- Alcohol will clean *resins* from your tools. Hot water will clean *oleo-gum-resins* and *gums*.



Consistency

There are different consistencies of resin you might choose depending on what botanical preparation you plan to create with them. For example, for loose incense you could use anything from pea-sized pieces to fine powder.

Topical resin-based preparations require your resin to be extracted into a solvent: either a carrier oil (olive, coconut, ect.) or an alcohol.

So for most topical preparations, you'll want to powder your resin down as finely as possible, which will make the extraction and dissolving process a much quicker one.



Powdering Stickier Resins & Oleo-Gum-Resins

Resins come in many shapes and sizes: tears, small granules, golf-ball sized pieces, even fist-sized chunks.

Some fully-cured *oleo-resins* will break down to a fine powder entirely with a hammer or in a mortar and pestle.

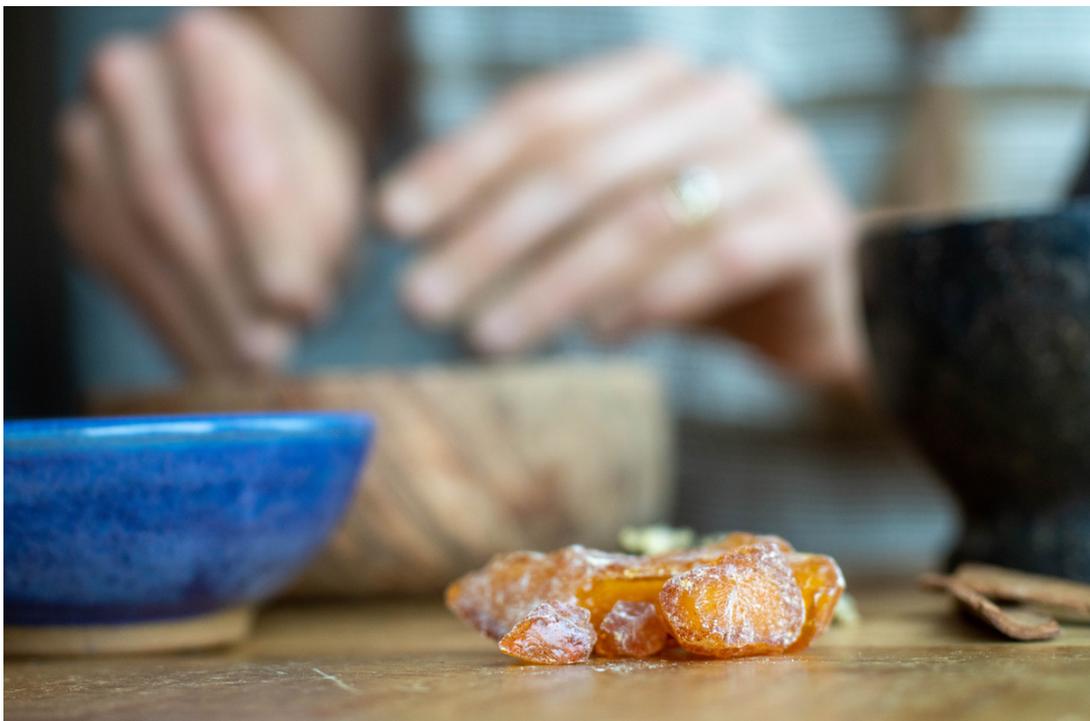
But since some stickier natured resins and oleo-gum-resins are too gummy or sticky to powder with those tools, a coffee grinder is needed.

If you have small granules or tears (*anything smaller than a blueberry*) they can be placed directly in your coffee grinder.

For anything larger than that, you must first use either a hammer against a hard surface, or a mortar and pestle to break them down into smaller granules to then place in your coffee grinder.

How to Not Gunk Up Your Tools!

- Freshly harvested, sticky resins **do not belong in your coffee grinder or mortar and pestle**. Instead, be sure to *properly cure them to their maximum solidity first*.
- If you're working with the handful of stickier natured resins, or gummy oleo-gum-resins, put them in the freezer for 30-40 minutes prior to processing and powdering them with your tools. **Freezing resins will temporarily solidify them and subdue their stickiness**. *But act fast before they warm back up!*
- With a few long-curing, softer resins like Labdanum and Galbanum, try carefully using a razor to shave off thin slices, freeze them, then place in your coffee grinder for powdering.



Sustainability of Resins

Due to their popularity, some resins are harvested in very unsustainable ways leading to many problems, *including pushing some species towards endangerment*. And some resins are not able to produce enough to keep up with the market demand.

Leading Issues of Sustainability:

- More people buying at-risk resins without knowing it.
- Large essential oil companies buying up a majority of certain resins for their essential oil (*using up to 100 x's more plant material than using resins in their raw form*).
- Climate change is causing a few species of common resins to produce less resin annually.
- Unsustainable, profit-driven harvesting methods that harm wild plant populations.





Although all of this may sound discouraging, there are many resins that are *totally ethical* to buy and use that are found growing in abundance.

There are also many things you can do and watch out for when sourcing new resins to ensure you're contributing to a healthy future for plant species, even those that are at-risk or threatened in the wild.

It is important to support resin sources who are harvesting or cultivating in sustainable ways as many are planting more trees and even encouraging at-risk plant species to thrive. The more we buy from these sources, the more hope there is for all wild plant populations.

So, what do you look for?



Sourcing Guidelines



Search the at-risk status of every resin species you use. If it's threatened or endangered, *search for sources that cultivate on farms instead of harvesting from the wild*. Farmers growing at-risk plants maintain beneficial practices, take the strain off of wild plants, & often plant trees in the wild to help populations recover.

For non-at-risk plants harvested from the wild, look for the terms "*sustainable*" or "*sustainably wild-harvested*". If cultivated look for "*organic*" or "*grown without chemicals*". If these terms are absent, make sure the values and positive efforts of the company are present on their website. *If you find no trace of this, consider a new source.*



Consider harvesting your own resins from the wild locally. There are countless resin-producing plants around the world, and likely one or a few within miles of your home. Look for dried, hardened resin on the trunks of known resin-producing trees. Always be sure to correctly identify the species to avoid any toxic plant lookalikes.



Next Up...

We're soon going to be putting everything you've learned so far in this series into the making of a resin salve, step-by-step. Starting with how to infuse or extract your resin powder into a carrier oil (*which can be used in countless preparations and ways*).

Plus, you'll get my recipe handout and guide that you can use to make any variation of salve using ingredients of your choice.

I hope you're ready to put it all into action and learn how to make one of the most useful and effective topical preparations there is.

In no time you'll be a pro at working with resins; making all sorts of resin-based creations!

Keep your eyes on your inbox for my next email and link to the *final lesson* of the series.



Evan Sylliaasen