

HOW TO MAKE POTPOURRI

Learn How to Make Your Own Fragrant Potpourri at Home



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

HOW TO MAKE YOUR OWN POTPOURRI	4
WHAT IS POTPOURRI?	4
WHAT YOU'LL NEED	4
BASIC INSTRUCTIONS	5
OTHER TIPS & TRICKS	6
USING ROSES IN POTPOURRI	6
MAKING POTPOURRI BAGS	7
POTPOURRI RECIPES	8
BASIC POTPOURRI	8
PLUMBERRY POTPOURRI	9
WOODLAND FANTASY POTPOURRI	10
GOLD FRANKINCENSE & MYRRH	
POTPOURRI	11
APPLE JACK POTPOURRI	12
COUNTRY WOODSTOVE SIMMER SPICE	13
BONUS: APPLE GARLAND	13

HOW TO MAKE YOUR OWN POTPOURRI

Here is everything you need to know to make your own potpourri that is deliciously fragrant. Get started with a basic version and then you can start to customize it using one of our favorite recipes below.

WHAT IS POTPOURRI?

Potpourri is a mixture of natural materials and oils that give off a pleasant, powerful smell used to freshen up indoor spaces. It is a great way to deodorize after unpleasant smells and can be fun to make yourself.

It can include petals of flowers like lavender, tulips, freesia and marigolds for added color and fragrance. Ingredients such as dried citrus peel, seeds, bark and tiny pinecones add variety to the texture and character of the potpourri. Small, whole dried flowers like baby rosebuds give depth and variety of size. Potpourri made only with petals tends to look like textured fabric. While there is nothing wrong with this, (rainbow like layers of different kinds of flowers can be very beautiful), combining petals with other floral material gives a more three-dimensional result.

Originally, potpourris were stored in closed ceramic jars which were opened when people used the room. The jars were placed near a heat source, so the perfume would expand in the warm air and fill the room with fragrance. When the people went out, the lids went back on.

Nowadays, the beauty of potpourri is also considered to be part of its charm. Displayed in various ways, dried petals, whether scented or not, can be layered in glass containers, placed in baskets, decoupage boxes, ceramic or silver dishes.

A little potpourri can go a long way if you layer it over a base of floral foam, sphagnum moss or tissue paper. Store the bulk of your recipe in a closed container and sprinkle out a little at a time on a need to replenish basis. The fragrance lasts longer and the visual impact is the same.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

In general, when making a potpourri, you'll need four types of materials, plus any oils you wish to use:

1. Fragrant Leaves, Flowers, or Petals

These would include lavender and rose petals, jasmine flowers, fragrant herbs such as lemon verbena or bay leaves, etc. (2-4 parts)

2. Spices

These are not strictly necessary in the more modern potpourris, since essential oils tend to make up for their absence, but I really like to see them used in most mixes. I generally use

whole form, as they add so much to the visual as well as the scent appeal of the mixture. Powdered form is OK, especially in sachet mixes, but they tend to make a jar-type potpourri look dusty. (1-2 parts)

3. Petals, Leaves, and Pods

Use non-fragrant petals, leaves, and pods to add color and visual interest to the mixture. This is where anything you've been able to grow or gather comes in as a real plus, since every item you don't have to pay for adds to the "plus" side of the cost figures! Any flowers except roses, lavender, and jasmine fall into this category. In fact, I even count commercially obtained roses as "half scented", since they're not the more desirable, fragrant damascene roses which hold scent so well. (use 4-8 parts of this type of material)

4. Fixative

The fixative is a vital element in a potpourri recipe. It absorbs and retains the volatile scented essences. Essential oils are used to reinforce the natural perfumes and to boost the fragrance. Without adequate fixative the life goes out of potpourri very quickly.

I generally prefer using either calamus root, orris root, or absorbent oak moss. Some like to use the newer "fiber fix" or "magic" potpourri fixative, which consists of ground corncobs or cellulose fiber. This ingredient is good in that it does not aggravate allergies, but I've had little success in using it in my mixes.

5. Essential Oil

You'll generally want fragrance or Essential oils, or a blend of the two. I've been using the blends successfully for years, now! Pick the type of essential oil that best suits the type of potpourri that you are looking to make.

BASIC INSTRUCTIONS

1. Start out by mixing your petals, scented and unscented, your herbs, leaves, and spices (and gum resin, if you choose to use one) in the bottom of a large container. Some say not to use plastic, but I've used it successfully for years as long as you don't pour any oils directly onto the plastic since that tends to degrade the plastic and adds a weird smell.
2. Put your fixative on the top - if using calamus, orris, or cellulose, just make a pile on the top. If using moss, you can simply dump it on top of all the petals.
3. Then, pour the oils carefully over the fixatives - it's ok if some of it goes on the petals, just try to put most of it on the fixative.
4. Close this up for about 2 days, for the oils to be absorbed by the fixative.
5. Then open, gently mix, and close again. Repeat this every day for at least 2 weeks.
6. Sometimes, in the case of strongly scented mixtures (lavender would be one, cinnamon another, for example), your potpourri needs to age 4-6 weeks.
7. When you open your mix and are satisfied with the fragrance, and there are no "sharp edges", unpleasant to the nose, it's ready to package, and, hopefully, sell!

OTHER TIPS & TRICKS

- In order to figure out the proper amount of fixative, you must first decide which one you're going to use. If using calamus or orris root, I'd suggest using the cut or cut/sifted form. Figure the number of cups of unscented material you've used. For each 4 cups of unscented material, you'll need ¼ cup of calamus or orris root. Double that amount if using cellulose. For each ¼ cup of calamus or orris, you'll need 1 dram (1/8 oz or about 120 drops) of oil.
- Remember to increase the amount of oil if using cellulose. If, like me, you like to use oak moss as a fixative, you use 1 cup of moss (I like to buy the whole form, and cut it into small clumps) per each 2 cups of unscented mix. (If using pre-cut moss, use 1 cup moss to each 3-4 cups unscented). I know that this seems like a lot of fixative, but the cost per cup compared to the rest of the fixatives is very low, and it adds to the volume of your potpourri, as well.
- Too mossy for you? Simply cut the amount of moss down a bit, and add some calamus or orris to take up the slack. For each 2 cups of oak moss, you'll need 1 dram (1/8 oz) of oil.
- I'd like to point out the merits of adding a bit of gum resin as a secondary fixative, as well as for the added "mixer-binder" properties - it really tends to blend all of the scents together into a wonderful, deep scent. Any gum resin works - gum benzoin, gum Arabic, gum tragacanth, or frankincense or myrrh. I like to use pieces or tears to prevent a dusty look, and generally now use frankincense tears - cost is most reasonable. Toss a tbsp or so in with the flower petal part of your potpourri - don't add to the oils - it will become a gummy mess (But it will smell wonderful)!

USING ROSES IN POTPOURRI

Show someone a rose and the natural impulse is to close the eyes and drink in the perfume. The appeal of roses is universal; they are perfect in every way. Roses hold their color and scent throughout the life of the petals, and are readily available in large quantities. They make a wonderful base for potpourri.

Roses produce perfume in minute glands located on the surface of the petals. Geraniol, a volatile oily liquid, is the primary perfume, although more than a dozen other compounds may combine with it to produce varying scents.

Some fragrances are linked to color. The basic rose scent is found in red and pink roses. Subtle scents of violet, orris and nasturtiums are found in white and yellow roses. Clove, tea, citrus and fruity scents are linked to orange-tinted roses.

Combinations of these scents are common and additional scents can be found in other varieties of roses. For instance: the Hawaii rose, tuberose, produces a raspberry scent. Lesser scents like parsley, wine, honey, anise, hyacinth, jonquil, lily-of-the-valley, bay and bananas are found in other scented beauties.

Some roses have interesting traits. Modern hybrid tea roses, which are usually bred for form, color, substance and resistance to disease are found lacking in perfume. This is because fragrance in roses has a recessive character. On the other hand, some scentless hybrid roses impart fragrance to their progeny.

The oil extracted from 32,000 damask roses produces one ounce of the legendary essential oil, Attar of Roses. The deep pink Kazanlik rose releases such intense perfume that the fragrance exterminates insects such as aphids within miles of the rose fields. The fragrance of the Rose of Miletus increases when the petals are dried.

MAKING POTPOURRI BAGS

Small packets of potpourri can find a home in lingerie and sweater drawers, mixed in with linens, in the folds of clothing inside suitcases, on coat hangers in the closet, at the party table as favors... almost anywhere a fragrant perfume is invited.

Potpourri bags used for linens look good in crisp stripes and fresh colors. Those placed among lingerie and delicate clothes can be made of satin, lace or silk. Use readymade lace handkerchiefs for a quick, fragrant fix.

Basic Potpourri Bag

1. Cut a strip of fabric, lace or ribbon 20" x 4". Fold the strip in half wrong side out and seam the sides with fabric glue, hot glue or use a needle and thread.
2. Turn the bag right side out and tuck in the top. If the fabric frays, run a line of fabric glue along the top edge before tucking it inside.
3. Fill with potpourri and tie a ribbon tightly around the neck, or secure the top with glue and glue a tiny ribbon rose on the front of the bag.

Ready to start making custom blends of potpourri? Check out some of these simple recipes to get started.

POTPOURRI RECIPES

Now that you know some of the basics of how to make potpourri, here are more recipes that you can use to make more interesting scents. Feel free to experiment with the ingredients to customize it to just the way you like.

BASIC POTPOURRI

INGREDIENTS	INSTRUCTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> 3 cups pink rose petals<input type="checkbox"/> 3 cups red rose petals<input type="checkbox"/> 2 cups miniature rosebuds<input type="checkbox"/> 2 cups lavender<input type="checkbox"/> 1 cup rose leaves<input type="checkbox"/> 2 tbsp powdered orris root<input type="checkbox"/> 15 Drops rose oil	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Spread the fresh petals on a mesh screen or on a large tray; place them in a warm, dry place, and stir or spread them around a little every day until they are dry. Put dried petals in a large glass or metal bowl.2. Add a fixative such as powdered orris root, oak moss, cellulose or ground gum benzoin or fiberfix. Use a ratio of two tbsp of fixative to about four cups of dried material. Add the essential oils and mix with your hands.3. Place the mixture in a paper bag and seal the top with clothespins or clips. Turn the bag over several times to distribute the fixative. Store it away from direct sunlight, and allow the mix to season for four to six weeks. Shake up the bag from time to time.4. When the potpourri is "seasoned" place in open containers in warm places. Add a few drops of essential oils and mix with your hands from time to time as the fragrance diminishes.

PLUMBERRY POTPOURRI

INGREDIENTS

- 5 cups Cockscomb, Dyed Violet or Purple
- 5 cups Rose Petals, Red
- 2 cups Star Flowers, Purple
- 2 cups Orchid Flowers, Purple
- 2 cups Globe Flowers, Dyed Purple
- 2 cups Spidergrass, Bleached
- 1 cup Angel Wings, Violet
- 1 cup Cinnamon Bark
- 1 cup Tulip Flowers, Bleached/Dyed Lavender
- 1 cup Tulip Flowers, Purple
- ½ cup Cloves, Whole
- 1 tbsp Frankincense Tears
- 4 ½ cups Oakmoss, Cut
- ¼ cup Calamus Root, Cut
- ¾ Oz Fragrance Oil - Plumberry

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Place all dried ingredients except oakmoss, calamus, and oil in the bottom of a large plastic container. Place moss and calamus root on top.
2. Pour or spray oil over fixatives, avoiding sides of the container.
3. Cover and allow to set up 1-2 days, till fragrance is absorbed by the fixatives.
4. Mix all together gently, cover, and allow to age 10 days to 2 weeks, until fragrance is well absorbed and mellowed.
5. If desired, add 5 cups of Silver Curly Pods and 2 cups of Kerni Fern.
6. Use half and half mix of Plumberry and Sugar Cookies fragrances. Voila - you now have Sugarplums!

WOODLAND FANTASY POTPOURRI

INGREDIENTS	INSTRUCTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> 6-8 cups fir tips, broken into 3" pieces<input type="checkbox"/> 1 ½ cups lichen, black & silver<input type="checkbox"/> 25 pieces golden mushroom pods, natural<input type="checkbox"/> ¾ cups cinnamon bark, broken into large pieces<input type="checkbox"/> ¾ cups small cones, hemlock, birch, xyris, or alder<input type="checkbox"/> ¾ cups curly pods, natural<input type="checkbox"/> ¾ cups bakuli pods<input type="checkbox"/> ¼ cup cloves, whole<input type="checkbox"/> ¼ cups juniper berries, blue or red, or whole rose hips<input type="checkbox"/> 2 tbsp Frankincense Tears (optional)<input type="checkbox"/> 3 cups oak moss, whole, cut into small "clumps"<input type="checkbox"/> 3/8 ounce fragrance oil, Woodland Fantasy, or other "forest" scent of your choice	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Mix all in container, then place the oak moss and fragrance oil on top.2. Allow to "set up" 2 days for oils to absorb, then mix all, and continue to mix gently once a day for at least 2 weeks.3. This mix tends to be "bigger than life", and is a natural for craft fairs and shows in large containers where customers can "scoop their own". <p>TIP: This is a good opportunity to use fir tips that you've dried yourself. You can use any type, although fir tends to have a nicer scent. Sand pine, if obtainable, has a "tangerine" scent, and is nice used as part of the greens. Also remember, pine tends to hold the its needles and its scent better if you wait to harvest till after the first frost!</p>

GOLD FRANKINCENSE & MYRRH POTPOURRI

INGREDIENTS	INSTRUCTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> 3 cups cedar tips, broken into 3" pieces<input type="checkbox"/> 1 ½ cups curly pods, painted gold (or any other gold accent you wish)<input type="checkbox"/> ¾ cup Pearly Everlasting, broken into small "clumps" (or substitute any small white flower - clumps of gypsophillia, white statice, or bleached miloberries are also nice)<input type="checkbox"/> ¾ cup hemlock or other small cones<input type="checkbox"/> ½ cup angel wings, natural cream<input type="checkbox"/> 3 tbsp Frankincense "Tears"<input type="checkbox"/> 3 tbsp Myrrh "Tears"<input type="checkbox"/> 2 cups oak moss, whole, cut into small "clumps"<input type="checkbox"/> 1 tbsp orris root, cut<input type="checkbox"/> 1 ½ drams (3/8 oz) fragrance oil - Gold, Frankincense & Myrrh, or another fragrance you prefer	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Mix all in container, then place the oak moss, orris root, and fragrance oil on top.2. Follow general directions, pouring oil over fixatives and allowing to set up 2 days.3. Then open, stir gently, and repeat every day for 3 weeks.4. If you choose to use the GFM fragrance, it's a mix of Frankincense, Myrrh, Sweet Orange, and Ambergris fragrances, and is very rich and "oriental".

APPLE JACK POTPOURRI

INGREDIENTS

- 2 ½ cups kesu flowers, dyed red
- 2 cups star flowers, dyed red
- 1 ½ cups (about 30-35 pieces) golden mushroom pods, natural
- 1 cup curly pods, natural
- ½ cups cinnamon bark, broken into large pieces
- ½ cup twisted leaves, cream
- ¼ cup cinnamon sticks, 1"
- ¼ cup smalley leaves
- 2 Tbsp allspice, whole
- 2 Tbsp cloves, whole
- 2 Tbsp Frankincense Tears (optional) Mix all in container, then place on top:
- 3 ½ cups oak moss, whole, cut into small "clumps"
- 2 Tbsp calamus root, cut
- 3/8 oz fragrance oil - Apple Jack, or any Apple-Spice scent you like.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Mix all in container, then place the oak moss, calamus root, and fragrance oil on top.
2. Follow general directions, pouring oil over fixatives and allowing to set up 2 days.
3. Repeat every day for at least 3 weeks, better with 4-5 weeks.

COUNTRY WOODSTOVE SIMMER SPICE

INGREDIENTS	INSTRUCTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> 1 part whole allspice<input type="checkbox"/> 1 part broken cinnamon bark<input type="checkbox"/> 1 part cinnamon chips<input type="checkbox"/> 1 part whole cloves<input type="checkbox"/> 1 part dried orange peel in small pieces<input type="checkbox"/> 1 part dried lemon or grapefruit or tangerine peel, if you have it, and<input type="checkbox"/> ½ part of whole coriander	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Mix all ingredients and simmer in 1-2 pints of water.2. Do not let the water go dry and it will smell delicious.3. You might want to add mace, cardamom, herbs, apple dices, or pine needles for a slightly different version.

BONUS: APPLE GARLAND

In order to string a beautiful garland with your apples, you might wish to seal the fruit with some polyurethane or other sealer.

Carefully drill holes in whole nutmegs, 1" and 3" cinnamon sticks, whole hazelnuts, or any other interesting pods you might find.

I use a Dremel with drill bit and drill holding the spice firmly in a pliers, drilling downward into a cardboard box bottom on top of a thick pile of newspapers. If you're lucky enough to have a drill press, it's a bit more secure, but also a bit more time consuming. It's a good idea to wear safety goggles, and PLEASE make sure children are out of the room. Believe me, these things can hurt if you lose hold of them!

Make sure the holes you drill are large enough for a large tapestry needle threaded with your desired stringing material to go thru easily. I generally use hemp twine, but have used jute string, waxed beeswax linen, fishing line, nylon thread, whatever you think might give the look you wish.

Decide the length of finished garland you desire. Cut your string at least a foot longer, to make it easy to tie loops in the ends. Thread large, sharp tapestry-style needles to both ends of your string.

Start with a middle section to your garland, then add matching sections of mixed fruit/spices/bay leaves/what have you alternately on both sides of your garland. Make sure to make "mirror" sections, so your garland will be balanced. In other words, if you use 12 apple slices in the middle, then 6 bay leaves, a nutmeg, a 3" cinnamon stick, then another nutmeg, on one side, be sure to add materials to the other side in the same order.

When you've reached the end of your string, tie each end into loops so that you can hang in a doorway, on a Christmas tree, mantelpiece, stair rail, etc. I find that the garlands are easiest to work in 3-foot and 6-foot lengths. They're also tremendously cute when made into short lengths to hang in the kitchen on a shaker peg.

If desired, dot the apple slices and cinnamon sticks (and the string between, too) with appropriate fragrances so that your creations smell totally delicious!