

Arnica Oil: A Must-Have for Your Natural First Aid Kit

Arnica oil is becoming popular for its pain-relieving and health-promoting properties. It's a wonderful addition to your alternative first aid kit, especially if you're prone to exercise-related injuries, such as bruises or sprains. Keep on reading to learn more about arnica oil.

What Is Arnica Oil?

Arnica refers to a clan of flowering perennial plants from the daisy family (*Compositae*) that's native to Europe and Siberia but also grows in North America, especially in mountainous regions. It is well-known for its use in natural medicine and is recognizable through its flowers, which have yellow petals and an orange center. Arnica grows between one to two feet high, with one to three flower blossoms per plant.¹

There are several species of arnica, but the most famous is *Arnica montana*, also known as Leopard's Bane, Mountain Tobacco, and Wolf's Bane. This alpine plant grows in meadows up to 3,000 feet above sea level. The higher the altitude, the more aromatic the flowers become.² *Arnica montana* blossoms are used to make arnica oil, an aromatic, yellow essential oil.³

Uses of Arnica Oil

Arnica flowers and roots have been used for hundreds of years as an herbal medicine. It was said that the German poet and philosopher Goethe consumed arnica tea to relieve chest pain. Smoking the leaves was also a popular therapeutic practice.⁴ Today, though, great caution is advised when using arnica, especially in its pure essential oil form.

Arnica oil is used in perfumes and some cosmetic products, such as anti-dandruff lotions and hair tonics.⁵ Aside from arnica oil, arnica pellets, topical gels, and creams are also available today.⁶

Pure arnica essential oil is NOT recommended for aromatherapy, as it is very potent and may be toxic.⁷ However, its diluted form can help reduce swelling, protect against infections, and relieve pain.⁸ Many professional athletes today even use a topical homeopathic preparation of arnica oil as first aid relief for sports- or exercise-related pain or injury.

Composition of Arnica Oil

Arnica oil is made up of about 50 percent fatty acids, including linolenic, palmitic, linoleic, and myristic acids. The other 50 percent is a mixture of thymol, various ethers of thymol, thymohydroquinone dimethyl ether, and phlorol isobutyrate.⁹

Arnica oil contains a compound called helenalin, which may cause allergic reactions in people with sensitivity. If you develop a mild rash while using arnica oil, you are probably helenalin-sensitive and should stop using the oil.[10](#)

Benefits of Arnica Oil

Arnica oil is found to have antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties,[11](#) and may be helpful for treating or relieving:

- **Muscle aches, spasms, pulled muscles, or rheumatic pain** – A 2007 study found that a homeopathic arnica solution has a positive effect on muscle soreness after marathon running.[12](#) Arnica is actually one of my recommended natural remedies for delayed onset muscle soreness or [DOMS](#).
- **Sprains, bruises, and swelling due to fractures**
- **Insect bites** – Homeopathic arnica can help treat insect bites and stings, especially those that may lead to intense bruising and soreness.[13](#)
- **Acne**[14](#) – However, I do not recommend applying on broken skin.
- **Hair loss** – a diluted form applied to your scalp can help increase local blood circulation, thereby promoting hair growth.[15](#)

There are also clinical trials suggesting that using arnica oil or gel topically may be effective in relieving osteoarthritis pain.[16](#)

How to Make Arnica Oil

Pure arnica essential oil is made via steam distillation or CO2 extraction, and is actually very expensive. If you have arnica flowers on hand, you can make your own arnica oil infusion. Here's a step-by-step process from Annie's Remedy:[17](#)

Materials:

Dried and coarsely ground arnica blossoms

Olive oil

Mason jar

Bottle

Procedure:

1. Fill the mason jar with arnica flowers and olive oil. Make sure there is enough oil to completely cover the herbs, but leave enough room for expansion.
2. Infuse it with a slow and steady heat for two to three weeks. You can put it in a place with sunlight or use an oven with pilot light on.
3. Strain the oil, and pour into a clean bottle for use.

To prolong the infused oil's shelf life, add a teaspoon of rosemary antioxidant or citric acid.

How Does Arnica Oil Work?

Most of arnica oil's anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving properties are attributed to its thymol derivatives. Thymol has been found to be effective as a vasodilator of subcutaneous blood capillaries, which helps facilitate the transport of blood and fluid accumulations and acts as an anti-inflammatory to assist normal healing processes. Arnica oil also stimulates the flow of white blood cells, which process congested blood to help disperse trapped fluid from the joints, muscles, and bruised tissue.[18](#)

Is Arnica Oil Safe?

Arnica oil is best recommended for topical application – DO NOT inhale or ingest it without the supervision of a qualified health expert. The tablet and pill forms contain very little amounts of arnica extract that will typically not cause side effects.

I advise you to use arnica oil ONLY in diluted form, as pure arnica essential oil is very potent and may cause severe side effects. Use a safe carrier oil like grapeseed or almond to dilute pure arnica oil, preferably in a 30:70 ratio.[19](#)

In addition, do not apply arnica directly to broken skin or open wounds, as it may cause severe irritation. Do a patch test to see if you have any allergic reactions to this herbal oil.

Side Effects of Arnica Oil

Pure arnica oil can be toxic if it gets inside the body, so avoid ingesting it. If taken orally, this herbal oil may cause:

- Heart irregularities and increased heart rate
- Nervous disturbances
- Dizziness, tremors, weakness, and vomiting
- Mucous membrane and gastrointestinal irritation[20](#)

I also advise against using arnica oil for prolonged periods even when diluted, as it may cause skin irritation, such as peeling, rashes, eczema, and blisters. People with hypersensitivity, pregnant women, and breastfeeding moms should also refrain from using arnica oil.[21](#)