

# Sweet Basil Oil: The Food and Health Enhancer

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## What Is Sweet Basil Oil?

Sweet basil oil comes from basil (*Ocimum basilicum*), a plant with a thick foliage and small white flowers. Fresh basil leaves taste sweet and pungent, and exudes a fresh and floral aroma, while the dried ones have a spicy and earthy scent.

The “dot-like” oil glands in fresh basil leaves produce the essential oil of the herb. Its dried leaves and stems are used in food flavorings and in the production of essential oil. However, it is believed that oil obtained from the flowers is superior in quality compared to the oil from the whole plant.

There are several types of basil oil such as European type or sweet basil, reunion type, methyl cinnamate type, and eugenol type.<sup>1</sup>

The commonly used basil oils in aromatherapy are the sweet basil and the exotic type. Sweet basil oil is produced in the US, France, Italy, and Spain, while the exotic type is from Comoro Islands or Seychelles.<sup>2</sup>

## Uses of Sweet Basil Oil

[Basil](#), especially its leaves and seeds, is used mainly for culinary purposes all over the world. It's a well-known fact that basil leaves are widely used in Italian cuisines like [salads](#) and pasta.

However, the essential oil from sweet basil is also often added in various foods such as spiced meats, sausages, tomato pastes, ketchups, pickles, and fancy vinegars. Dental creams and mouthwashes also use sweet basil oil as one of their ingredients.<sup>3</sup>

Sweet basil oil is used in making perfumes, and can act as an [insect repellent](#) in your home as it possesses insecticidal agents that can repel flies and mosquitoes.

## Composition of Sweet Basil Oil

Sweet basil oil is made up of d-linalool with 55% and estragole (methyl chavicol) with 70%. A variety of the essential oil contains methyl cinnamate of 28%.

Sweet basil oil contains other properties such as 1,8-cineole, eugenol, borneol, ocimene, geraniol, anethol, 10-cadinols, B-caryophyllene, a-terpineol, camphor, 3-octanone, methyleugenol, safrole, sesquithujene, and 1-epibicyclosesquiphellandrene. It also contains juvocimene 1 and juvocimene 2. Take note that variations of these chemical properties may exist depending on the source of the plant.<sup>4</sup>

## Benefits of Sweet Basil Oil

Sweet basil oil has diaphoretic, stimulant, carminative, and expectorant properties. It is effective in [revitalizing dull hair](#) and skin, and is also used in treating acne and skin infections.

Sweet basil oil also offers health benefits for your:

- **Digestive system.** Due to its carminative properties, basil oil helps reduce indigestion, constipation, stomach cramps, and flatulence. It helps expel gas from your stomach and intestine.<sup>5</sup>
- **Immune system.** The herbal oil works great in treating sinus congestion, asthma, bronchitis, and emphysema. It also helps effectively cure infections in wounds or cuts.
- **Nervous system.** Sweet basil oil is known to alleviate mental fatigue, migraine, and [depression](#). It is commonly used in aromatherapy for its calming effect. Basil oil clears the mind and provides mental strength.

## How to Make Sweet Basil Oil

Basil is harvested from mid-February until the end of September. The essential oil is produced through steam distilling the flowers or the whole basil plant. Hydro-distillation can also be used, but the former is much preferred as it saves time and produces better oil quality.

Steam distillation takes about one to one and a half hour. The oil obtained from the flowers is 0.4 percent while the whole plant yields 0.10 to 0.25 percent oil.

## How Does Sweet Basil Oil Work?

Applying a few drops of sweet basil oil to strained muscles can alleviate the pain. You can rub two to three drops of the essential oil on your forehead to promote alertness. Add sweet basil oil to your shampoo to reduce excessive hair oiliness.<sup>6</sup> Receiving a massage using this oil may help stimulate blood flow and soothe [muscle pain](#) and spasms. In case of earache, dilute sweet basil with three drops of a carrier oil then massage it over and around your ear.<sup>7</sup>

Sweet basil oil can be added to baths when combined with other essential oils such as jojoba, sweet almond, or avocado oil. The herbal oil can also be inhaled using a diffuser or vaporizer.<sup>8</sup>

## Is Sweet Basil Oil Safe?

Sweet basil oil is generally recognized as safe (GRAS). Although it doesn't have any known side effects, it may cause skin reactions to those who are sensitive to methyl chavicol.<sup>9</sup> I advise you to always dilute it with a carrier oil before application.<sup>10</sup> I also suggest conducting a skin patch test first to know if you are allergic to the essential oil.

Be aware that the estragole content of sweet basil oil is found to produce tumors in mice. The German Commission E prohibited the use of basil herb for therapeutic purposes due to its estragole content and the risks it may bring, as it is a possible carcinogen.[11](#)

### **Side Effects of Sweet Basil Oil**

Even though it is generally considered safe, I suggest that pregnant and nursing women avoid using this essential oil due to its potential carcinogenic component. If you have a terminal illness or any chronic ailment, consult first with a professional aromatherapist or licensed physician prior to using sweet basil oil.