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There are several extraction methods for making resins and extracts from plants, and each will be discussed briefly below. Some plants contain alkaloids as part of their chemical composition, and these different alkaloids will extract into different solvents.

For example, Blue Lotus contains alkaloids that will only extract into alcohol, whereas Amanita muscaria contains an alkaloid that will extract into water, but will be destroyed in alcohol. When doing resin extractions from plants, it is important to know what chemical compounds will extract into what solvents.

Steam Distillation:

Used mainly to extract essential oils from plants. The plant material is placed into a still (very similar to a pressure cooker) where pressurized steam passes through the plant material. The heat from the steam causes globules of oil in the plant to burst and the oil then evaporates. The essential oil vapor and the steam then pass out the top of the still into a condenser pipe where the vapors are condensed back to liquids. At this point, the essential oil separates from the water and floats to the top.

Cold Pressing:

Cold pressing is used to extract the essential oils from citrus rinds such as orange, lemon, grapefruit and bergamot. The rinds are separated from the fruit, are ground or chopped and are then pressed. The result is a watery mixture of essential oil and liquid which will separate given time. It is important to note that oils extracted using this method have a relatively short shelf life, so make or purchase only what you will be using within the next six months.

Solvent Extraction:

A hydrocarbon solvent is added to the plant material to help dissolve the essential oil. When the solution is filtered and concentrated by distillation, a substance containing resin (resinoid), or a combination of wax and essential oil (known as concrete) remains. From the concentrate, pure alcohol is used to extract the oils or fats. When the alcohol evaporates, the oil is left behind.

High Pressure CO2 Extraction:

Only recently developed, this method uses Carbon Dioxide to extract the alkaloids, essential oils, or resins from the plant when liquefied under pressure. Once the liquid depressurizes, the carbon dioxide returns to a gaseous state, and only pure essential oil, resins, or alkaloids remain. The Kavalactone paste offered by IAMShaman is an example of this new technology in action. Before High Pressure CO2 extraction, and due to the fragility of the kavalactone alkaloid, this kind of product was never before available.