

perfume oil

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Perfume Oil

Fragrance concentrate in a carrier oil, applied by roller, dropper or dab. Also sold as attar, *ittar*, or fragrance oil. It is the traditional format across much of the Middle East, South Asia and North Africa, and it behaves differently enough from alcohol-based perfume that comparing them on longevity alone misses the point.

Alcohol versus oil

The carrier decides the shape of the whole experience.

	Alcohol-based	Oil-based
Opening	Loud — alcohol flashes off, throwing the top notes	Quiet — the oil holds them back
Projection	Large; scents a room	Small; scents an arm's length
Development	A clear arc through top, heart, base	Flatter; the base dominates early
Longevity on skin	Moderate	Long — often the longest of any format
On sensitive skin	Can sting and dry	Gentle

Oil perfumes wear longer and project less. That trade is the whole decision.

Because the opening is muted, oil perfumes suit **base-heavy compositions** — oud, sandalwood, amber, musk, resins, vanilla, rose absolutes — and suit bright citrus compositions poorly, since the format suppresses exactly the notes those depend on.

Attar, properly

In its strict sense an **attar** is a natural essential-oil distillate traditionally captured in **sandalwood oil**, produced by hydrodistillation over long periods — *ruh gulab* (rose), *mitti attar* distilled from sun-baked earth after the first rains, *shamama*, and the rest. Sandalwood scarcity means many modern attars use other carriers or synthetic bases, and the word is now used loosely for any oil perfume.

That is worth knowing when buying: **"attar" on a label is not a guarantee of natural materials or of a sandalwood base.**

The carriers

Carrier	Behaviour
Fractionated coconut oil (caprylic/capric triglyceride)	Light, colourless, odourless, very stable — the modern default
Jojoba	A liquid wax; extremely stable, close to skin sebum
Sweet almond, apricot kernel	Traditional; moderate stability
Dipropylene glycol (DPG)	Not an oil; a common commercial diluent, lighter and cheaper
Sandalwood	The traditional attar base; expensive and increasingly scarce

Using it

A dab, not a splash. Perfume oils are concentrated and applied directly, so a roller pass on each wrist and the base of the throat is usually enough. **Press, do not rub.**

Onto moisturised skin. Warmth helps — pulse points, the neck, behind the ears — and the scent builds over the first twenty minutes rather than arriving at once.

Oil stains fabric, particularly silk. Keep it on skin.

The caution

Direct, undiluted, occluded contact with a high fragrance load is the least forgiving exposure in this category. **Patch test on the inner arm** before committing, especially with artisanal oils.

Citrus-containing oils raise the **phototoxicity** question — furocoumarins in expressed citrus oils cause blistering and lasting pigmentation on sun-exposed skin, which is why IFRA restricts them in leave-on

products. Keep citrus oils off skin that will meet the sun.

Where it sits in the rules

Cosmetic in the US — FDA primary category **(05) fragrance preparations** — with **no premarket approval**, and under **21 CFR 701.3** the fragrance may be declared simply as "fragrance".

In the EU, **named fragrance allergens must be declared individually** above 0.001% in leave-on products, and **Regulation (EU) 2023/1545 expanded the declarable list from 26 substances to roughly 80**, with transitions to 2028. Restricted materials, including **oakmoss and treemoss** and furocoumarins, are listed in **Annex III**.

Anhydrous, so no preservative is required. **Not flammable**, unlike alcohol-based perfume, and therefore not subject to the same transport restrictions.

Shelf life

Two to five years, depending entirely on the carrier: fractionated coconut and jojoba are extremely stable and last years; almond and apricot kernel go rancid within one to two.

A sharp, crayon-like or putty smell is oxidation of the carrier, and **oxidised oils are irritants** — a rancid perfume oil is worse than no perfume. Dark glass, cool storage, tightly closed.

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- The rest of *Forms* — [Body Mist](#) · [Solid Perfume](#) · [Hair Perfume](#).
- Regulatory statements here follow the FDA and EU sources listed on [Cosmetics](#), read 16 August 2026.