

VEGETABLE GLYCERINE & RAINFOREST DESTRUCTION: THE SOURCE MATTERS

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Vegetable glycerine is primarily used by herbalists to replace alcohol as an extractive substance when treating children, pets, a client who strongly opposes any alcohol intake or has a history of alcohol abuse. Alcohol extracts should never be given to persons with a history of alcohol abuse, as even the slightest amount of alcohol risks reawakening alcohol cravings in some people. The need to avoid alcohol based extracts in children is of some debate in the herbal community. A common method of treating nursing infants is for the mother to ingest safe and nourishing teas or extracts. An adult tincture dose is a very slight amount of alcohol intake (30 drops 3x day is a general tincture dose). For concerned persons, alcohol concentration can be reduced by evaporation if the drops are put in hot water. Glycerine does not extract many herbal constituents as well as alcohol, and some herbalists believe that the alcohol intake is so minimal that giving children a tincture is the best approach.

Organic vegetable glycerine is the preferred extract material when a glycerine extract is desired. Vegetable glycerine is primarily derived from three sources: soy, coconut or palm. All of these plant materials are refined by a high heat process called hydrolysis, which splits and pressurizes the fats to yield glycerine. Vegetable glycerine derived from palm is associated with an ongoing environmental travesty and should be avoided.

“Palm oil production is the largest cause of deforestation in Indonesia and other equatorial countries with dwindling expanses of tropical rainforest”¹.

“Approximately 85 percent of palm oil is grown in the tropical countries of Indonesia, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea on industrial plantations that have severe impacts on the environment, forest peoples and the climate”².

Palm oil plantations are associated with loss of biodiversity and tropical species, an increase in greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere when forests are burned to make way for palm

¹ <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=harvesting-palm-oil-and-rainforests>

“Is Harvesting Palm Oil Destroying the Rainforests?” Scientific American, December 11, 2008.

² Matthews, Chelsea. Forest Program Assistant, Rainforest Action Network. Personal Communication, April 10, 2012.

RAINFOREST ACTION NETWORK, Palm Oil Facts: <http://www.ran.org/problem-palm-oil-factsheet#ixzz1reyFckgo>

plantations, and an ensuing array of deleterious environmental effects on water and soil quality due to plantations replacing natural forest systems.

The products we buy impact places and people far from us in dramatic ways. Soy (organic, non-GMO soy) and coconut provide better alternatives as sources of vegetable glycerine than palm. Help raise awareness and don't be afraid to ask suppliers of herbal products where their glycerine is sourced.

For those making products:

[Mountain Rose Herbs](#) is a source of organic, soy based vegetable glycerine

StarWest Botanicals and Azure Standard currently source their vegetable glycerine from palm.

Other products to be wary of that are derived from palm plantations include: palm oil, palm kernel oil, sodium lauryl sulfate (Common ingredients in many food or body care products), for a complete list see: [Rainforest Action Network's Palm Ingredients List](#)