

There's a Tea for That! Hydrosols in Traditional Herbalism  
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***Hydrosols \* Colloidal suspensions \* Herbal distillates***

**Definition:** **Herbal distillates** are aqueous products of distillation. They are **colloidal suspensions (hydrosol)** of **essential oils** as well as **water soluble components obtained by steam distillation or hydro distillation from plants/herbs**. Herbal distillates go by many other names including floral water, hydrosol, hydrolate, herbal water and essential water.

In my experience, despite the terms above meaning the same thing, they are colloquially used differently. I would classify a hydrosol as any infused water, distilled or otherwise. For instance, a tea is a hydrosol. An herbal distillate, on the other hand, has been infused through the distillation process (see below)

**Chemistry:** Unlike other extraction techniques based on *solubility* of a compound in either water or oil, distillation will separate components regardless of their solubility. The distillate will contain compounds that vaporize at or below the temperature of distillation. Distillates will contain essential oil compounds as well as organic acids and other water soluble plant components. Therefore, herbal waters contain diluted essential oils. Besides aromatic chemicals, these distillates also contain many more of the plant acids than pure essential oils making them skin friendly. A pH between **5-6** makes them suitable for use as facial toners.

Tea (Hydrosol) Method:

A proper herbal tea should be made infused for at least 20 minutes covered. This is to ensure that the maximum amount of phytochemicals from the herbs has diffused into the water, and the cover prevents the loss of phytochemicals via steam/evaporation.

Herbal Water (Herbal Distillate) Method:

For those lacking fancy distillation equipment, a simple distillation station can be set up using a double boiler with a lid. A large pot of water and herbs is placed on the heat source (stove top), and a heat resistant bowl is placed floating in the water inside the pot. A lid is placed on top and the water is brought to a gentle boil. The water will evaporate, creating steam. The steam will collect and condense on the lid, and drop down into the interior bowl. When the process is complete, you will have a bowl of distilled herbal water and the remnants of the herbs will be at the bottom of the pot (be careful not to overheat, or you will be scrubbing burned herbs off the bottom of your stock pot).

**Storage:** Because hydrosols are produced at high temperatures and are somewhat acidic, they tend to inhibit bacterial growth but not fungal growth. **They are not sterile.** They are a fresh product, like milk, and should be kept refrigerated.