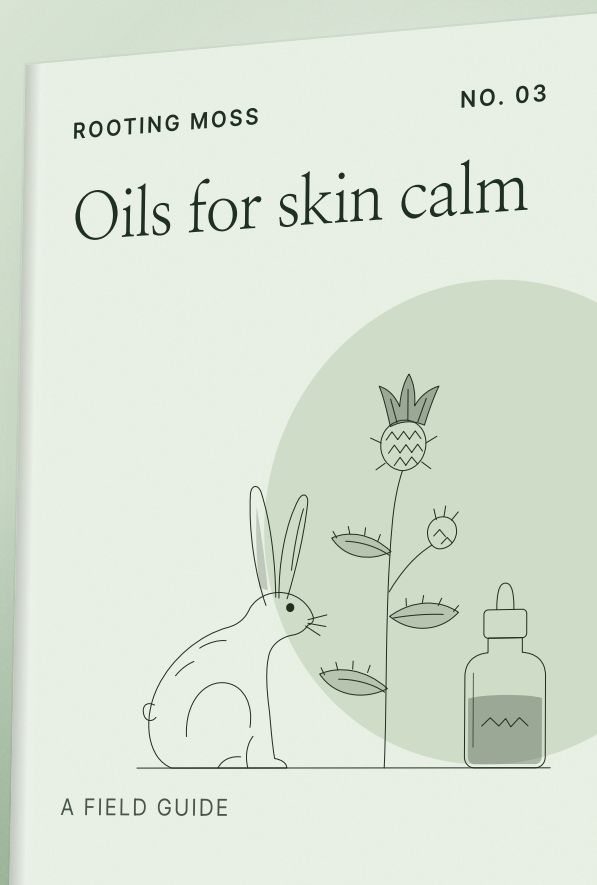




FIELD GUIDE · BOTANICALS

# Match lighter oils to skin without fearing every rating

For considered buyers who read ingredient lists and distrust hype around pore clogging charts. After reading, they will be able to choose between linoleic and oleic oils, store them well, and place oil calmly in a routine.



## Know acids

Linoleic supports barrier ceramides while oleic softens and seals.



## Read ratings

Comedogenic scores began in rabbit ears, not human faces.



## Keep fresh

Cool dark storage protects delicate oils from turning.

By Erin Dunleavy · Updated Sep 6, 2026 · 10 min read

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Skin often reacts badly to oil because the wrong oil was chosen, used too heavily, or kept too long. Learning the balance of linoleic and oleic acids, the limits of pore ratings, and simple storage habits makes oil feel steadier and more useful in daily care.

01

Linoleic and oleic acids and what they do in skin

Linoleic acid carries 18 carbons and 2 double bonds, and the body cannot make it. Oleic acid also carries 18 carbons but only 1 double bond, and the body can produce it. That small chemical difference shapes how each fatty acid behaves on skin, with linoleic tied to structure and oleic tied to softness and spread.

Ceramides make up approximately 50 percent of the skin barrier and use linoleic acid for synthesis, particularly ceramide 1. When ceramide 1 has enough linoleic acid to work with, the barrier holds water more evenly and feels less rough. Vegetable oils themselves are composed of triglycerides at typically around 99 percent and unsaponifiable matter at typically around 1 percent, including phytosterols, squalene, carotenoids and vitamin E, so the fatty acid pattern matters more than the trace compounds.

Sebum tells the same story from the inside. People with oily acne prone skin tend to have sebum deficient in linoleic acid and higher in oleic acid. Low linoleic sebum becomes thicker and less able to flow from the pore, which suits congestion. This link does not prove that applying a linoleic rich oil corrects acne or replaces acne medicine or sunscreen, and how much topical linoleic acid is needed to change sebum composition in different people remains unknown.

Oleic acid works mainly as a monounsaturated emollient that softens and cushions. It also acts as a penetration enhancer, helping other lipid materials settle into the upper layers. A face oil is lipid based and does not add water like a humectant moisturiser, but may soften dry skin and help reduce the feeling of moisture escaping. Rich oleic oils can feel comforting on intact dry skin, yet it is still unclear whether they suit sensitive or inflamed skin. A review of 27 clinical studies of 17 vegetable oils concluded oils high in oleic acid with little or no linoleic acid may cause additional structural damage of the stratum corneum on inflammation affected skin, while non affected skin may tolerate them.

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# Meet the oils by fatty acid balance

High linoleic oils feel lighter and spread quickly without a long cushion. Safflower sits at about 75 to 80 percent linoleic acid, grapeseed at about 70 to 75 percent, and hemp seed at about 55 to 60 percent linoleic acid. Rosehip belongs in this lighter group in practice, though the reviewed numbers centre on hemp, safflower and grapeseed. These oils suit people who dislike weight, and they pair well with layering over a water based moisturiser.

High oleic oils feel richer and leave a longer soft film. Olive sits at about 70 to 80 percent oleic acid, avocado at about 60 to 70 percent, and sweet almond at about 60 to 70 percent oleic acid. Apricot kernel sits near this richer family and often feels slightly lighter than olive or avocado. Richness can help dry cheeks, shins, elbows and hair ends, where extra slip reads as care rather than grease.

Balanced options sit between those poles. Argan offers a middle path for people who want some body without heaviness. Jojoba oil is described as actually a wax ester that mimics sebum structure, with about 5 to 10 percent linoleic content, which explains why so little of it feels like enough. It spreads thinly, stays fairly stable, and suits facial use when heavier oils feel too much.

Coconut oil stands apart because it is mostly saturated. A reviewed composition table gives about 48 to 52 percent lauric acid, 18 to 19 percent myristic acid, 8 to 9 percent palmitic acid, 5 to 6 percent oleic acid and 1 to 2 percent linoleic acid. That saturated structure makes it solid at cool room temperature and rich on skin. Many faces find it too heavy, while legs, feet and hair shafts may welcome it.

| OIL TYPE                                     | FATTY ACID CHARACTER                  | TEXTURE AND BEST FIRST USE                         |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Safflower, grapeseed, hemp seed              | High linoleic, polyunsaturated        | Light and fast, good for oily or combination faces |
| Olive, avocado, sweet almond, apricot kernel | High oleic, monounsaturated           | Rich and cushioning, good for dry or mature skin   |
| Argan, jojoba wax ester                      | Balanced or wax based                 | Middle weight, good for daily facial layering      |
| Coconut                                      | Mostly lauric and myristic, saturated | Dense and occlusive, better for body than face     |

#### FROM THE EDITORS

Linoleic means essential and polyunsaturated, with two double bonds that support ceramide synthesis but oxidise faster. Oleic means monounsaturated, with one double bond that feels richer and keeps longer, yet may trouble skin where inflammation has already disturbed the barrier.

## 03

### Choose an oil for oily, dry, sensitive and mature skin

Oily and acne prone skin usually prefers lighter linoleic rich oils in small amounts. Safflower, grapeseed and hemp seed leave less cushion and mix more easily with a gel or light lotion underneath. Start with evening use only, watch for congestion over two to three weeks, and keep acne medicine and sunscreen in place. Oil supports comfort here, it does not treat acne by itself.

Dry and mature skin often prefers oleic rich cushioning oils that soften fine texture. Olive, avocado and sweet almond press well into slightly damp skin after moisturiser, when the humectant layer holds water and the oil slows its escape. A thin second layer on cheeks or around the mouth can help on cold days. Body skin tolerates richer use, so leftover oil from the hands can finish shins, elbows or cuticles rather than going to waste.

Sensitive skin asks for fewer variables. Choose a fragrance free single oil, patch test along the jaw or behind the ear, and introduce one product at a time and observe. Apricot kernel or sweet almond may feel kinder than olive for some faces, while others prefer jojoba for its thin wax ester slip. Where skin is cracked, eczema prone or freshly inflamed, caution matters because high oleic low linoleic oils may damage stratum corneum on inflammation affected skin. A clinician can help decide whether oil should wait until calm returns.

Combination skin can use two methods at once. A light linoleic oil may suit the forehead and nose, while a richer oleic oil suits cheeks and neck. Hair ends also take oil well, especially avocado or sweet almond smoothed sparingly over dry lengths. Keeping face and body uses separate avoids dragging a heavy body oil onto a reactive face.

## Comedogenic ratings and how to read them with care

The 0 to 5 comedogenic ranking descends from rabbit ear testing reported by Fulton, Pay and Fulton in 1984, where substances were applied to rabbit inner ear for 2 to 4 weeks. Rabbit inner ear is far more reactive than most human facial skin. "The rabbit ear model is extremely sensitive" (Starzyk et al., authors of 2025 JAAD Reviews review). A score that looked alarming in that model may mean little on a human cheek.

Human testing paints a quieter picture. A 2006 study by Draelos and DiNardo in the Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology tested finished cosmetic products on human upper back skin and found finished products were not necessarily comedogenic. "Finished products using comedogenic ingredients are not necessarily comedogenic" (Draelos and DiNardo, dermatology researchers). A 2021 double blind randomised human trial by Waranuch et al. found four finished creams with lanolin, apricot kernel, avocado and sunflower lipids were non comedogenic while octyl palmitate raised microcomedone counts. Concentration and position on the ingredient list, the full formula, and personal tendency to clog all shape the result.

Consumer charts add more noise. Ingredients rated 0 to 2 are commonly treated as the safe zone and 3 and above as warranting caution for acne prone skin, yet the same plant lipid can score 0 on one site and 2 on another. A 2025 review in JAAD Reviews found the term non-comedogenic has no legal definition in the US and consumer rating databases are not governed by scientific or regulatory standards. Which exact finished formulas will clog pores for a given person without a personal trial is still not shown by research.

Use ratings as a rough sorting tool, not a verdict. "No oil-and-butter rating chart can guarantee whether a finished product will cause acne." (Herbal Dynamics Beauty guide authors). Patch test a new oil for a fortnight, keep the rest of the routine steady, and note congestion, comfort and texture. Personal observation carries more weight than a single number.

### FROM THE EDITORS

A non-comedogenic label has no legal definition in the US, so read it as a brand intention rather than a promise. Finished formula, amount used, and individual skin matter more than any single ingredient score.

## Freshness, pressing and quiet daily use

Polyunsaturated linoleic rich oils oxidise faster than oleic rich or saturated oils, especially with heat, light and air. Oxidation dulls scent, deepens colour and makes slip feel harsh. Cold pressed oils typically have a shorter shelf life of 12 to 18 months and should be stored in a cool dark place with the cap sealed. How long a specific opened oil stays fresh in a home bathroom versus laboratory storage is not firmly established, so buy small bottles, note the opening date, and keep oil away from steam and sun.

Pressing method shapes colour, scent and keeping. Cold pressing is mechanical extraction with no heat above 120 degrees F (49 degrees C) and no chemical solvents. The resulting oil keeps more tocopherols, polyphenols and pigments, which many makers prize for character. Refining may include solvent extraction with hexane, degumming, neutralisation with sodium hydroxide, bleaching through clay, and deodorising at 450 to 500 degrees F (230 to 260 degrees C). Refined oils still work as emollients and may offer more neutral scent colour consistency and stability for some formulas. Organic as a farming standard does not describe extraction method, so read labels for both terms. Whether cold pressed minor compounds translate into measurable long term skin benefits compared with refined versions of the same oil remains unproven.

Daily use stays simple when oil comes last. Face oil guidance suggests using 1 to 3 drops warmed between fingertips and pressed into slightly damp skin, or layered over moisturiser at night. Warmth thins the oil, dampness eases spread, and pressing avoids pulling. Oil cleansing follows a different rhythm as a rinse off method, with oil massaged over dry skin then removed with a soft cloth or second cleanser. Mixing a drop into moisturiser softens a lotion that feels too light in winter. Introduce one product at a time and observe, so any change in breakouts or softness can be traced to the oil itself.

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## The checklist

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☐ Choose linoleic rich safflower grapeseed or hemp for oily faces

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☐ Choose oleic rich olive avocado or almond for dry skin

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☐ Try jojoba or argan when a middle weight feels right

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☐ Keep coconut oil to body hair ends or feet if face congests

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☐ Patch test a new oil near the jaw for two weeks

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☐ Use 1 to 3 drops pressed into slightly damp skin at night

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☐ Layer oil as the final step over moisturiser, not under

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☐ Try oil cleansing as a rinse off step before cleanser

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☐ Mix one drop into moisturiser for winter dryness

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☐ Buy small dark bottles and note the opening date

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☐ Store oil cool dark and sealed, away from shower steam

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☐ Prefer fragrance free single oils for sensitive skin

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☐ Keep acne care and sunscreen steady while testing oil

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☐ Replace oil that smells sharp looks darker or feels harsh

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## Sources and further reading

- Comedogenicity in cosmeceuticals: A review of clinical relevance, regulatory gaps, and future directions · [sciencedirect.com](https://www.sciencedirect.com)
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- Is the Comedogenic Scale Accurate? Where the 0–5 Ratings Really Come From — and the 4-Week Test That Beats Them [CallNature Journal](https://callnature.com) · [callnature.com](https://callnature.com)
- Is It Comedogenic? How Pore-Clogging Ratings Work · [scienceinsights.org](https://scienceinsights.org)

For information only, not medical advice. Check with a qualified professional before using herbal remedies.



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Erin produces the interviews: the research, the question lists, the follow-ups. She reads ingredient lists for fun and admits it.

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