



## Unit 3: Herbs, Oils, and External Therapies

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(What to use, why to use it, and how to apply it safely in Kalari Uzhichil)

#### 1) Common Ayurvedic herbs used in Kalari massage

In Kalari Uzhichil, herbs are rarely used in isolation. They appear inside **classical medicated oils (taila)** and **boluses (kizhi/pinda)** to deliver qualities—warming, cooling, nourishing, drying—exactly where you need them. Below are high-frequency herbs you'll meet in authentic Kerala practice and why they matter.

**Bala (Sida cordifolia).** A quintessential **Vāta-pacifying** root used in oils (e.g., **Dhānvantara Taila, Kṣīrabala Taila**) for neuromuscular pain, postpartum care, and general strengthening. It pairs well with warm oil and steady, slow strokes.

**Kottam / Kuṣṭha (Saussurea lappa).** Pungent, penetrating, classic in **Koṭṭamcukkādi Taila** with ginger (śunṭhī) and vacha to disperse **Kapha-type heaviness**, stiffness, and “damp” aches—ideal before dynamic Kalari practice.

**Vacha (Acorus calamus).** Aromatic, channel-clearing; used externally with kottam/ginger to enliven sluggish tissue and support circulation in cold, sticky states.

**Rasna (Pluchea lanceolata) and Devadāru (Cedrus deodara).** Both appear across Vāta-Kapha formulas for **aching joints and fascia**; they complement heat or steam when stiffness predominates.

**Manjiṣṭhā (Rubia cordifolia).** In **Pinda-type oils** (cooling, Pitta-soothing), it helps when heat, redness, or reactive skin coexist with pain—use even tempo and avoid friction.

**Nārikelam (Coconut) & Camphor (Karpoora).** Coconut oil vehicles are favored in Kerala for **cooling** or for post-heat soothing; camphorated oils are used sparingly for **topical analgesia** and decongestion. (Follow contraindications for pregnancy/children and scent sensitivity.)

#### 2) Medicinal oils — selection, properties, and application techniques

##### Choosing the right oil (by tissue state and doṣa)

- **Dhānvantara (Dhanwantharam) Taila.** Bala-rich, milk-processed, sesame-based oil used externally for **Vāta disorders**, spondylosis, and general weakness; time-tested in Kerala. Its official monograph lists Bala-mūla decoction with milk in sesame oil, and recommends **external Abhyanga**.
- **Koṭṭamcukkādi Taila.** A **warming, decongesting** blend (kottam, dry ginger, vacha, moringa, garlic, etc.) indicated for **āmavāta/“rheumatic” pain, stiffness**—excellent for Kapha-dominant heaviness or cool, puffy limbs.
- **Kṣīrabala Taila.** Bala processed with **milk (kṣīra) and sesame oil**, designed to **nourish, cool, and calm** irritated nerves and muscles; favored when Vāta coexists with Pitta features (burning, irritability).
- **Murivenna (Kerala formulation).** A coconut-oil preparation with leaf drugs traditionally used for **sprains, contusions, wound care**; applied locally with light coverage and no deep pressure over acute injuries.

**Clinical idea:** Oils are **not interchangeable**. Dhānvantara for cold, thin, twitchy Vāta tissues; Koṭṭamcukkādi for heavy, sticky Kapha pain; Kṣīrabala for hot-irritable neuromuscular states; Murivenna for **acute** soft-tissue protection.

## How to warm and apply (taila-kalpanā in practice)

- Warm oils to ~38-40 °C in a water bath (never direct flame). **Mūrchita taila** (properly purified sesame oil) is the base for many classics; keep batches fresh and protected from light.
- **Film first, depth second.** Spread a thin film with flat palms; after tissues “accept” the oil, progress to therapeutic depth (≤ one-third tissue thickness).
- **Sequence matters.** Clear **proximal basins** (axilla/inguinal) with light strokes, then work **distal → proximal** along limbs so venous/lymph return has somewhere to go.
- **Endings integrate.** Seal with a **midline sweep** and a quiet heart/crown hold to stabilize autonomics.

## 3) Abhyanga (oil massage) — importance and method

Abhyanga is the **flagship external** therapy in Ayurveda. Beyond tradition, early studies suggest **stress and cardiovascular calming** (lower heart rate/BP in at-risk groups; improved HRV/subjective stress when paired with head oiling or shirodhara). It's not a cure-all, but the relaxation and circulation effects are clinically useful when dosed well.

### Method blueprint (full-body, 45-60 min).

1. **Prepare:** Intake, consent, temperature check, patch-test if new oil.
2. **Prime:** Thin warm-oil film; start with **Thirumu** (long glides).
3. **Work:** Add **Eduthu-Thirumu** (lift-kneads) where density persists; place **marma** holds (broad, breath-timed) for autonomic reset.
4. **Close:** Midline sweep; wipe excess oil; stage to sitting slowly; water & after-care.  
**Adaptation:** Slow, warm, steady for Vāta; even and non-frictional for Pitta; brisk, lighter, with brief heat for Kapha.

## 4) Swedana (sudation) — types and benefits

Swedana means **therapeutic sweating/fomentation**. It follows or accompanies Abhyanga to **soften fascia, reduce stiffness, and assist fluid movement**. Classical taxonomies converge on two big buckets: **Sāgni (with heat source)** and **Niragni (without direct fire/heat)**, with further clinical sub-types (e.g., **Nādi sweda**—tube steam; **Bāṣpa sweda**—steam chamber; **Pinda/Saṅkara sweda**—herbal bolus; **Upanāha**—warm poultice).

### When to use which?

- **Rūkṣa (dry) swedana**—powder boluses/heat beds—for **Kapha-heavy, puffy** states.
- **Snigdha (unctuous) swedana**—oil/moist boluses—for **dry, tight Vāta** or post-exertion stiffness.

Evidence-informed reviews align that swedana improves **range, warmth, and perceived pain** when matched to the tissue state and paired with safe dosing.

## 5) Kizhi (herbal bolus) and Navarakizhi — preparation & use

### What is Kizhi / Pinda (Saṅkara) Sweda?

A **bolus** of herbs/powders/rice is tied in cloth, heated (often in medicated oil or decoction), and **pressed/glided** rhythmically over the body to induce local sweating and mechanical change. It's the Kerala expression of **Pinda/ Saṅkara Sweda**.

### Common variants and when to pick them

- **Ela Kizhi (Patra Pinda Sweda).** Leaves (e.g., ricinus, moringa, tamarind), spices, and salts are sautéed in oil, bundled, and applied hot—best for **stiff, cold, Kapha-Vāta** patterns.

- **Podi Kizhi (Cūrṇa Pinda).** Dry powdered herbs in boluses; more **drying**, ideal for **oedema/heaviness** and chronic Kapha states.
- **Jambeera (Naranga) Pinda.** Lemon-based boluses for **adhesive, fibrotic** shoulder/neck complaints when heat is indicated.

### Navarakizhi (Śaṣṭika Śālī Pinda Sweda)

A **nourishing** (brimhana) bolus made from **medicinal red rice (Njavara/Śaṣṭika śālī)** cooked in **Bala-root decoction and milk**, then massaged hot with repeated reheating. It is classically positioned for **strengthening muscles, easing Vāta pain, and post-illness convalescence**—especially when you need heat **without** drying.

#### Procedure essentials.

- Cook **Śaṣṭika rice** in **Bala (Sida cordifolia) decoction + milk** to a soft paste; pack into poultices.
- After Abhyanga, apply boluses in synchronized, circular and longitudinal strokes; re-dip in warm milk-decoction as temperature falls; maintain safe skin temperature.
- Finish with gentle oiling and a short rest; offer warm water.

## Summary Tables

### A) Oils you'll actually use (with classical anchors)

Oil (Taila)	Core botanicals (examples)	Primary use-case	Doṣa tilt	Notes
Dhānvantara	Bala root decoction + milk in sesame oil	Neuromuscular pain, weakness, postpartum care	Vāta ↓	External Abhyanga; Kerala mainstay.
Koṭṭamcukkādi	Kottam, Ginger, Vacha, Moringa, Garlic	Stiffness, “damp” aches, Kapha-heaviness	Kapha ↓ Vāta ↓	Warming/decongesting; great pre-movement.
Kṣīrabala	Bala + milk + sesame oil	Irritable nerves/muscles with heat	Vāta ↓ Pitta ↓	Nourishing + cooling; even tempo work.
Murivenna	Leaf drugs in coconut oil	Sprain/contusion, post-strain local care	Pitta ↓ Vāta ↓	Local only; avoid deep pressure acutely.

### B) Swedana choices at a glance

Type	How it's delivered	Best for	Avoid/modify
Nādi Sweda	Tube-directed steam	Local stiffness around a joint	Neuropathy/low heat tolerance
Bāṣpa Sweda	Steam chamber	Global cold/stiff states	Uncontrolled HTN, heat intolerance
Pinda (Saṅkara) Sweda	Heated boluses (leaf/powder/rice)	Adhesions, stubborn stiffness	Acute inflammation, varicosities
Upanāha	Warm poultice tied and left	Local, slow-changing fibrosis	Skin fragility, active dermatitis

### C) Kizhi selection logic

Variant	Ingredients	Tissue feel	Session aim
Ela (Patra Pinda)	Fried medicinal leaves + spices	Cold, sticky, bound	Warm, mobilize, decongest
Podi (Cūrṇa Pinda)	Dry powders in bolus	Puffy, heavy, oedematous	Dry, lighten, stimulate flow
Navarakizhi (Śaṣṭika)	Rice + Bala decoction + milk	Tight + depleted	Nourish + heat without drying

## Safety & dosing reminders (quick)

- **Heat is a drug.** Screen for sensory loss, acute inflammation, varicose veins, uncontrolled BP; dose conservatively and monitor skin color/feedback.
- **Marma rules still apply.** Use **broad, breath-timed** contact over **Hṛdaya/Nābhi**; avoid vertical force and high heat there.
- **Evidence lens.** Early clinical data support Abhyanga for **stress/HR** modulation; traditional swedana classifications and procedures are well codified in classical-based reviews and pharmacopoeial monographs—use them to standardize your practice.

### What to remember

1. **Match the medium to the person:** choose the oil and kizhi by doṣa and tissue feel, not habit.
2. **Sequence:** Abhyanga sets the field → Swedana softens + moves → Kizhi or Navarakizhi targets what remains.
3. **Standardize with the classics:** anchor your formulas and temperatures to **API/AFI monographs**; adapt tempo, depth, and heat to the moment.

If you'd like, I can add a one-page "therapy chooser" flowchart (oil → swedana → kizhi) for your LMS as a printable.