



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 (śuṅṭhī) 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 (Karpooṛa). 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 (\leq 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., **Nāḍi 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
Nāḍi 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
Upaṇāha	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.