down of the oil-water microemulsion. As a result, it may be necessary to adjust the particular surfactant(s) with a particular fragrance to maintain this "cloud point" below a desired temperature.

The table immediately below sets forth illustrative and preferred weight percents of the components of the gel mixture used in the instant invention based on the total weight of the mixture:

Component	Preferred Range	Illustrative Range
Deionized water	79.56	
Gelling agent	0.80	0.05–10
Crosslinking agent	0.40	0.001–15
Aversive agent	0.05	0–0.1
Coloring agents (1% in water	0.14	0–0.2
Microbiocide/preservative	0.05	0–0.1
Noniomic surfactant	6.0	0.5–20
Fragrance	5.0	0.1–15
Dipropylene glycol	5.0	0.1–30
Alcohol 40-2	3.0	0–3

The gel composition prepared from the preferred components in the above-described categories results in a product having the desired attributes when used in conjunction with the process herein described. Suitable gels can be made with components of the gelling system used in mounts shown in the "preferred" range in the above table. However, the characteristics of the end product may be slightly modified from that obtained when the amounts used are in the "illustrative" range.

The method of the present invention includes the steps of:

A. Preparing a suitable liquified gel mixture; and

B. Chilling the gel mixture to a temperature of about 38° C. to about 40° C. The term "gel mixture" is used to describe an aqueous gel including a gelling agent such as sodium alginate or the like, a flagrance, a co-solvent and a surfactant. Botanicals may be suspended in the gel mixture before it cools completely and gels as described in more detail below.

The method of making the gel composition may vary to some extent depending on such factors as the particular constitutents used and whether the composition is being prepared in a laboratory or a commercial production facility. The description below generally reflects commercial production of the gel composition. Slightly different steps used in laboratory production of the gel composition are described in the Example.

The gel mixture may be prepared by dispersing a modified polysaccharide gum, such as KelcoGel gellan gum, in water. Best results are achieved when the water is at about room temperature. It also is possible to add the gellan gum to warm water, but this increases the likelihood of agglomeration of the gellan gum before it is completely hydrated.

The resultant dispersion is heated to about 75° C. with stirring or other agitation, preferably in a high shear mixer, until the dispersion becomes clear and the gel is completely hydrated. The crosslinking agent, and, if desired, the aversive agent and water-soluble coloring agents may be added to the water either before or after it is mixed with the gel. The dispersion is maintained at this temperature for about 5 to 10 minutes to allow complete dispersal of the gellan gum and ensure good crosslinking of the gum. Heating to lower temperatures and/or a shorter holding time may result in formation of a gel that is unacceptably soft.

A fragrance solution may be prepared by combining a surfactant, such as Rohm& Haas' Triton X-102 nonionic surfactant, a fragrance, a fragrance cosolvent such as dipropylene glycol, and, if desired, a microbiocide or preservative. The fragrance solution sometimes is referred to as the "oil phase," although all of its constituents except for the fragrance are water-soluble. These components are stirred or otherwise agitated, preferably for about 10 minutes, until the solution is clear. Preferably, specially denatured alcohol 40–2 is also added to the fragrance solution to enhance the pungency of the top note of the fragrance.

The gel mixture and the flagrance solution are combined and mixed for about 10 to 15 minutes while the temperature of the mixture is decreased to about 60° C. The mixture will be milky or opaque upon initial blending at temperatures greater than about 55° C., but will clear as the temperature approaches about 50° C., indicating that a microemulsion has been formed.

The gel mixture may be poured into suitable containers. This should be done while the mixture is warm to avoid congealing of the gel before the containers are filled. Use of fluted or textured containers will reduce the likelihood that striations or pores in the gel will be visible, although flat glass containers also may be used. The containers are cooled, for example, in an ice bath or a chilling unit such as a chill table. When the gel mixture has been chilled to a suitable temperature, typically about 38° C. to about 40° C., the mixture will attain the desired viscosity or gel structure. The gel will reliquify if the temperature in increased to about 60° C. or more.

If botanicals are to be added to the liquified gel, they may be positioned at a desired location within the gel by partially filling the gel container. Generally, the containers should be filled to about one third to three-fourths full depending on the desired position of the botanicals in the container. The partially filled containers are cooled as described above, typically to about 38° C. to about 40° C., until the mixture attains a viscosity and/or weak gel structure capable of supporting botanicals or other solids placed on the gel surface, such that the botanicals will not tend to sink into the gel, but rather will be maintained in a desired position and level within the container. If the desired viscosity or gel structure is not achieved, however, any solids intended to be suspended in the gel may tend to float or sink depending on the specific gravity of the solids, resulting in an undesirable clumping of the solids in the top or bottom of the container.

The time required for the gel to develop sufficient viscosity to support botanicals on its surface will depend on the specific gravity of the botanicals relative to that of the gel. Less dense botanicals may be supported on a less viscous gel, but denser botanicals will require gel of a higher viscosity for adequate support. For example, dry, delicate flowerheads of Queen Anne's lace typically will require a lower viscosity, and therefore less chilling time, than moist, dense botanicals such as berries or sliced peaches. The chilling time required for the gel to support low density botanicals may be as short as about 10 to 15 seconds for a small, partially filled jar in an ice bath.

When the desired gel structure has been achieved, the botanicals may be added. Additional warm, liquified gel may be added until the container has been filled to the level desired and chilled until the added gel thickens. Care must be taken when adding additional liquified gel to avoid disturbing the desired arrangement of the botanicals or the continuous structure of the partially set gel layer. Preferably, the containers are allowed to cool to a temperature approaching room temperature. The containers may be handled normally without damage to the gel once the desired temperature is reached. However, extremely rough handling should be avoided to reduce the likelihood that the gel will pull way from the container walls.