

Herbal Beauty Treatments

Contributed by Sally Pointer

How often have you noticed that the latest selling point of expensive beauty treatments is their use of 'natural' or 'organic' ingredients? High profile manufacturers sell expensively packaged creams and potions based on their reinvention of plant ingredients that have been known about for centuries.

Take Aloe Vera for example, the Greeks and Romans knew of its soothing capabilities and the Spanish brought it to the New World. Many different countries have a long history of using the gel from the leaves to soothe sore skin or sunburn. Fruit Acids are another recent fashion, anyone who has ever rinsed their hair with diluted lemon juice to add shine has made use of the natural acids contained in fruit, but the cosmetic companies would have us believe that there is some great mystery involved.

To be fair, commercial cosmetics do have their uses. Most importantly, they have a standardised recipe, which means you can get your favourite skin-cream from one end of the year to the other, and the shelf life is much greater than home-made blends. However, there is no reason to stop you combining the best of both worlds to use luxurious cosmetics, hand-made from fresh natural ingredients to support and enhance the action of your basic drug-store shampoos and moisturisers. The recipes below are good, fun introductions to the art of making your own cosmetics and all have stood the test of time. Common sense note: Always use new products cautiously, use scrupulously clean equipment, and if in doubt, throw it out!

Herbal Vinegar Hair Rinse

Modern shampoos can often leave your hair feeling heavy, as the ingredients added to provide 'volume', or 'shine' can build up over a few washes and actually produce the opposite effect. This simple preparation keeps well and will help clear away that build-up to leave your hair and scalp feeling really clean.

1 bottle of good vinegar. Try Red-Wine vinegar if your hair is dark, or Apple Cider vinegar if its light
 1 handful dried herbs: Rosemary for dark or oily hair, Chamomile for fair or dry hair
 3 drops lavender (*Lavendula angustifolia*) essential oil:

In a large jar, combine all the ingredients. Seal well and leave in a warm place for about two weeks, shaking often. Strain through a coffee filter paper and decant into a pretty bottle that can be kept in the bathroom. To use, add a tablespoon of the rinse to a jug of lukewarm water. Pour this through your hair as the final rinse after washing with a mild shampoo. There is no need to rinse out the mixture. You should be left with beautifully clean hair with a fresh, herbal fragrance.

Honey and Oat Face Pack

It has been said that you should avoid putting things on your skin that you wouldn't be prepared to eat. This deep cleansing and soothing face pack definitely fits those guidelines. Apply it before relaxing in a warm bath and don't worry if odd bits drop off into the bathwater. The milk and honey are especially soothing to dry skin, and the oatmeal will gently exfoliate any slightly oilier areas.

2 tablespoons of oatmeal
 1 tablespoon of clear, runny honey
 a little milk to moisten

In a bowl, mix the honey with a few drops of milk to loosen the texture. Stir in the oatmeal and add a little more milk if necessary to form a smooth paste. Apply to clean skin and allow to remain on for about ten minutes. Before washing off, rub the mask gently into any problem areas of your skin (nose, chin and forehead for example) using small circular movements. Dip your fingers into water first if the mask has set slightly. Wash off using tepid water and a soft washcloth, then tone with a gentle tonic.

Rosewater and Witch Hazel Skin Toner

This gentle fragrant astringent can be easily made from commercial Distilled Witch Hazel and from Rosewater. Rosewater can often be bought in the home baking section of supermarkets but if you have trouble getting it a drug-store should be able to order it for you.

The actual proportions depend on whether your skin is dry or oily. Use equal parts of Rosewater and Witch Hazel for normal skin, 1/3 Witch Hazel for very dry skin, and 2/3 Witch hazel for very oily skin. Simply blend the two waters together and pour into a scrupulously clean bottle. Apply as you would any other tonic, with a cotton ball.

Galen's Cold Cream

This rich cream is based on a recipe first devised by a Greek doctor who lived almost 2000 years ago. It is rather different to commercial creams, and does a wonderful job at moisturising dry skin.

4 tablespoons sweet almond oil (olive oil works too)
1 tablespoon grated beeswax
pinch borax (use this ingredient cautiously)
rosewater

Melt the wax into the oil and remove from the heat. Stir the borax into a small cupful of the rosewater. This helps emulsify the mixture. You can manage without the borax, but the cream will probably be thicker as you will not be able to incorporate as much liquid.

Add the rosewater a drop at a time, stirring constantly. When you think that the cream will not accept any more liquid (small beads of liquid will refuse to stir in), stop adding, and keep stirring very gently as the cream cools down. Pot into a scrupulously clean jar. This makes a wonderful cleansing cream if massaged into the face well before washing with a good handmade soap. If you normally couldn't even think about using real soap on your skin, this cream adds an extra oily layer that should prevent drying. The other way to use this is as an overnight moisture pack on dry hands or feet. Massage it generously into the skin then wear thin cotton socks on your hands or feet to prevent getting salve all over the bedding. In the morning, you should find that all the cream has been absorbed leaving your skin feeling like new.

Sally has just published a book on the history of perfumes and cosmetics, . Sally has been researching it for "more years than I care to mention" and says: "From the downsizing perspective it includes lots of information about traditional cosmetic ingredients and their relative safety, and many of the recipes are suitable for modern use, so may help those wishing to switch from complicated commercial soaps and potions to things they make themselves".

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To find out more about Sally's book take a look at this [thread](#) or [click here](#) to buy *The Artifice of Beauty*