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DECEMBER 2011



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The New Frontier of Skincare

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After thirty years of practicing clinical skincare I decided to go on a journey to explore the meaning of wellness and how that pertained to skincare. I traveled to Germany, Thailand, and India, but—unlike Elizabeth Gilbert whose journey was to Eat, Pray, Love—I was in search for the truth about safe and effective skincare products.

My travels spanned more than a five-year period after which, as part of my own transformation, I moved here to Asheville, NC. I compiled all that I learned through my herbal studies and my travels abroad—and realized skincare formulas needed to be changed. Part of this change would be to formulate products that would include pure plant material that would address current skin care challenges and would be safe for skin and body health.

A return to traditional plant medicine is on the rise, and this includes skin care. There are many astounding studies on the medicinal application of plants and their ability to prompt the body to produce what is necessary for repair and survival. After three decades in skincare I have seen many changes to the industry, but none as profound as we are currently going through. Skin conditions that once were defined as rare are now the “New Normal”.



Anne in her lab

I have lived through trends like petroleum-based moisturizers, apricot kernel scrubs, buff puffs, alcohol toners, and the current craze, Retin-A, and skin resurfacing treatments. My original clients were big fans of pancake makeup and Abolene cold cream. We have gone from shielding the skin to overexposure.

The focus of traditional formulas was to make people “look better” and was based on a 50s mindset where everyone got swept up in better living through chemistry and forgot to consider human health issues.

These formulas used botanicals, but not raw plant material. This is where part of the confusion comes in. Most personal care products that say they contain botanicals actually use cosmetic-grade herbal extracts. The herbs are compounded and extracted with synthetic ingredients,

such as alcohol or propylene glycol. These synthetic ingredients cripple the potency of herbs. So the real changes you see with the skin are minimal and you run the risk of exposing yourself to ingredients that can impact your overall health.

Though contemporary skin care formulas offer clients convenience and immediate results, they do not work in harmony with the complex biochemistry of the skin that initiates repair on a cellular level. I believe people are challenged with health issues that are directly linked to harmful ingredients found in personal care products. The knowledge I gathered during my international travels helped me in the development of skincare using green technology. This is vital as we seek solutions for aging effects, oxidative stress, and skin cancers.

The average woman applies 165 ingredients to their skin everyday. Men average 85. Children get slathered with about 65 (and if you include sunscreens and blocks it is more). Out of all of these ingredients most are synthetics. The following are only a few of the isolated ingredients that should be avoided.

Mineral oil may also go by the names liquid paraffin, paraffin wax, and petrolatum on the product label.

Mineral oil, once applied, prevents the skin from “breathing.” As such, it clogs pores, interferes with your skin’s natural ability to eliminate toxins, and can lead to acne flare-ups. It is irritating to the skin and can cause chapping and dryness.

Propylene glycol may cause dermatitis, kidney or liver abnormalities, and inhibit skin cell growth.

Phenol carbolic acid can cause circulatory collapse, paralysis, convulsions, coma, and even death from respiratory failure .

Acrylamide is linked to mammary tumors in lab research.

Sodium laurel/lauryl sulfate (SLS), and sodium laureth sulfate (SLES) are substances that break down the skin’s moisture barrier, allow other chemicals to easily penetrate the skin, and can become a “nitrosamine” a potent cause of cancer.

Toluene, butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT), benzoic and benzyl are linked to anemia, lowered bloodcell count, liver or kidney damage, and may affect a developing fetus.

Taking a more holistic approach to skin care certainly makes sense, but is this something you can achieve by mixing up a few plants from your local harvest? I feel the best use of plants for home care is for emergencies like minor cuts, sunburns, and poison ivy. When it comes to skin conditions such as roseacea, hyper-pigmentation, pre-skin-cancers, acne, and sensitive skin, it best to leave that up to the experts. But if you want to be your own medical advocate in an emergency, here are a few recommendations.

The first requirement for any household is a first aid kit for a cut with minor bleeding. Though I say minor, recently my friend Jane had a knife stab the top of her foot—the blood that spewed out was off the charts. What was the first thing I grabbed? Cayenne pepper! By packing the cut with cayenne pepper the bleeding stopped within 30 seconds. The reason for this is that, rather than the blood pressure being centralized, it is equalized by the cayenne, and the clotting action of the blood becomes more rapid. Following the cayenne, I doused the wound with goldenseal. Goldenseal is valued because it is a strong antimicrobial, a mild anti-inflammatory, and has astringent properties. It is extremely useful for treating tissues that are inflamed, swollen, or infected. In addition, I made Jane a goldenseal tonic to take internally as a natural antibiotic. After insuring the wound was clean and disinfected, I went out into Jane’s amazing herbal garden and plucked some yarrow leaves. Making a poultice, I packed the wound with the moistened leaves and placed a secure gauze wrap around the foot. Yarrow exhibits antibiotic activity. It is an amazing herb externally for treating wounds and helps to stop the flow of blood as well as closing the wound edges. No emergency rooms were necessary and we achieved one hundred percent success in wound care. (This is not intended to treat or diagnose. Always seek medical advice in the case of a true medical emergency.)

I could be the poster child for Poison Ivy skin reactions. People have shared all kinds of natural remedies,

such as clay, jewelweed, and oats. Although they provide temporary relief, none of these have worked for me. The only sure thing has been Octagon soap. An old-time cleansing bar put out by Colgate, I have found it to be a sure thing. I make a rich lather, apply the foam to cover the effected area and leave to dry. I do this at least three times a day. I wish I could say that I grab a magic plant from the local harvest, but none has worked for me .

Summer is the time of year for sunburns. Not only are they extremely painful, but can eventually lead to skin cancer. The 911 for bad sunburns are buttermilk or Greek yogurt. The nutrients in these items aid in repair of damaged skin. The fat content soothes the burn and the probiotics return good bacteria to the skin, thereby preventing skin blistering and breakout. Traditionally aloe has been a number one choice for sunburns, but because the ointment from the leaves locks in infection, it is not my number one choice—especially if skin has blistered.

As research yields astounding studies that expand our understanding of medicinal plants, we find ourselves at a unique crossroads between the applications of traditional versus conventional therapies. My own clinical experience has shown over and over again that raw plant material provides amazing results for even the most challenging skin conditions. My goal, as we set the foundation for new skincare formulas and solutions, is to consider the whole body and the intricate wisdom of plants.

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